



A Journal of

Contemporary Shamanism

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 2, FALL 2013

**Shamanism: Approaching
Indigenous Wisdom with
Care and Respect**

The Masters of Deception

**Cultivating Right Relationship
with Spirit of Place**

**The Shamanic Grail Cup—
the Sangraal**

Songlines & Storylines

**Shamanic Healing Within an
Iranian Cultural Context**

**Michael Harner Writes His
Testament**

**Reflections on Michael
Harner's *Cave and Cosmos***



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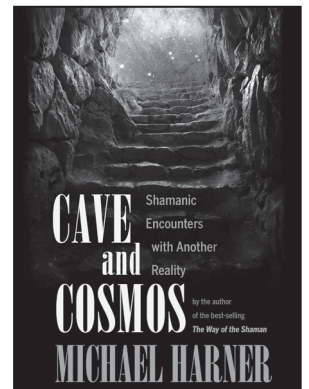
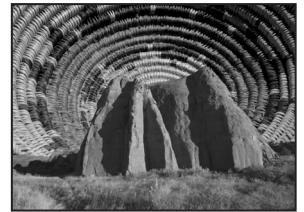
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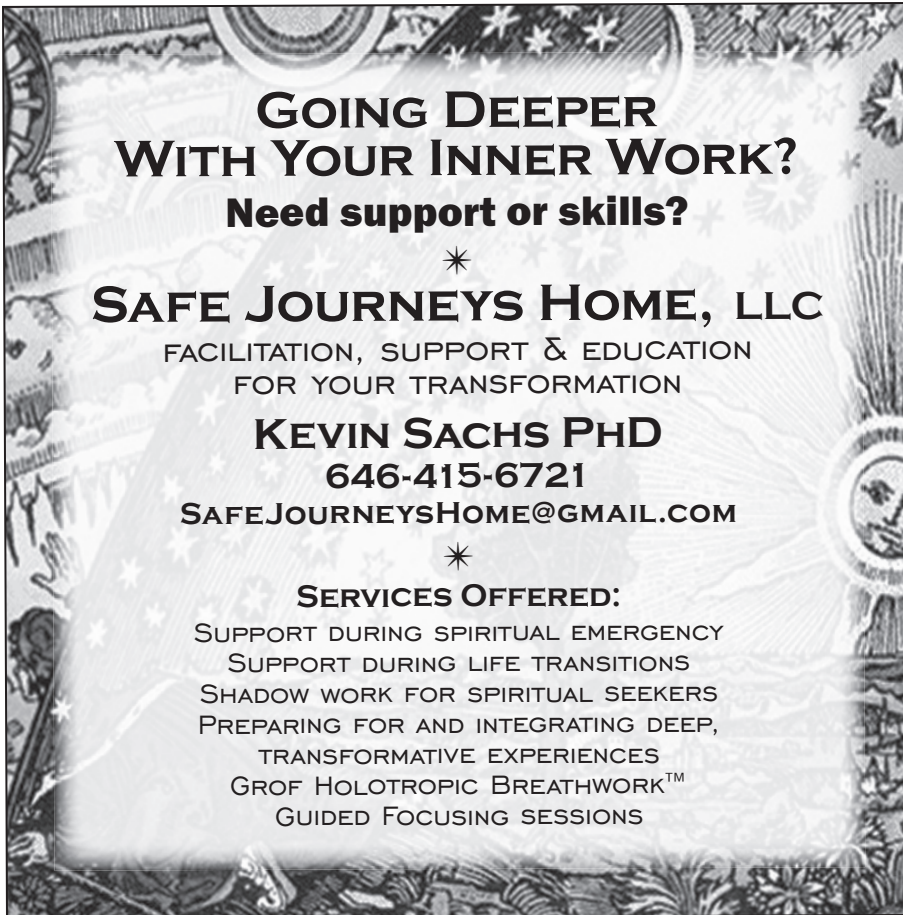
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Thank You, Cecile Carson, MD!



Cecile Carson, MD will be leaving the SSP Board after serving since its inception. Cecile was one of the seven physicians that created the original Shamanism in Medicine conferences 2001-2003 with Bonnie Horrigan. These gatherings formed the basis of SSP; our organization focused on supporting shamanic practitioners from a broad range of backgrounds and trainings. Cecile has been a productive board member assisting in the creation and facilitation of our USA conferences, editing the latest SSP book *Spirited Medicine*, and most recently as a faculty member at the Omega Institute's workshop focusing on shamanism in healthcare. Cecile's word doctoring and wisdom will be sorely missed along with her wit. We are hoping that her departure signals the start of a new adventure! Thank you Cecile for all of your dreams and hard work dedicated to SSP. We will miss you!

Welcome to our newest Board Member, Anna Harrington!

Anna is an instructor for the Power Path School of Shamanism and a shamanic healing practitioner and ceremonialist with over 18 years of experience working with indigenous shamanic healers around the world. She has in depth training in both Shipibo and Huichol healing modalities as well as the Paco tradition of the Andes and Native North American traditions.

Anna is also a producer, director and editor, and founder of Green Spider Films. Her past producing credits include a nine part television series, *Understanding People* (2001), *Green Medicine: On the Path of Herbal Remedies* (2000), *The Mystic Traveler* (2002), and *Woven Songs of the Amazon* (2006). For the past six years she has been working with The Center for Shamanic Education and Exchange to create educational documentaries and material honoring indigenous people and their unique and valuable traditions.



Dancing with the Four Directions

by Martha Lucier, SSP Board Member

It was a pleasure to attend the seventh annual SSP UK Shamanic Conference in Dorset, England September 5-8th. The conference theme was "Dancing with the Four Directions" and was held at Gaunt's House, an 18th century mansion, set on 2,000 acres of beautiful Dorset countryside.

We arrived to a warm greeting with plenty of time to be with the land, ancestors and nature spirits on the sunny fall day, before the opening ceremony. Gathering in the "Theatre" we chose a red, yellow, black or white piece of yarn symbolizing each of the directions. We offered our prayers, connecting the yarn pieces to make a large Medicine Wheel.

While maintaining our connection to this wheel we journeyed as one, out to the sacred fire that was waiting. Prayers of gratitude were offered to the fire, the heart flame of our gathering, which was kept fed throughout the weekend.

Beyond the fire was a conical structure built of sticks and tree limbs, where prayers were offered to the spirit of air with milk. An invitation was offered to make prayers each day to the wind by tying a prayer flag onto the altar.

We proceeded to an ancient oak tree where a pool of water surrounded by candlelight was nestled up close to an opening like a womb. As daylight faded, we each added water from our home to the pool, like many rivers flowing into the ocean, offering gratitude for the waters of life that sustain us.

In the darkness, we came to a standing log where the faces of many nature spirits peered out at us. Offerings of flowers, leaves, seeds, and fruit within the log's many nooks and crevices brought the Spirit of the log alive with beauty. Here we offered prayers of gratitude to the Earth, contributing a rock from our home to the altar, connecting the lands we each came from, and our hearts.

Each day was like a beautiful feast of workshop offerings exploring the many ways that shamans work and live with the Four Directions. They each tempted the palate, quenched the senses and touched the heart while dancing with the elements. This conference was the seventh SSP UK Conference organized by Elsa and Howard Malpas. On behalf of the entire SSP community, we offer our gratitude to Elsa and Howard for their



deep commitment to creating space for the community to gather, share and be inspired to continue our shamanic practice, promoting healthy individuals and viable communities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martha Lucier is a shamanic practitioner and Board Member of the Society for Shamanic Practitioners. Along with her husband Todd Lucier, she has co-founded Northern Edge Algonquin Retreat Centre to provide experiences in nature that enable us to rediscover ourselves, empower each other and heal our connection to the Earth. Martha has evolved her own shamanic practice as principal teacher at the Canadian Centre for Shamanic Studies, offering Introductory and Advanced Shamanism Trainings, and Sacred Journeys into the heart of Algonquin Provincial Park.



Shamanism:

Approaching Indigenous Wisdom with Care and Respect.

by Ben Boomer

Shamanism has grown in popularity as an idea and practice in the modern world. Shamanism is defined by the recognition of a common wisdom based on ancient or indigenous spiritual traditions. This broad definition has some advantages and disadvantages that are worth exploring. I am speaking from the perspective of a North American tribal member because I am of the Diné people. I was raised on the Navajo reservation in the American Southwest with a mixed cultural background. My mother is Diné (Navajo), and my father is from California of European descent. My childhood was spent on a ranch with sheep, cattle, traditional ceremony and the occasional trip to California for Christmas.

Many Native Americans I know hear the word “shamanism” and take an immediate skeptical stance. Several people I know embrace shamanism with a rich, authentic, and rewarding spiritual life. There is a long history of cultural appropriation and abuse among indigenous peoples that leaves several issues to be sorted out. The issues that wound the indigenous cultural personality range from minor to significant. For example, there are the much publicized conflicts over the names of sports teams like the Redskins, or the gaudy feather costumes of runway models. These are easy to recognize aspects of a much deeper trend that impacts how people and cultures are identified. I am not personally offended by the name of a football team, but become concerned when I recognize the slow erosion of my culture’s significance within the awareness of the dominant social consciousness.

It isn’t as simple as pride in myself or pride in my ancestors, but more of a recognition of the wisdom contained within the teachings of my culture. As I layer mistakes, lessons, and years on top of one another I get better at reflecting in greater depth the wisdom and significance of not only the Diné traditions, but also the traditions of many indigenous peoples. There is a perspective held by many Native Americans that this wisdom has such depth and breadth that you have to grow up with it in order for those teachings to truly resonate in your life experience. I agree to the extent that I may never understand being Diné like my grandmother did, but this does not diminish the value it has in my life. Being Diné is simply who I am.

Because I live my life and nurture my family within the context of the dominant western culture it is important that I have significant points of reference within western culture that allow me to weave the wisdom of the past with present reality. It is the erosion in any capacity of these points of reference that get many indigenous people frustrated and angry, because it interferes

with our capacity to preserve the lifeline of cultural wisdom, and maintain a healthy interaction with society as a whole.

There are more significant issues to be considered beyond sport teams, and lingerie, and this brings us to the realm of spirituality. At the core of a culture are the ideas and practices surrounding its spiritual and philosophical understanding of the world. Language, food, art, song, and dance are a few key elements that hold a cultural system together. My mother was forbidden from speaking the Diné language as she attended government-funded boarding school on the Navajo reservation. The pressure to convert to one form of Christianity or another has been underway since first contact with Europeans, and has largely been successful. The diet, family structure, and living habits of the Diné have undergone great changes in the past four generations. All of this has left many traumatic imprints on the Diné identity. Despite this, much of the culture and spiritual tradition has survived.

The idea of change and renewal is central to Diné philosophy, and this has contributed to its survival. Not all indigenous spiritual traditions share this fortune and many have disappeared. Those that do survive have done so with much effort and sacrifice. This is one of the key reasons why there can be a guarded and proprietary attitude surrounding indigenous culture in North America and beyond. There is a kinship among different tribes that has grown from this shared struggle. There is a recognition of many shared values, but also a respect for some very clear differences. This understanding has evolved over generations of people sharing and comparing ideas and traditions for mutual survival in the context of western culture. At the core of this cooperation has grown a recognition of shared spiritual principles and several spiritual practices are now shared by many tribes in North America. This is where there is some commonality with the idea of shamanism.

Shamanism recognizes that many cultures share similar ideas and practices grown out of what is termed a perennial wisdom. Many shamanic practitioners recognize the value and wisdom of these practices. I have wondered what it would be like to never have grown up with my background of culture and tradition, but still recognize the beauty and wisdom in the world around me. I would realize that the study of shamanic practices would seem to bring me closer to an understanding of that truth. I would want to embrace it, and to absorb as much knowledge and wisdom as I could in order to bring me as close as possible to a full understanding.

That level of enthusiasm makes it easy to see the common thread that ties many ancient beliefs together, but also makes it easy to overlook the qualities that make each culture unique. There is a haste and material preoccupation inherent in western culture that drives many people to reject it in search of a slower more natural wisdom. This drive brings many to explore shamanism. There are several examples of people bringing the haste and preoccupation to shamanism instead of escaping it. Fraud, delusion, greed and exploitation have plagued the shamanic community from its inception. This is why many indigenous people react with wary caution to the mention of "shamanism." It is really a natural response to those who may practice "taking" wisdom from a culture, and it happens enough to create a protective attitude. Ideas of monetizing, commodifying, marketing and trading these spiritual practices gets rejected out of hand by Natives because they are all clear markers of western thought and culture.

I have come to understand that this rejection out of hand is a mistake. It is true that shamanism as a word carries with it the legacy of those who have abused it, but it also has brought attention to ideas and principles that are vital to the survival of our species. There are very good reasons that drove the tribal people of North America to preserve their traditions. Many indigenous people recognize that these traditions share a common resonance with the world, and with life as it is lived. The ceremony and practice of these traditions bring a wealth of practical knowledge to the way we live life, and honor our surroundings. We recognize that we would not have survived if it were not for these teachings. There is also a recognition that many of the world's ills would be healed by the application of that wisdom. Native Americans are not alone in this recognition by any means. There is a struggle worldwide to preserve not only our physical environment, but also our mental and spiritual environment.

Shamanism has a great capacity to contribute to this collective effort simply due to the nature of its popularity and perspective on common threads of wisdom. It is not by divining what practice can be collected or gem of wisdom recorded, but by reaching into our own experience and offering forth what resonates, what contributes. In this way a spirit of cooperation and understanding will be fostered. This is the foundation of a true exchange. The knowledge passed from one culture to another can be received with reciprocity. There is no need to abandon our personal culture or past experience and co-opt the identity of another. By way of example, the value is lost if you try to perform an authentic Diné sweat lodge ceremony when you are not Diné, but there is tremendous value in learning to sweat with a Diné. By intentionally fostering reciprocity, and with a

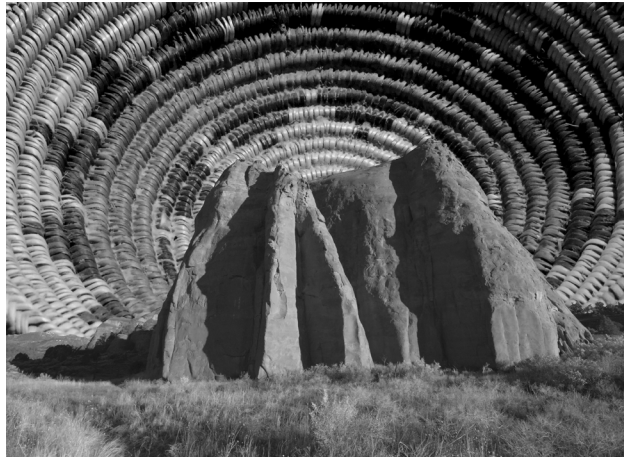
great deal of humility, patience, dedication and effort a real level of understanding can take place. From this place it is possible to foster new traditions for ourselves and community.

I have learned this by interacting and observing many shamanic practitioners, and concluding that there are at least two distinct approaches. One approach is to collect and commodify spiritual practices and pass them along as "authentic indigenous teachings." Without the appropriate cultural background, and lacking reciprocity and humility, these practices only offer a veneer of wisdom, and lack a depth of understanding. In the end they only serve to diminish the spiritual practice in the larger context of the world, and in many cases damage the culture they derive from. The other approach is marked by the active participation of the originating culture. There is an obvious reciprocity that doesn't just involve a few isolated people claiming to be bearers of indigenous wisdom, but instead entire families or villages. It is rare for any group of people to reach 100% consensus, but the involvement of increasingly larger groups is powerful. This approach helps to nurture not only the preservation and exchange of indigenous wisdom, but lays the groundwork for new traditions to emerge that allow people from different cultures to grow together. This is how the tribes of North America have been coming together for the past several generations.

I have learned that there are many shamanic practitioners in the world who may have begun in a self-centered way, but learned that there is a more nurturing way that leads to a deeper, richer understanding of life and the spiritual practices that shamanism recognizes. I struggled with the term "shamanism" because of all this confusion both within the indigenous community and within the shamanic community about its value and purpose. I now recognize that shamanism has a large following consisting of many people who do not want to participate in cultural appropriation in their quest for a deeper relationship with life, but instead would welcome a healthy exchange based on reciprocity, respect, honor, and gratitude. There are a growing number of opportunities to practice shamanism through education and exchange, and I intend to contribute with caution and hope. I welcome you to join me in this pursuit and direct your interest in shamanism into a contribution to the preservation of indigenous wisdom.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Boomer has been bridging gaps since his childhood as a Diné hybrid on the Navajo reservation. He works integrating technology and digital communications into the world around us, and practices a lifestyle that fosters a connection to the spirit that is the essence of our reality. He lives and laughs with his wife and stepson in Phoenix, Arizona and can be contacted at Ben@rootphoenix.com.



The Masters Of Deception

by Paul Levy

A few days before my interview on *Why Shamanism Now? Internet Radio Show*, I received an email from the well-known anthropologist, author and shamanic practitioner Hank Wesselman. He mentioned that what I am calling “*wetiko*,” the Hawaiian kahuna tradition with which I was also familiar, and called these mind parasites the “*‘ēpa*.” He mentioned that he talks about these archon-like entities in his latest book *The Bowl of Light: Ancestral Wisdom from a Hawaiian Shaman*, which I immediately went out and bought. When I found the section on the *‘ēpa*, my eyes almost fell out of my head, as the description of the *‘ēpa* by an esteemed Hawaiian kahuna shaman was almost word for word what I had written in my book *Dispelling Wetiko: Breaking the Curse of Evil*.

As my research deepens, I am realizing ever more fully that every wisdom tradition in the history of our planet has its own language and symbol system for illuminating what the Native Americans have been calling *wetiko*. Having just finished an article on how the Kabbalah described the evil of *wetiko* in its own unique way, I had recently started doing research for a new article on how a particularly powerful practice in the Islamic tradition was specially crafted so as to dissolve the pernicious effects of *wetiko*. After learning about the *‘ēpa*, I was left with the feeling that I was fated to continually find an ever-expanding number of wisdom traditions that articulate the *wetiko* psychosis, each in their own way. By whatever name we call it, *wetiko* is undoubtedly one of the most important discoveries ever made. Indicating the supreme importance of developing knowledge about how this predator of the mind operates, Carlos Castaneda’s Don Juan refers to it as the “topic of topics.”¹ *Wetiko* is literally “at the bottom,” at the very root of the seemingly never-ending destruction we are wreaking on each other and the very biosphere we depend upon for our survival as a species. It is truly helpful to find other lineages and traditions that illumine *wetiko* disease in their own creative way. A multi-perspectival vision simultaneously gives a higher resolution and provides us with a greater scope and capacity to see what no one particular map or model by itself can reveal.

Shape-shifters

Wesselman’s book is an introduction to the profound wisdom teachings of the Hawaiian kahuna elder Hale Makua. To quote Makua’s conversation with Wesselman, “The *‘ēpa* are

deceivers. Some call them the masters of deception.”² Interestingly, etymologically speaking, one of the inner meanings of “the devil” is “the deceiver.” The *‘ēpa/wetiko* virus flavors and covertly manages our perceptions under the deceptive darkness of our unconscious so as to act itself out through us while simultaneously hiding itself from being seen. Makua, who is a wisdom keeper of an ancient Polynesian lineage, continues, “They are free-ranging psychic entities, invisible beings who function as mind parasites. As such, they prey on those who are vulnerable to their influence.”³ We all have a tendency to potentially deceive ourselves via the reality-creating genius of our own mind; the *‘ēpa* hook into and amplify our seemingly innate propensity for self-deception. Due to our almost unlimited capacity for pulling the wool over our own eyes, as a species we have tricked ourselves out of our own minds, a state covertly inspired by the *‘ēpa*, I might add. People are particularly susceptible to fall under the spell of these “masters of deception” who are not in touch with the living and self-authenticating reality of their own experience. Not sufficiently knowing the nature of their own minds, they are overly suggestible to taking on other peoples’ perspective of the world and themselves, and then they easily fall prey to the prevailing groupthink of the herd and to the *‘ēpa* parasite.

Others, who are “sensitive” and have a permeable boundary between the conscious and unconscious, such as psychics and channelers, can, even with the best of intentions, become unwitting instruments for these incorporeal masters of deception in ways that can create havoc in people’s lives. The *‘ēpa* telepathically tune into the psychic’s mind, customizing their very image so as to have the most personal impact, simply telling the psychics what they wish to hear. When we are inspired by “spirits,” it is always a good idea to check our sources, to discern if they are of the left or the right hand path.

Makua comments, “The *‘ēpa* are accomplished shape-shifters who are good at mimicking. They can assume forms that are meaningful to the ones they choose to deceive...they are devious, and their motivation is deception. They operate through illusion, and they are masters of this practice.”⁴ The *‘ēpa*, another name for the *wetiko* virus, have the most disagreeable and trickster-like quality of appearing in our guise. When we unconsciously identify with, become taken over by, and act out the impulses that are inspired by the *‘ēpa/wetiko* virus, it is as if a psychic tapeworm or parasite has comman-

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deered our brain and tricked us, its host, into thinking we are feeding and empowering ourselves, while we are actually nourishing the parasite. They cloak themselves in and assume our form, getting under our skin and “putting us on” as a disguise, impersonating us as they fool us to buy into their false version of who we are. Falling prey to their artificial, yet uncanny intelligence, we become unreal to ourselves. Bamboozled and hoodwinked by this imposter and copycat of ourselves, we then mime ourselves, becoming a master copy, an ersatz duplicate of our original and authentic selves. This pathological part of the psyche can subsume all the wholesome parts of the psyche into itself such that the healthy aspects of the psyche come under the dominion of the disease and become slaves to it. We then become pushed around by an invisible player like a figure on a chessboard, played and manipulated like marionettes on a string, as if these intangible forces are “gaming” from a hidden position within our own un-illuminated psyche. No longer belonging to nor possessing ourselves, we then simultaneously identify with who we’re not while disassociating from, and forgetting who we actually are. In so doing we effectively have then “lost our soul.”

Jung refers to this deceiving spirit by the name Antimimos, which he describes as “the imitator and evil spirit.”⁵ Antithetical to the light, Antimimos refers to a type of deception that

could be thought of as “counter mimicry.” Referred to as the *antimimon pneuma* in the Apocryphon of John (Apoc. John III, 36:17), this counterfeiting spirit imitates something in this case, ourselves but with the intention to make the copy, the fake version, serve a purpose counter to that of the original. When we fall for the ruse of this snake oil salesman of the spirit, we become dis-oriented, losing our sense of spiritual vocation, our mission in life, even our very selves. Writer and poet Max Pulver, presenting at the 1943 Eranos Conference, said that “The *antimimon pneuma* [i.e., the *‘épalwetiko* virus] is the origin and cause of all the evils besetting the human soul.”⁶ The revered Gnostic text *Pistis Sophia* says that the *antimimon pneuma* has affixed itself to humanity like an “illness.”

The *‘épalwetiko* virus induces a form of psychic blindness that not only believes itself to be sighted, but arrogantly believes it is more sighted than anyone else. The *‘épalwetiko* virus bedazzles, bewitches, and bedevils consciousness in such a way that we become blind to the underlying, assumed viewpoints through which we habitually perceive, conjure up, and give meaning to our experience of both the world and ourselves. Inspiring an inverted, upside-down logic, a flawless and truly deadly illogic (what I call “*wetiko*-logic”), the *‘épalwetiko* virus covertly operates via psychic stealth and subterfuge. It will influence those under its sway to use fallacious deduction

to subconsciously select data which will then invariably lead to conclusions which only perpetuate chronic avoidance of the crux of the matter. People who are taken over by the *'épa/wetiko* parasite are unconscious of being taken over, as this “psychic coup” takes place through their unconscious blind spots. When we are taken over by more powerful psychic forces, we don't know that we are possessed by something other than ourselves, which is precisely the way the *'épa/wetiko* virus wants it.

A Lethal Mirage

Though “relatively” real, and most definitely needing to be dealt with and faced within the level of relative reality, the *'épa/wetiko* virus has no objective, independent existence separate from our own mind. This is analogous to how a vampire can't exist autonomously, from its own side, separate from us; a vampire can only take on apparent existence relative to—and feeding off of—us. As compared to existing “by virtue” of something, the *'épa/wetiko* bug can only exist by the “lack of virtue” of our own obscured and unexamined minds. There is no entity outside ourselves who can steal our soul; the dreamed-up phenomenon of the *'épa/wetiko* virus, which arises entirely within the sphere of our mind, tricks us into giving it away ourselves. The most depraved part of falling under the sleight-of-hand of the *'épa/wetiko* virus is that it involves the assent of our own free will, as we willingly, though unknowingly, subscribe to our enslaved condition. In other words, no one other than ourselves is ultimately responsible for our situation. Ultimately speaking, with the *'épa/wetiko* virus we are not being infected by an objectively existing, independent or substantial entity, which is why there is in reality nothing outside of ourselves to be afraid of.

If we reify the *'épa/wetiko* bug as being real, “other,” and truly existing independently of ourselves—and therefore a substantial threat to us—this virus of the mind will then inspire, magnify, and feed off of our fear. Conversely, if we think that the *'épa/wetiko* virus is merely a function of our imagination and is, hence, “unreal” and something to be ignored, we have then fallen under its spell, albeit in a different way, such that it can then unrestrainedly act itself out through us, beneath our conscious awareness. This conundrum points to the extreme paradox that we have to be able to embrace within ourselves in order to get a handle on these trickster-like forces. The *'épa/wetiko* virus exists in an intermediate realm in which it is both real and unreal at the same time. Though not objectively existing in an absolute sense, the *'épa/wetiko* pathogen has a “virtual reality” such that it can destroy not only us as individuals, but potentially our entire species. The fact that something that only exists as a function of ourselves can unleash enormously destructive forces upon the world and in so doing can

ultimately destroy us is pointing at the incredibly vast, invisible, yet mostly untapped, unharnessed, and unrealized creative power that is our inherent human birthright.

Interdimensional Demons

Referring to the *'épa*, Makua says, “Demons — they could be called interdimensional demons.”⁷ Unconscious psychic forces, “demons” have a psychological reality, in that they affect and alter our experience of ourselves. The origin of the *wetiko* demon are split-off parts of the psyche, what Jung would call “autonomous complexes.” Due to trauma or some other form of transgression of our psychic boundaries, a part of our psyche dissociates and develops a seemingly independent and autonomous life of its own. Indigenous people the world over refer to these autonomous complexes as “demons.” These demons inhabit the higher (and lower) realms of mind in such a way that, as Makua points out, they are truly “interdimensional,” easily able to pass through and fluidly operate across the apparently solid boundaries of mind and matter, of inner and outer, of dreaming and waking. Not constrained by the conventional laws of third-dimensional space and time, these nonlocal “interdimensional demons” manifest themselves by in-forming and synchronistically configuring events in the seemingly outside world so as to express themselves.

Just as in a dream, events in the outer world are symbolically reflecting a condition deep within the psyche of each one of us. The (worldly) “powers-that-be”—the people and corporate institutions in positions of power to influence perception and deceive the masses—are themselves lower-level reflections of and instruments for these higher-dimensional “masters of deception,” who are actually the ones in-forming and guiding much of the deception within, between, and among ourselves. We need to understand that our current world crisis has its roots within the human psyche and is an expression of it. We must not become entranced into believing that the many problems we face as a species have a concrete, objective, and extra-psychic origin, or we are doomed. We will then unconsciously repeat and continually re-create endless suffering and destruction in more and more amplified form, as if we are having a recurring nightmare.

The virus of evil at first insinuates itself into the soul in incremental, unnoticed and insidious steps, but at a certain point this leukemia of the soul becomes seemingly irreversible, leading to its host's destruction. Once we fall into our unconscious, and identify with and act out our unreflected-upon point of view, our uncorrected error becomes an open door for the *'épa/wetiko* virus to lend its deviant force to what is increasingly going off course, taking us with it in an ever-downward

death spiral. Just as viruses or malware infect a computer and program it to self-destruct, mind-viruses like the *'é'epa/wetiko* pathogen program the human biocomputer to act in ways that are contrary to our best interest, and that can ultimately result in our self-destruction. People so afflicted are like someone in the throes of an addiction or in a state of trauma. They unwittingly create the very problem they are trying to resolve, clinging desperately to the very false conviction that is leading them astray as it tortures and destroys them.

If we don't see what's happening, at a certain point we cross a threshold and step into the realm of evil. Evil, simply put, is anti-life, life turning against itself. Evil is "live" spelled backwards. In the traumatized soul (and to the extent we are not fully awake, we are all in a state of the trauma of not being one with ourselves), both Freud and Jung recognized that there is a factor within the psyche which, once it gains a certain momentum and seeming autonomy, continually keeps neurotic, unproductive suffering alive. There is an aggressive anti-wholeness agency within us, as if "made" out of our disowned, unexpressed, in-turned, and inverted aggression twisted back upon ourselves. This can actively cultivate and breed dissociation within the psyche. The fluid, ever-flowing, self-reflective/reflexive process of the continually-evolving psyche en/unfolding itself over time becomes suspended, rigidified and frozen, stuck in time, in a seemingly never-ending and self-generating feedback loop. This inertial, entropic and thanatic factor seems to be actively resistant to our recovering, discovering, and attaining our intrinsic wholeness. Jung refers to this dis-integrative factor as a "morbid" fragment of the personality which inspires a "will to be ill." It is as if there is an unconscious counterforce to the faculty of the will, a "shadow of the will," so to speak, that prohibits the synthesis of the fragments of our experience into the meaningful constructs and perceptions that make up a healthy, wholesome, and coherent psyche.

To the extent we are not aware of the *'é'epa/wetiko* virus, it literally colonizes our minds and sets up a seemingly autonomous regime, a "shadow government" within our psyches (outwardly reflected by the "shadow government" in the world). Thus we become oppressed within the sovereign domain of our own being. As if an invisible coup has taken place within the psyche, we, as rightful rulers of our own psychic landscape, have been deposed and are living under a "foreign occupation" (what Don Juan calls a "foreign installation"), no longer masters in our own home. As this split-off, rogue, and pathological part of the psyche "incorporates" itself within the psyche, it takes on, and over a living body. Then it "dictates" to the ego in such a way that the ego is tricked into believing that it is directing itself. This is similar to Americans believing that we live in a functioning democracy in which our elected officials in Washington actually serve and represent us. We are allowed our seeming freedom and ability to live our "normal" lives, as long

as it doesn't challenge, threaten, or thwart the deeper agenda of these sinister forces to centralize power and control. This internal process is getting externally out-pictured in the creeping tendency towards fascism within the United States government and the world at large.

Blowing the Whistle on the *'é'epa/wetiko* Bug

Synchronistically, during the writing of this article, it has become front-page, worldwide news about the NSA's out-of-control, 24/7 spying on not just American citizens, but on people and governments the world over. In a total abuse of power and an example of upside-down *wetiko*-logic, the Government absurdly claims to be "protecting" its citizens by spying on — "bugging" — them. In the total opposite of what a free society looks like—transparent government and privacy for its people—the U. S. government is demanding secrecy for itself while destroying the privacy of everyone else. Spying is a classic archetypal feature of the modus operandi of a mind infected with the logic of fear and separation, the sine qua non of the *'é'epa/wetiko* virus's operating system. Spying itself is an action that if done in return to the party committing the spying is considered to be an unacceptable outrage. As light is being shed on their nefarious actions, the NSA is acting like it's the victim, while the truth of the matter is that, in having committed violations of basic human rights, the NSA is in fact the perpe-tra(i)tor, the "victimizer disguised as the victim." Such a glaring double standard, logical contradiction, hypocrisy, and inverted logic are the spore-prints of the *'é'epa/wetiko* virus in action. A lawless and criminal violation of our sovereign rights of freedom and privacy, this complete surveillance of our lives, presented to the public as the very thing needed to keep us safe, is an example of countermimicry in action. It is the underlying and unspoken agenda of power, domination, manipulation, and control creating the exact opposite of its publicly stated intention. A more vivid living example of the *'é'epa/wetiko* bug in action as it unfolds throughout the world theater is hard to imagine.

The *'é'epa/wetiko* bug doesn't acknowledge or abide by the spurious subject/object dichotomy, acting itself out free from these constraints. One of the *'é'epa/wetiko* virus's unique ploys is to take advantage of the fact that there is no actual boundary between the inner and the outer. In the NSA spying scandal, an "interdimensional" process taking place deep in the soul of humanity has had the whistle blown on it, as it spills outside of our skulls and reveals itself in the events and circumstances of the outer world. Appearing external to ourselves, the *'é'epa/wetiko* virus, having its origin within us, utilizes the medium of the outside world as the canvas for its full-bodied revelation of itself. The inner process of how the *'é'epa/wetiko* bug covertly operates within our psyche is getting synchronistically dreamed

up and currently en-acted in full-bodied form, writ large on the international stage, visible for all who have eyes to see it as a reflection of a dynamic taking place within ourselves.

Those who are drawn to power are particularly susceptible to being taken over by these deceivers, which feed on their attraction and addiction to power. Having a predilection for power brings with it a self-serving blindness which can easily be seized upon, manipulated and amplified to malignant extremes by the *'épal/wetiko* virus. The people who find themselves in positions of worldly power and influence are easily able to propagate their pathology far and wide throughout the world at large, thus significantly helping to spread the reach and dominion of this psychic plague. It does seem as if an arch-deceiver has infiltrated itself into our major religious, political, and social systems for many centuries, creating untold havoc in the world.

Vampires of the Mind

So many of us seem to have a resistance to seeing and consciously dealing with these darker forces that have insinuated themselves into the greater body politic and are playing themselves out through every level of our society. This resistance is, at least in part, due to the “dark programming” of the deceivers, which can be likened to a hypnotic spell that is

woven throughout the warp and woof of every aspect of our civilization. This cultural brainwashing is propagated through the mainstream media and corporate-controlled entertainment industry—the “entertainment industry”—both of which can be considered to be the massive propaganda organs of the *'épal/wetiko* virus. Our resistance, our looking away, is an avoidance of relationship with a part of ourselves. Our ostrich policy of turning a blind eye to events of enormous negative collective significance is itself nothing other than the *'épal/wetiko* virus in action.

Once having infiltrated and insinuated itself into the body politic, be it of a person or a society, the *'épal/wetiko* virus perversely fancies itself to be the healing antibody. Ironically it relates to the genuinely wholesome parts of the greater overall system (which are in fact the actual antibodies) as cancerous tumors to be exterminated. The *'épal/wetiko* virus subversively turns our “genius” for reality-creation against us in such a way that we literally become bewitched by the projective tendencies of our own minds. As if under a spell, we become entranced by our own intrinsic gifts and talents for dreaming up our world. We unknowingly hypnotize ourselves with our God-given power to creatively call forth reality, so that it boomerangs against us, undermining our potential for individual and collective evolution.



Speaking about the 'épa, Makua makes the point, "If we look at the state of the world today, we can see their influence everywhere, and at every level. They could be thought of as psychic vampires. This is who and what vampires really are."⁸ As I read Makua's words, the excitement I felt was palpable, as if I was reading my own words in someone else's book. Legends and mythologies about vampires from time immemorial are symbolically describing and pointing at the 'épalwetiko virus. Just like vampires, the 'épalwetiko virus has a thirst for the very thing it lacks, the mystical essence of life, the "blood" of our soul, our very life-force. A member of the "undead," the vampiric 'épalwetiko virus is fundamentally "dead" matter "taking on" apparently living form; it is only in and through a living being that it acquires a quasi-life. The 'épalwetiko virus paralyzes and freezes the ego into an immobilized, powerless, and life-less state, in which our life force and energetic potential are literally being vampirically drained from us. These psychic vampires aren't able to replicate themselves through their own energy, however, so they are compelled to propagate themselves through us so that we can dissimulate, "pass on," and transmit the bug to others.

The 'épalwetiko virus animates a virulent form of psychosis that is highly contagious, spreading through the channel of our shared unconsciousness. When afflicted with this virus of the mind, there is an alien-ating code or logic which affects/infests awareness in a way analogous to how the DNA in a virus passes into and infects a cell. Its vectors of infection do not travel like a physical pathogen, however. This fluidly moving, nomadically wandering bug reciprocally reinforces and feeds off and into each of our unconscious blind spots, which is how it nonlocally propagates itself throughout the field. As Jung has reminded us, the greatest danger that threatens humanity today is the possibility that millions (maybe even billions?) of us can fall into our unconscious together, reinforcing each other's madness. As if afflicted by a psychic plague that we cannot see due to the blinding nature of the infection, we become unwittingly complicit in creating our own self-destruction.

As if stalking us for eternity, the 'épalwetiko virus, to the extent we are not awake, seems to intimately know the inner workings of our own mind better than we do. Coveting our creative imagination, these adversarial mental forces will use our imagination for (and against) us, with deadly consequences, especially if we don't use the divine gift of our creative imagination in the service of life. Interestingly, an inner meaning of the word "Satan" is the "adversary." Our natural birthright is to be creators—autopoietic agencies in reciprocal co-evolution with ourselves as well as with the universe at large. Once we recognize the 'épalwetiko virus for what it is, we can actively participate in our own evolution and consciously create our personal and collective destiny.

Like a vampire, the 'épalwetiko virus can't stand to be illumined. If we see how it covertly operates through our own consciousness, we take away its seeming autonomy and power over us, disabling it while at the same time empowering ourselves. Recognizing who and what the 'épalwetiko virus is starts a process of healing in which we can begin to realize our limitless potential for spiritual and evolutionary growth. The 'épalwetiko virus can only be seen when we begin to realize the dreamlike nature of our universe, step out of the viewpoint of the separate self, and recognize the deeper underlying field of which we are all expressions, in which we are all contained, and through which we are all interconnected. The energetic expression of this realization, and the 'épalwetiko virus dissolver, par excellence, is compassion.

The World's Pivot

The origin of the 'épalwetiko virus is the human psyche, and recognizing how this virus of the mind operates through our unawareness is the beginning of the cure that literally changes everything. Our shared future will be decided primarily by the changes that take place in the psyche of humanity, which is truly the world's pivot. The 'épalwetiko virus is literally demanding that we pay attention to the fundamental role that the psyche plays in creating our experience of ourselves and our world. The less the 'épalwetiko virus is recognized, however, the more seemingly powerful, and dangerous it becomes. The "Gnostics" (the ones "who know") recognized the 'épalwetiko virus, calling it "the Archons," mind parasites who would infiltrate and subvert the workings of our own minds. To quote the Gnostic text *The Gospel of Philip*, "So long as the root of wickedness is hidden, it is strong. But when it is recognized, it is dissolved... It is powerful because we have not recognized it."⁹

To a person who's entranced by the mainstream view of reality, such talk about demons, vampires, mind viruses, psychic parasites and the like sounds like so much superstitious dogma, new age, spiritual nonsense and gobbledygook, or the ravings of a fevered, paranoid imagination that believes in strange conspiracy theories. It should be pointed out that everyone of us experiences the 'épalwetiko virus in our own unique way, regardless of what concepts or words we use to describe the experience, or whether we believe in such things or not. It is worth noting, however, that some of the greatest thinkers, philosophers, visionaries, and teachers among us have been pointing in their own way at the 'épalwetiko virus for millennia. Speaking about the state of humanity, philosopher, mystic, and social activist Simone Weil was pointing at the 'épalwetiko virus when she writes, "It is as though affliction had established itself in him like a parasite and were directing him to suit its own purposes."¹⁰ The revolutionary spiritual teacher Gurdjieff

says that if we observe carefully, “You will see that you are different from what you think you are. You will see that you are two. One that is not, but takes the place and plays the role of the other [the real you].”¹¹ Physicist David Bohm, one of the most original, radical and important thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century, speaking of the *‘ēpa/wetiko* parasite in his own words, writes, “It’s similar to a virus—somehow this is a disease of thought, of knowledge, of information, spreading all over the world...It’s spreading like a virus and each one of us is nourishing that virus.”¹² To the extent we are unaware of this thought-virus, Bohm realized that we are all complicit in its propagation. He recognized that this virus of the mind is the very thing “preventing mankind from working together for the common good, and indeed, for survival.” He realized that this contagious “disease of thought” had surreptitiously intruded itself into the realm of mind itself, where, to the extent we are unaware of it, it can work its black magic unrestrained.

Bohm then wonders, “Do we have a kind of immune system that stops it? The only way to stop it is to recognize it, to acknowledge it, to see what it is. If any one of us starts to look at that, then we are looking at the source of the problem.”¹³ Seeing and knowing the presence and activities of the *‘ēpa/wetiko* virus – in Buddhist tradition called Mara, “The Evil One” - are major elements in the process of the Buddha’s enlightenment. It is emphasized in the Buddha’s teachings that it was ignorance and darkness, along with their capacity to “blind” humanity—all characteristics of being afflicted by the *‘ēpa/wetiko* virus—that were dispelled at the moment of

enlightenment. Though on one level apparently opposing Buddha’s enlightenment, Mara was actually Buddha’s secret ally, a projected aspect of Buddha’s own consciousness, for Buddha wouldn’t have been able to develop the “muscle” of his realization without Mara’s challenge.

The Greatest Force of Evolution Ever Known

There is no way around it: the way to enlightenment is by making the darkness conscious. I would suggest that the sooner we shed light on and become aware of the “darkness within ourselves,” the better. Our “enlightenment” makes no difference whatsoever if it doesn’t help us to illumine the darkness within ourselves. Light is ultimately revealed through darkness; it needs darkness, for otherwise, how could it appear as light? Shadows are simultaneously an expression of the absence, as well as the presence of light, for we can never have a shadow without light nearby. The darker the shadow, the brighter is the light of which it is a projection. We normally think of illumination as “seeing the light,” but “seeing the darkness” is a form of illumination, too. Hidden and encoded in the darkness is a higher form of light that transcends the light vs. dark duality: the light of awareness itself. This formless light has the property of not only being invulnerable to the negative forces of darkness, but it touches and transfigures everyone who “sees” it. This is the light of self-reflective, lucid, primordial awareness that awakens us to the dreamlike nature of reality.



The greatest protection against becoming negatively affected, and in extreme cases possessed, by the evil aspects of the *'épal/wetiko* virus is to be in touch with our intrinsic wholeness. In other words, we must be “self-possessed”—in possession of the part of ourselves that is not possess-able by another, which is the Self, the wholeness of our being. Being in touch with our true nature acts as a sacred amulet or talisman, shielding and protecting us from evil’s pernicious effects. We “defeat” evil not by fighting against it (in which case, by playing its game, we’ve already lost), but by getting in touch with the part of us that is invulnerable to its effects. The value of bringing our attention to, putting our awareness on, and contemplating the multi-faceted ways that the *'épal/wetiko* virus deviates the psyche is that, in so doing, we can discover and directly experience the part of ourselves that is incorruptible. It is from this place in ourselves that we can bring real and lasting change to our world. Testers of humanity, these nonlocal vampiric forces are guardians of the threshold of our conscious evolution.

In illuminating the darkness, we need to rely on a “higher power,” a strength in us that is greater than and transcendent to our own ego. This “higher power” is the Self, our intrinsic wholeness. Paradoxically, we would not have connected with the wholeness of the Self without the *'épal/wetiko* virus’s intervention. Without a break in its symmetry, the higher order and true nature of our Being would have no way to encounter and become aware of itself. If the obstacles presented by the

'épal/wetiko virus didn’t exist, we would have to invent them intentionally, because it is by overcoming obstacles that we develop the higher qualities that we need in order to unleash our untapped potential. Interestingly, another meaning of the word “Satan” is one who creates “obstacles.” Instead of a typical virus mutating so as to become resistant to our attempts to heal from it, the shape-shifting and mercurial *'épal/wetiko* virus forces us to mutate and evolve relative to it. In a very real sense, the *'épal/wetiko* virus “cures” us of our wrong attitude towards both it as well as ourselves. It is as though the evil of the *'épal/wetiko* virus is itself the instrument of a higher intelligence designed to connect us to a sacred, creative source within ourselves. The *'épal/wetiko* virus literally demands that we step into our power and become immune to its oppression such that we discover how to step out of bondage and become free. Although it is the source of humanity’s inhumanity to itself, the *'épal/wetiko* bug is the greatest catalytic force of evolution ever known, as well as not known, to humanity. It confronts us with a stark option: evolve or self-destruct.

Though it seems opposed to our true nature, when seen from this more expanded point of view, the *'épal/wetiko* virus introduces us to, and is itself, the disguised expression of our true nature. Once this is realized, the question arises: Is the *'épal/wetiko* virus the darkest evil? Or given that it is introducing us to the greater unity and perfection within ourselves, of which we were previously unaware, is it an instrument of the highest good? This point of view within ourselves in which the

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opposites coincide and become indistinguishable, a “coincidentia oppositorum” is itself the transpersonal viewpoint of the Self. When we see through the “transpersonalizing” lens of the Self, we can overcome the urge to personalize and solidify ourselves as separate and seemingly concrete individuals. A true quantum phenomenon, the *é'epa/wetiko* virus is the deadliest poison and the most healing medicine co-joined in one superposed state. Will the *é'epa/wetiko* virus take our species “down” and continue to inspire our self-destruction, or will it wake us “up”? Everything depends upon whether or not we recognize what it is revealing to us about ourselves. Being a dreamed-up phenomena, how the *é'epa/wetiko* virus manifests depends upon how we dream it from now onwards.

Endnotes

- 1 Castaneda, *The Active Side of Infinity*, p. 218.
- 2 Wesselman, *The Bowl of Light*, p. 224.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid., p. 225.
- 5 Jung continues that Antimimos “appears as the antagonist of the Son of God: he too considers himself to be God’s son... We meet this daemon in many other places ... he is the spirit of darkness in a man’s body, compelling his soul to fulfill all his sinful tendencies.” *Psychology and Alchemy*, CW 12 (Princeton:Princeton University Press, 1968), para. 460.
- 6 Joseph Campbell, ed. *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, Vol. 4 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). p. 254.
- 7 Wesselman, *The Bowl of Light*, p. 225.
- 8 Wesselman, *The Bowl of Light*, p. 226.
- 9 II, 3, 83.5-30.
- 10 Simone Weil, “The Love of God and Affliction,” in *Simone Weil Reader*, ed. G. Panichas (Mt. Kisco: NY:Moyer Bell Limited, 1977), p. 441.
- 11 From an essay by Jeanne de Salzman originally published in *Gurdjieff:Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching* (New York: Continuum, 1996), ed. Jacob Needleman and George Baker; posted at www.gurdjieff.org/salzman3.htm.
- 12 Bohm, *On Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 58.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 58-59.

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Cultivating Right Relationship with Spirit of Place

by *Gaela Morrison*

In reality, all places have their sacred qualities, whether they are special places of power or ordinary landscapes. Specific sites that have been sanctified, blessed and tended with ceremony and prayer over time to keep them activated naturally attract devic and angelic spirit presences to the place. Possessing extraordinary spiritual potency, these are places where the veil between the worlds is thinner, acting as gateways from the physical world into the spiritual realm. The higher vibrations of these places have an expanded energy field and numinous qualities that can strengthen your spirit, and offer power for healing, inspiration, recharging and balancing. But what about our own backyard?

I feel that it is crucial, particularly at this time, to develop an interconnected relationship with the consciousness of places in our own region, the places where we live and work everyday. When we are able to discover, create and activate our own sacred places in our local landscapes, mutual healing and awakening can happen as we foster a co-creative vision of our future with the spirits of the natural world.

What can you do to develop this deeper connection with the spirit of place or the “genius loci” in your daily lives? By developing your own deep attunement with the consciousness of a place, you can expand your personal geomantic skills. The following principles and suggestions are useful for connecting with all sacred sites as well as well known power spots, and are intended to encourage you to trust your own path in relationship building with a place’s subtler energies. The spirit presence of each place is unique, and is unique to each individual. To find your own sacred places in nature, pay attention to what calls you and what you resonate with, perhaps a place where the earth pulse is strong.

We usually are attracted to specific places in the landscape for a reason – whether to gather power, for specific healing, for visions and messages, for inspiration, or for rejuvenation and recharging. There may be an energy blueprint of that particular place that reflects similarities in patterns within yourself that you are attracted to. This being a relationship of reciprocity, and knowing we are interconnected and related to everything, the more we can be fully receptive to what these presences have to express, the more the spirit of the place awakens, and comes alive. The more we recognize, honor, and celebrate the consciousness of a place, the more the place expands and restores its energy and power.

How to enter and approach sacred sites is essential. See if you can feel the edges of its energy boundary, and stop there. Entering with an attitude of the utmost respect and being very present, you absolutely must have permission from the spirit guardians of the place to enter, and if for any reason permission is not granted, by no means should you enter. If you get a go-ahead, introduce yourself verbally, as if you were speaking to a new friend. Physically touching a tree or stone at the entry point as a greeting helps to align you with the place and the beings there. You can always ask for guidance from allies, power animals, and spiritual ancestors. Honor the beings of the place and always honor the indigenous ancestors of the land. Approach with an attitude of openness, and with offerings (material and/or of the heart) of gratitude. Pay attention to any signs in nature that appear – animals, birds, plants, sounds, wind.

Get Present. Make sure to ground deep into the Earth, connect with the Cosmos, and then expand your ch’i out beyond what you think your boundaries are. Find a quiet safe place to be and engage all of your senses - perceive with softer eyes and listen for the sounds in between the sounds, sense with your heart. Allow your essence to shine, feel your inner sun radiate - the joyful spark of your soul light. I cannot stress receptivity enough, as forcing, imposing or projecting will get you nowhere in developing a rich co-creative relationship with the spirits of place. Recognizing, receiving and appreciating them will awaken and open new networks of relating. Simply being, and allowing are key. Be in your innocence, engage your imagination, trust your intuition and just relax. Allow yourself to be touched by the experience. What does it feel like to allow yourself to be seen by the spirits of the place? Whether you meditate, journey, or just open your senses, try breathing with the consciousness of place.

How you tune into the spirit of place is a very personal process. You may relate with various aspects of a place’s character in very different ways. Regardless of what aspect you connect with or how you do this, it is important to always be in a place of receptivity, sincerity and humility. I also find it beneficial to connect with a childlike innocence, which helps to be more open to joy and non-attachment to any outcome. In my experience I find it simplest to connect with a feeling sense, particularly when attuning to the devic fields, but not everyone does so. Devas are non-physical beings connected to the consciousness of nature, having an instinctive knowledge of the patterns and harmonies in the natural world.

Places have different subtle energy qualities and facets that you can intuitively tune into or focus on. For example, there is the basic ch'i or life force of a place, its vitality connected with the earth energies. Dragon lines, sometimes referred to as leys, are invisible currents of powerful magnetic energy coursing through the landscape. Sacred sites are always found on dragon currents. Often on a dragon line, colors seem brighter in a place with vibrant chi, visually crisper - and plants, trees and animal life have more vigor, almost a pulsating. Try sensing the energy on a vibrational level with your bare feet on the ground and tune in with your second and third chakras.

Each spirit of place also radiates a consciousness or intelligence connected with its wisdom. Open-heartedness, receptivity and deep listening will assist in connecting with the spirit presence of the place. Others may resonate with tuning into the personality or the feeling quality of the place, the emotion it is expressing. How do we experience that emotion in our own being? And then there's the shamanic principle of beauty, which speaks directly to and nourishes our deepest soul. Open your heart with gratitude and experience the beauty of a place by being porous, absorbing it with every cell and allow it to touch your soul. Feel it as a reflection of your own beauty. BE the beauty.

Start a dialogue. Singing, dancing, tai chi, or any mode of expression that uses poetic language is a great way to communicate with the subtle worlds. As you start conversing with the spirit presence of a place, notice what messages, images, feelings or impressions you receive. Is there a story of the place? Listen with every fiber of your being - remember that you are exchanging vibrational energies. Ask if there is anything you can do to serve the place. Connect in both ordinary and non-ordinary ways, and try exploring places with different elemental qualities: Mountain, Water, Tree, Stone, Desert, or Jungle. As you breathe with the place, visualize becoming the place or a tree or stone, and let yourself experience this directly on a cellular level.

Trees are the easiest to feel the spirit presence and are excellent to initiate an exchange with, as they are very attuned to humans. Seek out a tree you feel a resonance with and greet it when you feel you are entering its auric field. Touch the tree either with your hands or lean against it. As you breathe with the tree, be very still, tune in and listen with all your senses, (including your body and your heart) particularly beneath the tree. Become the tree, and travel in your imagination to all parts of it from the roots to the inside of a leaf to its energy body. Feel the photosynthesis take place. Trees have the capacity to align and soothe our innermost soul. Returning to the same place or tree on a regular basis will establish trust, hone your sensing skills and most importantly promote a deepening of the relationship. It can also be helpful to visit these places at a transitional time of day, at dawn or dusk when the veils are thinner.

Offer your beauty. Remember that this is a two-way relationship, based on the principles of reciprocity. By expressing who you are, in the form of a creative act of beauty can be the most wonderful offering of gratitude to the spirit presence and the beings of a place. Using the lyrical and rhythmic language of the arts, whether it is a song, a dance, movement, chanting, music, a poem, or a drawing - when it is given with love straight from the heart, the receiving of it is often palpable. I've heard that just chanting the simple Aum will help the immune system of a place to self regulate and open.

Bring it home. Practice what you've experienced out in nature and in sacred places, and apply that to your own home and property. Get to know the spirit of your home and land, and honor the consciousness of your place in and around your home. Your home is alive and part of nature; we are exchanging vibrational energies with everything. Every thing. Didn't everything come from the Earth originally? Even plastic is a petroleum product, which came from the Earth. Cultivate awareness that all abundance comes from Her, and honor that in your daily life. Your altar is a link to spirit and

a way for you to work with this. Outdoor altars are a necessity in my book. Consider making a spirit house or some sort of altar or shrine on your property to specifically recognize and consciously co-create with the spirits of your home and land.

Above all, let your experiences be guided by your own heart!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gaela Morrison is a Geomancer and Artist, and resides in Boulder County, CO. Working with aligning the consciousness of spaces with human awareness, she specializes in balancing the subtle energies in both natural and built environments. Her integrative approach includes European Geomancy, Feng Shui, Dowsing, Geobiology, Sacred Geometry, Space Clearing, and Shamanic Ritual. For more information see her website at www.ForcesofNatureDesign.com



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The Shamanic Grail Cup —the Sangraal

by Nita M. Renfrew

The Grail cup is one of the most ancient symbols. The cup that both receives and offers, and also withholds. The cup where change and transformation take place. The cup that is the “Source,” as I was to find some years ago, in a most curious way. The cup that contains ancient shamanic practice.

The Holy Grail can offer nourishment or even poison. It gives and it takes. The Grail is like the Cross in Christianity, an instrument of suffering, transformation, resurrection, and eternal life—a symbol of Love. Shamans in the past always knew that the path to being a shaman-healer, for both individuals and communities, was dismemberment, or shattering, and death of the self, or even of the body; they knew that in order to be an instrument of the spirits, it was necessary to lose everything, to surrender totally. They also knew that, once called, there was no hiding from the spirit that had called, and, once on the path, there was no going back—ever. Shamans knew that the spirits could make your life miserable if you did not do their bidding. And once you had tasted of the cup, you were theirs forever. Jesus Christ knew this in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified, when he prayed: “Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt (Matthew 26:39).” But the cup did not pass. The following day he went obediently to the Cross, where he suffered and died. However, he then, descended into Hades, or Sheol, brought back condemned souls, and was resurrected.

A Personal Quest

When I was a child, my mother Helma never ceased to remind me that the tradition of the Holy Grail was an important part of my heritage. The story of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, and their quest for the Holy Grail, was staple bedtime reading. The Holy Grail was the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper—the Communion cup. The story went that Jesus’s uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, took the cup to Glastonbury, England, after Jesus’s death, where it lay hidden for many years. An ancestor of mine, Sir Thomas Malory, was the author of the 15th century English classic, *Le Morte d’Arthur*, and so, the tradition came down to me through my mother’s family, the Mallorys. They came to Virginia in the early 17th century from Studley Royal in Yorkshire, which lay next to Fountain’s Abbey,

a Cistercian monastery, where Sir Thomas would have had access to the rare French source books. (1)

Early on in my life, I decided to find out exactly what the quest for the Holy Grail was about, and I vowed to learn its inner secrets. I read everything I could get my hands on, but it all appeared to miss the mark. It took me most of my life to put the bits and pieces together and realize that the Holy Grail was about shamanic initiation and practice. The information and the practice, along with the transmission, came to me in ways that I could never have anticipated. As I was to learn, the original shamanic practice itself had been dismembered, and the various components were being practiced separately, and needed to be re-membered.

Jesus: Shaman and Grail-Teacher

Among the many pieces of the puzzle that I would need to put together regarding the Holy Grail, an important one came when I attended a workshop with Saami shaman Ailo Gaup. Sitting in the back was an older woman who wore glasses and looked more like a librarian than someone who practiced shamanism. She was quiet, though she participated in all the exercises where we drummed and journeyed, crossed the river of blood, and invoked the Saami spirits: Juksakka, the Bow Woman, and the White Reindeer. She told me that she was an Episcopal priest, and she was there because Jesus Christ had been a shaman, and she wanted to learn shamanism. She explained: Jesus was a healer, performed exorcisms, mediated with the invisible world of spirits, descended into the Underworld to bring back souls, and rose from the dead. I was nonplussed. These were all things that shamans did. This was confirmation from a source that I had not expected, of something that I already suspected.

In 2001 everything in my life fell apart: I lost my job and my companion of twelve years, and then my aging mother, far away, became ill. Neither of us had any money and, my heart and life broken beyond repair, as I saw it, I went into a state of total despair. I was grasping at straws to keep from going under in my life, and Reiki appeared in the form of a free mini-session which I thought at the time was by chance. It took only a few

moments after I felt the magic of the heated energy flowing from the hands placed gently on me to realize that this was what I had been waiting for my entire life. That same day, I scraped together the money for a training that began the next day. My instructor was an Israeli who looked like Jesus Christ, and, during the attunements, I sobbed with all my broken heart as Heaven opened up and filled me with light. Soon after that I learned that I had serious, physical heart trouble.

At that time, it was said that the Japanese originator of Reiki, Mikao Usui, who had received this transmission for healing during an experience of enlightenment in the early 1920s, was a Christian who had discovered Reiki during his search for the way Christ had done healing. And so, I learned from the Israeli that Reiki was Jesus's method. We were given secret Japanese and Sanskrit symbols to strengthen the Reiki, and I immediately questioned that Jesus Christ would have used these symbols. Soon, I discovered that Reiki was also a form of prayer, and while praying in that way, I dared to ask Jesus Christ to give me the symbols that he, himself, had used for healing. If anything—and I seriously doubted that I would receive anything—I expected Hebrew or Aramaic symbols. But no, the symbols I was given to use in place of the traditional Usui symbols came to me in the form of light, looking more like what I imagined the Druids and Celts would have used (I realized later that they could also have been from Central Asia). I was told that these were the Grail symbols for healing, so I understood that this was Grail Reiki and I very quickly learned that the symbols could be combined in ways that the traditional Usui symbols could not. I was also told that I should begin to celebrate a Grail Communion ceremony for healing, and that it should consist of water and grain (bread), infused with the Grail symbol energies. Still, I didn't know whether to take all this seriously—I figured it might just be my imagination.

About shamanism I only knew what little I had read, and what I had learned from Michael Harner in an early-1980s workshop, but I was about to learn that the Grail Reiki work was meant as just one part of a far-wider shamanic practice. When I went into prayer mode again and asked Usui whether these symbols were indeed to be used for Reiki, he said I should use them, that these symbols would be simpler for Westerners. Always doubtful whether my communications with the spirit world were real, in prayer then, I asked Usui to give me a concrete sign that this was so. I said I didn't want anything like an inner voice, that it needed to be explicit in the visible world. I never expected to get that sign, and I immediately forgot about it. By that time, however, I had learned that the story of Usui being a Christian and the head of a Christian university was not true. Usui's memorial stone had been located in a Buddhist cemetery in Tokyo, and there was a short biography inscribed on it. We learned that Usui came from an old Samurai family. On his family crest was a circle with the Pole Star at the top, an ancient Taoist symbol around which revolved the sacred Ursa Major—the Big Dipper. We also learned from his tombstone that Usui had practiced divination and spent time studying in China (where Buddhism was closely intertwined with Taoism). Indeed, Usui's spiritual connections with Central Asia and the North Pole would prove most important later for understanding why the Grail symbols were revealed to me in the context of Usui Reiki.

Nevertheless, it took me a while to get up the courage to use these new symbols. But, one day I did so, when exchanging attunements with three Reiki masters. I figured that if the symbols didn't work, it wouldn't matter, since these people were already Reiki masters. But they did work, and the energy was most powerful.

I suddenly found myself having to come up with a certificate for Grail Reiki, and I decided to create a certifi-

cate with an image of the Grail on it. I began to look through my collection of Grail books, but nothing seemed to be right, until I picked up a book I had never opened. I was almost at the end of it, when an image of a Communion chalice on a cloth popped out at me, and I immediately knew that this was the one. When I read the inscription on the following page, my stomach went queasy. It said: "The Christian flag in the Shimabara Rebellion, 17th c. Japan." (2) I looked that up and found that, indeed, Christianity had been outlawed in Japan, and history said the last of the Christians were massacred at that time. This was a piece of history about which I had known nothing. I learned, however, that some Christians had remained and gone underground, including a number of Samurai families. These Christians had continued to practice Christianity secretly, risking horrible public torture and death. (3) I went into Reiki prayer-meditation mode again, and asked Usui if his was one of the families that had continued to practice Christianity underground. He just smiled and said, "Keep looking." The story was becoming more complex.

Still, I wondered whether the Grail symbols I was using, even if Usui had endorsed them, had really come from Jesus Christ. But I hesitated to ask Jesus for a sign, fearing that would be pure hubris. Finally, one day, I got up the courage and spoke to him in that form of Reiki prayer where the veils between the visible and invisible worlds are very thin. "Jesus," I said, "if these are really the symbols you used in healing, please send me a sign so that I know it is not my imagination. And, Jesus, I don't want an abstract sign, like a voice from a cloud or whatever. I want something very explicit, in the visible world." Again, I never expected to hear anything more.

A Magdalene Easter

A couple of weeks later, on the Sunday following Easter, I attended a celebration to honor Mary Magdalene, held

by the Sisters of Charity. The sisters noted how little attention was paid during the Easter liturgies to Mary Magdalene, Apostle to the Apostles, when, without her, there would be no Christianity. It was to Mary Magdalene, after all, that Jesus Christ had first appeared after his Resurrection. There were some seventy nuns and a sprinkling of lay women at the celebration, in a hall filled with large round tables. At the front of the hall was an altar with the Paschal candle, and a large image of Mary Magdalene preaching to a crowd. As part of the program, there was a reenactment, to music, of Jesus's appearance to Mary Magdalene in the garden: two nuns danced. The one who represented Jesus Christ wore a long white tunic. Afterwards, a nun placed a bowl with essential oils on each table, and we were told that we should pair up with someone, and that we were to anoint one another in our life's purpose, to honor Mary Magdalene's practice of anointing. I recalled how, by some accounts, even, Jesus had learned healing from Mary Magdalene, the anointer. (4)

As I sat there wondering who would be my partner, I watched with trepidation as the nun wearing the long white tunic walked slowly towards me. When she asked me to be her partner, my heart jumped. She stated something about peace and harmony among humans, and I gingerly anointed her hands with some of the oil. Then, it was my turn. I stated my purpose, which was to live a life as a healer on Jesus Christ's path, and she proceeded to do something that changed everything for me. She took some oil and slowly anointed me, while reiterating my purpose, on the forehead, heart, and hands. But that was not all. To my amazement, she drew with the oils the very same Grail symbols that Jesus had given me—without knowing what she was doing. I was left in kind of a dream state, and said nothing. It was really only after I was at home later that night, alone, that I was able to fully realize what had happened. A holy woman dressed as Jesus Christ, or as Jesus Christ in his female form (whichever way one looked

at it), had physically given me a Grail Reiki attunement with the secret healing symbols that Jesus Christ had transmitted to me. And this had all taken place at a celebration honoring his companion, Mary Magdalene.

A friend and Grail Reiki student of mine had accompanied me, and I called her the following morning to double check that I hadn't imagined it all. She reassured me that it was as I remembered. There could be no more doubt in my mind now that Jesus Christ had given me the sign I had asked for.

By this time, I was teaching Reiki regularly, and I was working in a hospital doing Reiki. I had managed to heal myself of heart trouble over a period of two years, primarily with the Reiki, and no medication (I had no medical insurance). In short, I had found my way again into the world, largely through the Grail Reiki, and my future looked rosy to me.

Enter Shamanism

Then everything began to collapse again, and it was at that point that I began to learn from the spirits that the Grail symbols and energy work were a part of a far-wider practice, which was shamanism. And so, I was called, kicking and screaming, to the wider practice, which I was certain I could do without. As I soon found, however, when the spirits call you, there is no refusing them. Only when I fully accepted the calling after many months of trials and tribulations did things begin to go well for me again. It was then that I was able to ascertain that Jesus Christ, indeed, was a shaman in the fullest sense of the word. He led me, along with several other invisible spirits, into various traditions that had to do with the Holy Grail—which I resisted at the time, to no avail—including sending me first south to the Equator and then north, close to the North Pole, to teach Grail Reiki and do special Grail Communion ceremonies for Mother Earth. The deeper significance of this

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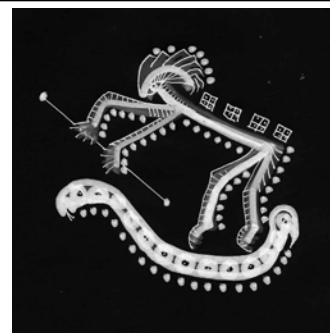
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would only become clear to me much later.

And so, Jesus Christ has been my principal Guide in the invisible world. He has always told me that I should help to restore traditional practices, and repair the damage done in his name. He said I should encourage people to stay within their ancestral spiritual traditions, or the one they grew up with, as a base tradition, since, normally, this worked best in the spiritual world of invisible energies. After that, learning different traditions would be something like learning other languages. He also told me to be an inconspicuous follower of his, and to do my healing quietly. He said that when I encountered a great deal of darkness, I was simply to let the light shine through. (At one point, he told me never to use his name in places where people might be offended.) I slowly learned that Grail Reiki had unique properties that made it a shamanic practice. I found that I often knew how to do a shamanic practice before I read about it or was taught. Importantly, I was taught that as long as I used the Grail Reiki as the ground for my other shamanic work, such as for soul retrievals, extractions, clearings, and even depossession work, as well as for ceremony, there was never any danger to me from the invisible world. I was told that I should teach this to others. There was no need for other protections. It was all part of the same, wider, original shamanic practice. Unfortunately, energy work with the hands, such as Reiki, had been broken away from shamanic practice over the millennia, as people sought to become specialized and differentiated.

THE SANGRAAL

As a journalist, I was used to being able to check facts through interviews and documents and such, and after receiving the Grail healing symbols I was feeling a strong need to be able to do the same with the information I received from the invisible world. To my amazement, at that point, I began to receive or be guided invisibly to information, on a

regular basis, that supported what I was learning about the connections between the Grail and shamanism. First, I learned from a Hungarian scholar friend, who I suddenly heard from after many years, about research showing that the tradition of King Arthur and the Holy Grail in Europe, rather than coming from Celtic sources, as had been thought, could be traced to Asian hero tales about a magical cup—the “Revealer”—that would appear at feasts but served only flawless heroes. The tradition had been brought to Europe by shamanic, nomadic Scythian tribes from Asia that settled in Britain in the 2nd century A.D. and in Gaul in the 5th century. (5)

The written versions of the story of the “Gaal,” or “Sangraal,” had first appeared in medieval France. “San” had most-often been equated with the French “san” or “saint,” meaning “holy.” However, there had never been a satisfactory etymology for “Gaal,” although it was often said to come from “gradalis” (Latin, “cratalis”) for platter. Sangraal, therefore, was translated into English as “Holy Grail.”

And so, I learned, the story of the Quest for the Holy Grail had a shamanic-Scythian origin somewhere in Central Asia. However, since I had begun working with the Grail healing symbols, I sensed that there was far more to discover. There was a powerful energy surrounding the stories of the quest for this Cup, that I sensed in my bones. Working with the Grail healing symbols had magnified my connection to a mysterious energy that I could only describe as being “higher,” like the North Pole is higher, and “inner,” like the source of the Earth’s magnetic core. This had been particularly evident to me during the Grail ceremony I conducted before a glacier in Greenland. I asked for more guidance from the invisible world.

What Is This Cup?

The question in my mind always was, exactly what is this Cup? And is it a physical Cup?

Suffice it to say that my Hungarian scholar friend revealed to me also that the word “Gaal” was Mongolian for “Source.” A light went on in my brain and something very ancient resonated in my heart. So, I asked, was the correct translation for “Sangraal” the “Holy Source?” Answers from the spirit world would often come to me through written texts shortly after I asked, and, in this case, I soon found myself reading a book on Mongolian shamanism, where I learned that, in addition to the word “gaal,” the word “sang” also existed in Mongolian: according to Mongolian shaman Sarangerel, it meant an invocation, with a smudge bowl or smoke. (6)

Therefore, “Sangraal” (or “Sang Gaal”) in Mongolian could mean “Invocation of the Source,” which made a lot of sense. And this would make it a ceremony. I wondered when and how this Mongolian tradition had come to Europe. The first known, written story of the Gaal—Chrétien de Troyes’ *Conte del Graal*—appeared in France in the late 12th century, much later than the Scythian settlements in Gaul. However, in Mongolia itself I found that several important nomadic tribes had converted to Christianity much earlier, and they would no doubt have merged their shamanic practices with the new faith. The tribe of the Keraites, for one, had been Christian since at least the early 11th century (some 150 years before Chrétien’s book). At the same time, Christian Byzantium was a very cosmopolitan place, with significant ties to Central Asia, and there would surely have been contact with their Eastern brothers and sisters. And a number of Christian Byzantine rites, often secret, were known to have come from, or to have been influenced by, the far Orient.

Indeed, even earlier, Eastern Christians had close ties to Central-Asian shamanic cultures and Taoism in China, which had common roots as well as practices. Already in the 6th century, the shamanic White Huns of Central Asia, a Mongol tribe, had converted to Christianity. And, at that same time, Christianity became established in shamanic Bon

Tibet, which had strong connections with Mongolia and the Huns. (The Church remained strong there until at least the 13th century.) Meanwhile, in neighboring China, starting in the 7th century, there were a number of “Taoist-Christian” monasteries. (7) And so, the “Gaal” tradition could have come to the West from any one of these groups. There were many people traveling back and forth between the Far East and Christian Byzantium, and between Byzantium and Europe, even before the First Crusade in 1095. After the city was sacked by the Crusaders, many relics and rites made their way back to Europe.

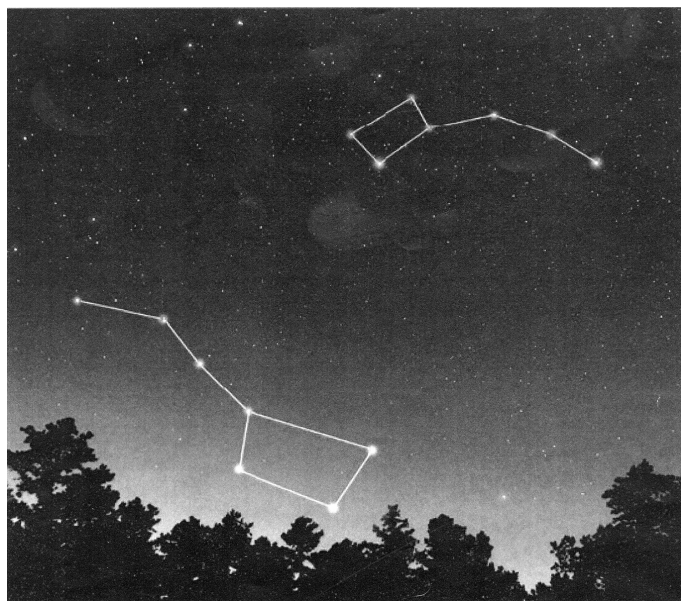
And so, the Gaal or Sangraal practice, or transmission, must have made its way from Mongolia to France, probably by way of Byzantium, brought by returning Crusaders, or Moslems by way of Spain. Eventually, the Sangraal tradition, probably through resonance and a certain cultural familiarity, seems to have become amalgamated with the Scythian story of the Cup, which had taken root earlier in Europe, and the Celtic stories of magical Cauldrons, and with the Christian story of the Cup of the Last Supper. It was possible, even probable, I mused, that they all had common, ancient roots, and, indeed, there was evidence of this. And so, it seemed very possible that the “Sangraal,” or “Sang Graal” was an Asian shamanic ceremony, or transmission, possibly Christian, invoking the Source. Now, I wondered, to what, exactly, did the word “Gaal,” or “Source” refer? The “Source” of what? I knew that there were, in fact, many Mongolian shamanic ceremonies with a cup.

The Dream

And so, it was now five or six years after I had first learned Reiki and

received the Grail healing symbols, plus a physical confirmation that they came from Jesus Christ. And I had been guided by my spirit guides to understand that these symbols were for shamanic healing work, and I had learned that, in Mongolian, “Gaal” meant “Source,” and “Sang Graal” might have meant “Invocation of the Source.” And so it was possibly a transmission and invocation ceremony that had come to the West from a probably shamanic-Christian—tradition of Central Asia. And yet, I knew there was still something important missing. I didn’t know exactly what was meant by “Source.” Nevertheless, I was regularly celebrating the Grail Communion ceremony for healing, as instructed by the spirits, with a group of friends, energizing water and grain (bread), and continuing to ask for guidance.

It was then that I had a lucid dream that led to breakthrough information about the origin of the Grail and its function in Central Asia, and the Grail as “Source.” In the dream, there was an oriental-looking man in jeans and a



t-shirt, with a large topknot, standing about twenty feet away from me, surrounded by his followers. A voice said to me, “He is the real thing.” Then, the man turned and spoke to me in a language that I could not understand. He pointed

a finger straight at me and I felt a powerful electrical shock. After I awoke, I continued to feel shaken by the strong jolt. Later, I figured that it had been an empowerment. But an empowerment of what?

I thought the man must be a spirit, and I began researching traditions where oriental-looking men wore large top-knots. At first, I thought he might be a Japanese Samurai spirit, or a Mongolian, or possibly even a Blackfoot Indian spirit. A few months later, however, I recognized the face in a photograph I saw in an article on shamanic Chinese calligraphy. His name was Master Zhongxian Wu and he was from China. He had written a book explaining that Qigong (meaning “energy work”) had come from the shamans of pre-Taoist China some 8,000 years ago. Soon, in 2009, Master Wu would publish another book, which I promptly read, and then I knew immediately why he had appeared to me in a dream. The book had a section on the shamanic origins of the *Yijing* (better-known as the *I Ching*, or *Book of Change*). Here, I found the answer to what I was looking for regarding the function of the Holy Grail as a Cup that was the “Source.” The book explained that in ancient, shamanic China, long before Confucius, it was believed that the knowledge in the *Yijing*, known as *The Heavenly Book*, had been channeled from heaven by the *wu*, or shamans, whose original function was “to connect with the universal energy” and to pass it on to others.

Clue in the Sky

“*Yijing*” was a composite of two words: “*jing*,” which meant a Chinese Classic; and “*Yi*,” for which the oldest-known oracle-bone character was a cup of water or grain, recorded by pre-Taoist shamans over 4,000 years ago. The Oracle Script, or Seal Script, traditionally, had been considered by shamans to be the means of receiving Heavenly knowledge and universal

energy from the “Cup of Heaven,” or Big Dipper, that revolved around the North Pole and was the Source of all knowledge. In ancient China, the symbol for the Big Dipper was a pig or boar, and the explanations for the hexagrams all began: “Boar says,” meaning “Big Dipper says.” Indeed, the Big Dipper was considered to be in charge of karma and the life force, as well as all natural phenomena (including natural disasters and disease), the four seasons, and the balance of Yin and Yang in the universe. The “Heavenly Cup,” also known as the “Jade Balance of Fate,” was considered to be the “heart of the celestial world.” So, “Yi” was the Big Dipper. (8) (Interestingly, I thought, given this discovery, it could be said that the *Yijing* was the Book of the Holy Cup, or Book of the Grail.)

And so, I realized, if for ancient shamans in that part of the world, the Big Dipper was the primordial Source of all knowledge and universal Qi (as used in healing, which would also make clear connection between the Grail and Usui Reiki, via his family’s guardian, the spirit of the North Pole), it would make sense that these could be attained by invoking the Big Dipper, or Graal, perhaps with a ceremony, the “Sangraal.” So, I began thinking that, while I might have sought to link Usui to Christianity when he said “Keep looking,” he was perhaps pointing toward shamanic Taoism and the North Pole and its two Dippers—two Heavenly Cups. It was not difficult to believe that some Taoist Christians might have embraced this practice. Surely, I mused, it was Usui who had guided me to Master Wu’s writings.

The “Jade Balance of Fate,” I realized, must be an allusion to the green Northern Lights, that result from the interaction between the solar wind and the Earth’s magnetic field at the North Pole. And here was another reason, as well, I realized, for the ancients to equate the North Pole with a pouring cup that was the “Source” of all knowledge about nature, and universal energy: indeed, the Earth’s magnetic field poured out of the

Earth’s axis at the North Pole, circled downward, and around like a doughnut shape, or toros, and reentered at the South Pole, forming a cup or chalice-like, energetic shape along the axis. The Big Dipper would have symbolized that cup-shaped electromagnetic field that poured out of the Earth’s core at the North Pole. Interestingly, human beings, who in Taoist China were considered the microcosm of Earth, had similar magnetic fields pouring out of the head and reentering at the base of the torso. And the magnetic field of the heart formed an additional toros: it made the shape of a medieval chalice with a round bulge on the stem—a second toros shape, if you will. Furthermore, in shamanic, ancient China, it had been established that there were energy centers on the human body, that corresponded to the seven stars of the Big Dipper, and these continued to be activated by Taoists for healing, as well as for becoming immortal. The Earth’s core energy, then, spilled out into a cup made of seven far-away stars.

So, I realized, these must be the mysterious energies I had been intended to connect with when I was sent by the spirits to Greenland to do a Grail ceremony for Mother Earth. For, in fact, the polar tradition, where the Big Dipper and Pole star were central, had originally come from the far North, and would have traveled across Mongolia to China. Those people, moreover, had left no known written records.

Conclusion

And thus, the Big Dipper, for shamans in ancient Asia, had been considered the Source of Heavenly knowledge and universal Qi, or energy. All these pieces supported the understanding that I had come to, that the Holy Grail, Graal, or Sangraal—the “Source” as a holy primordial cup—was a shamanic tradition brought to Europe from the area of the world that Mongolia and China occupy today, and it meant the Source of Heavenly knowledge and universal Qi,



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or energy. If the “San” or “Sang,” indeed, was also part of the original Mongolian etymology, then there was a Sangraal ceremony: an Invocation of the Source. And there would have been many levels for receiving the energies of the Heavenly Cup—the Grail—according to the shaman’s spiritual development and skills, reflected still today in the various levels of initiation for shamans in Asia. Thus, one could say that the original quest for the Holy Grail was perhaps the quest by Central-Asian shamans for the spiritual knowledge and universal healing energy contained in the magnetic field pouring out of the energetic core of the North Pole, through the seven stars of Heaven that made up the Big Dipper—the primordial Holy Grail.

Endnotes

1 Matthews, William. *The Ill-Framed Knight: A Skeptical Inquiry into the Identity of Sir Thomas Malory*. University of California 1966., p. 121. French Cisterican monks had been connected with the Grail

stories along with their protegés, the Knights Templar, from the start of the known, written accounts in the 12th century.

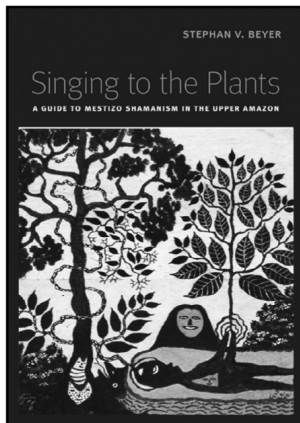
- 2 Godwin, Malcolm. *The Holy Grail: Its Origins, Secrets & Meanings Revealed*. Viking Studio Books 1994., p. 232.
- 3 Endo, Shusaku. *Silence*. Monumenta Nipponica 1969. I learned that many of the statues of Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, where she carried prayer beads, were, in fact, disguised images of the Virgin Mary.
- 4 Chilton, Bruce. *Mary Magdalene: A Biography*. Doubleday/Image 2005.
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Songlines & Storylines

by Jeff Stockton

I love the soulful story-weaving that comes when we meet in shamanic ways and set our own personal stories free on the wind... around the fire, night falling, stars wheeling. Woven into such personal stories are the defining moments of our lives. In the telling, the pattern and flow of our lives make perfect sense. But in the *living* of those story-moments, our logical, rational minds strain to understand the unfolding – even as the heart yearns to say “yes,” to surrender to whatever is searching for us.

What is it that comes in search of us? Is it destiny?

Each of us finds our destiny in distinct and unique ways. In the thirteenth century the poet Rumi said, “Don’t be satisfied with stories, how things have gone with others. Unfold your own myth.”

And so, in the unfolding of my own myth, the visionary realms of shamanism have led me to weave the work of a lifetime on the strings of the Celtic harp, in the travels of a professional harper and storyteller.

Lifelines

My family comes from the Canadian Prairies, with a strong no-nonsense work ethic. When I took up meditation at the age of nineteen, it threw the family for a bit of a loop. But at the age of eighteen, my inner world had imploded. While there were external life challenges at the time, there was no understandable cause for the complete absence of joy, of vital energy, of hope in my life. When I look back upon it now, I call it “The Bleakness.” In my struggle, my drowning, there came an inrush of certainty that I needed to reach out to the “Unseen” for assistance. But how? And what was this Unseen?

A university student at the time, I wandered into a bookstore. I looked for the most inexpensive book in the “contemplation and prayer” section. Deceptively titled *How to Meditate*, it cost \$1.99. I bought it and took it home.

To be honest, with the whirling of my thoughts and emotions, learning to meditate was a maddening experience. I



dreaded it each morning, but somehow knew that if I held to it, I would be able to find my way forward. As time went on, it became rich and pleasurable, and I began to look forward to the daily practice. I never really knew if I was authentically meditating. But a lifelong internal conversation that had been underway for as long as I could remember came to the forefront and took on a whole new significance: I understood that the Unseen was reaching out to me as well, in some sense “holding me.”

In my mid-twenties, I encountered the yogic styles of meditation and I was set afire. I traveled to India several times, explored different ashrams, and soaked up the sheer magic. By the time I was twenty-six, I was teaching first grade full time and running a meditation center in Calgary. My “double life” baffled my family, but they could see that I was happy, and had a life that made sense in its own way.

Then, at age twenty-nine, another transition occurred – this one a bit more difficult to understand logically.

By then, I knew that my experiences of meditation were not exactly like those shared by others. Although I experienced peace and mindfulness, my meditations often flowed into strong imagery of landscapes and vivid encounters.

Even though I felt that I had found my way, I began to be haunted by the sense that there was something else I was supposed to be doing. At night I dreamed of long treks through marketplaces, into dusty old bookstores, hunting and hunting. The most elating and the most depressing dreams were the ones in which I found the exact book I had been searching for, the one that would explain it all! In the dream, I would open the cover ... and then suddenly wake up before I could read any words!!

After struggling with these dreams for months, I knew without doubt that I was being called onwards. I began to drive out of the city for long hikes in the mountains every chance I got, to clear my head, to *listen*.

On one particularly long escape into the woods, with the moon rising over the trees, I had a waking dream. I had to sit down on the moss as a flow of energy, an encounter, took me through the familiar images of the marketplace, the bookstores, the old books, and then finally I find the one I have been looking for all these years. This time I open the book and the pages are blank! But I wait, I drift, and then, I “hear” three words.

Bard. Shaman. Harp.

When they are spoken, they appear written on the pages.

And the waking dream is done. The three words were new and strange to me. There was only the vaguest sense of “shaman” having something to do with “other” cultures. I had only heard the word “bard” in relation to Shakespeare. And why the harp?

Over the years, I had experimented with background music during meditation. It held little appeal until a friend gave me a cassette of Celtic music. I had never heard anything like it. Skirling pipes, soaring strings, and underneath it all there was *something*. Was it a guitar? A mandolin? Some kind of synthesizer? I checked the liner notes. A harp.

I had been caught by the ear, enchanted. It became a staple in my meditations. I once heard a harp live in concert when I was 25. I remember sitting in the audience, moved to tears. I knew I loved that sound!

A Flood of Change: The Harp

After the experience in the mountains, there came a flood of change. I transferred to a new school, a new home, assisted someone else in taking over the meditation center, and decided to buy a harp. I phoned every music store in Calgary, but none sold harps. I discovered that it was possible to purchase a harp at a distance via the internet. And so I ordered one. It felt like an insane thing to do.

In the six months it took for the harp to be built, I read everything I could on shamanic traditions. I marveled that there was such a thing as “Celtic shamanism.” Though I maintained my meditation practice, I began journeying like a fiend.

When I received news that the harp had finally arrived at the Calgary airport, I was at school. My principal knew how much this meant to me, and offered to cover my class so I could go to the airport and pick it up.

I recall how ferociously the wind blew, a proper spring gale for western Canada, as baggage handlers wheeled an enormous box out to my jeep in the parking lot. I wrestled for a good twenty minutes in vain to fit the box into the jeep. Hands numb, I resorted to tearing open the packing with my car keys. The burly fellows in shipping and receiving watched with amusement through the windows as the wind literally tore the packaging off the instrument, cartwheeling the huge cardboard box across the parking lot.

So my first look at the instrument I had long felt drawn to was in a spring blizzard, just after sunset, out at the Calgary industrial airport. It was love at first sight, and I have never looked back.

Becoming a Harper

I began with no musical skills. I had never before known such a feeling of accomplishment as that which came from learning how to release the music that lives in the stilled strings. I understood this to be a shamanic adventure, but at the time I had no interest in becoming a performer of any sort. It soon became clear that the spirits had other ideas. Two months after the harp arrived, I could barely play a note. Even though my artistic skills were slight, unexpected invitations to play began to appear: a book launch for a friend, a restaurant owned by an acquaintance, soon a local bookstore. At each, my spirit allies nudged

me past my doubts, and off I went with the harp.

I hauled the harp into the classroom every day, and experimented with telling part of a story to the music of the harp. From there, I began to be invited to tell stories at conferences and professional gatherings. I worked with great discipline and practiced my heart out, but it wasn't the slow development of skill that kept me going. It was the inexplicable moments of simply sitting at the harp with the spirits, letting my fingers move on the strings, letting discoveries unfold. Letting the veil grow thin. Letting the enchantment grow strong.

Within two years, I had taken all of the basic workshops in shamanic healing, had gone on a vision quest, and had no more doubts about this being the way forward in my life.

Life became a process of the most unlikely new doorways. I was now living an hour outside Calgary, in a fairly isolated spot in the forested foothills of the Rocky Mountains. It was out in the woods that the power of song came through in full force.

I recall being moved when I read author Bruce Chatwin put forth his experiences and interpretations of Aboriginal Songlines. His notion, after spending time in conversation and travel with Indigenous Australians, was that the totemic ancestors left more than footprints behind them. Through song and spoken word, they created trails of Dreaming across the world as they traveled. There is beauty in the notion that even though we may be physically separated from one another, there are trails of Song and wisdom across the land, connecting us. There is beauty in settling into the idea that the land itself sings, and that together, we sing each other into being.

This was my experience of walking daily in the deep woods, in the song of the river and the winds.

Clients began to appear. A lovely lady approached me to journey for “her song,” what she called the “song of her heart.” I had never heard of such a thing. But the journey was astoundingly vivid, and I was moved at different points to stand up and “moodle about on the harp” until the experience transferred into sound, rhythm, melody. In the end, it was just simple and joyous and bright music. The song “told me” when it was complete. I recorded it and sent it along to her. To my surprise, she was delighted.

The floodgates opened around this. New music, songs of the spirits, began to be a part of my spiritual/musical practice. As those still very simple pieces began to take shape, they took over what I would play in performance or as accompaniment during story-tellings. People began to ask if I had recordings they could buy (which amused me to no end).

As more invitations came to present and to perform, I went to teaching part-time to make room for the new possibilities. I was approached by an organization working out of the University of Calgary to do professional presentations and seminars for them, woven around story and music. In each, we worked with the flow of old stories in assisting people to think differently about professional change.

Then a “priority alert” began to sound. To honor the music more deeply, the spirits called for a formal recording.

As unlikely as it sounds, within a fairly short time I was earning my living in the world on the strings of the harp. Within another decade or so, I had produced five recordings of music and stories that came from the spirits, that I had learned with the spirits.

I have heard it said that the best way to learn a brand new language is to be dropped into the middle of it, immersed in it. Looking back nearly twenty years later, I can see that the spirits immersed me in a language I needed to learn in order to work with them; so that together, we might bring something to the world.

I used to ask and even argue with the spirits about this, all the while wondering, “So when does the *shamanic* work start?” In their usual way, they would simply laugh and ask, “What makes you think this is not ‘shamanic’ work?!” They reminded me that the shaman has always been the praise singer, as Rumi said, “Praising the Great Heart within the daily.”

The harp has an incredible capacity for playing the beating of the Great Heart within the daily. It opens up a fluid landscape, coaxing the listening heart to the place “betwixt and between.” On a recording, the harp is quite beautiful, but it is in the live performance that one recognizes the unique voice of the instrument. It has an uncanny ability to draw the whole self to a new vista of emotion and experience, a new vista of consciousness. The deep base vibrates right through the bones. The range of notes rising to the highest notes make it an entirely physical—yet spiritual—experience.

The Primal Power of Song

Celtic folktales and literature are filled with tales of the Otherworldly dwellings of the Sidhe, carrying mortals off in tides of music. In some of those tales, the Sidhe bestow the gift of music, so it may be brought back into the everyday world. My harp too becomes, as in those old tales, a doorway to a place of wonder. Although a formal, recognized piece thrives well on the strings of the harp, the instrument is astonishing in its capacity to change direction on a dime, to improvise, to play the whispering from every leaf; to open to the singing from every river; to play the shimmering from every sky.

In the ancient Celtic traditions, we know that no one reached places of leadership and spiritual guidance of the people without first training intensely in the weaving of dreams, in the art of song and story. In that training, there was no hard line between song and spoken word, as if they were two separate art forms. The one flowed into the other on the

breath, into and through the threads of Inspiration.

One of the most ancient Celtic myths speaks of the beginning of music in human experience.

When the goddess Boand is giving birth, she is having great difficulty. She cries out in pain and suffering. Her husband, Uaithne, wanting to bring what ease he can, feels her pain. He takes his harp, sets fingers to strings, and calls forth from it the sound, the song, of Sorrow. All who hear it are caught up in it, they weep with Boand. And for the first time in creation, the Sorrow strain of music is heard on the Earth. Boand gives birth to a son, and he is named Goltraí... Song of Sorrow.

But Boand has not finished her work, and the labor continues. Moments later Boand laughs out loud with delight, and Uaithne takes the harp and plays pure, unrestrained jubilation upon the strings. All who hear it are caught up in euphoria, and for the first time in the world, the Joy strain of music is heard. The second son is named for this Geantraí... Song of Joy.

Astonishingly, Boand has still not completed her labor! But this third child is such a gentle birthing that Boand actually falls deeply asleep. Uaithne takes his harp one more time, and from the strings comes a deep, rippling song of peace, of sleep, of rest. All who hear it are brought under its spell, and are drawn into a deep sleep. And so it is that the Sleep strain of music is heard, and the third child is named for it Suantraí... Song of Sleep.

In Celtic myth, these three strains of music were called the Three Noble Strains. The distinguishing feature of a trained bard and harper was to be able to weave the Three Noble Strains into the world: to know when and where they were called for, and to confer them onto the listener. It was the Three Noble Strains of music that allowed the wonder of Song to bring each separate listener together, to bring the Sorrow upon them, then the Joy, and at last the Sleep of healing.

To do so meant that the bringer of song, the bard, would be caught up in the power of the strains also. Not just for effect, but for the rich gift of consciousness that each strain brings with it. Invoking the flow of each Noble Strain into the world; evoking the flow in each listener; bringing the listener and the world together for a moment in time; and thus free the dreaming capacity of each listener to flow free once more.

Songlines

Although it is a glorious thing to play an instrument—external strings, keys, frets, and pipes are not required for human beings to express themselves through song. This wondrous body each of us wears is the most exquisite instrument in creation.

As the story of Boand and Uaithne reminds us: *We live music. We are music.*

Our media saturation has made us hyper-sensitive to skill and technique.

It tends to silence those who will never have a five-octave vocal range that makes people's hair stand on end. Our richness of media has resulted in many classifications and genres of music, each with their own "niche" audience. But with the spirits, there is no genre of music. Music isn't pop or rap or folk or new age—it is the sound of the moment, the glorious song of praise, an embracing and honoring of what is.

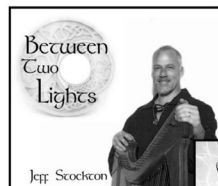
I would venture to say that any who have worked with the spirits for any length of time have found themselves spontaneously expressing through rhythm and melody, the simple flow of sound, rising and falling. In an instant, the mind—that rational, clawing, judgmental part of the mind anyhow—is soothed and quiet. The majority of these are just spontaneous sung or hummed expressions of a given moment. They don't need to be "caught" or remembered or ever repeated. But sometimes there is such an expression, a jolt of wonder and power and emotion, that we need to let it come and put down roots within us; invite it to dwell with us—let it *sing* us.

There are certain songlines that, when they visit us, instantly open intimacy with the spirits. In the singing, the spirits are here and now, and we are not alone. We are held, and no invocation or smudging is required. Song, as the old tales say, becomes a doorway to a place of wonder. The side of the hill has opened; the power of Music has come; the Three Noble Strains have touched the world once more.

As shamanic people we need those quick connections, both for the simple pleasure of connection, and for the assistance and strength to face, to endure, to pass through difficulty or frustration. Sometimes when the Song Spirits gift us in this way, the song becomes an ally in and of itself. We are given a guide who will travel with us through *many* life moments rather than just a passing moment.

Once upon a time, when songlines opened with such greater presence, I would drop everything and run to find my little battery operated hand-held cassette recorder. Now, when they ar-

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rive, it's my iPad I sprint for. But the sprint hasn't changed much in all these years. Moments of song are astonishingly ephemeral. A glimmer of song, a few fleeting moments of rise and fall, of tone and mood, perhaps a fragment of lyric attached (although the lyrics aren't always so important), and we have a sudden window into the Real World. Like a shooting star, like the glimmer of the northern lights on the horizon, like the crest of the full moon as it begins to shimmer its way up into the evening sky, the moment passes on swift feet.

I have had moments of such intense wonder, so deeply moved by a moment of song that breaks through, that I was certain I would never forget the melody line, or the words that may have come along with it. And then an hour later, I realize sadly that it has not stayed with me. Sometimes the spirits have been patient and returned with it, and often with a bit of chiding at the missed step of embracing and recording the song.

There have been times within a journey or even a dream at night that the song actually formed as moment of recognizable music. But those are rare for me. Usually it is a *feeling* that strikes me, and it comes into focus *afterwards* as I sing, or as I sit and let my fingers find it on the harp strings.

But either way, when the songs arrive, I run. These are the bits and moments that often end up traveling with me for years. Many of them become the heart of something that eventually becomes formally recorded and released... always with the permission of the spirits.

Storylines

The fluidity and freedom with which we can access music and narrative today is an astonishing thing. Recorded music is a cloud of sound upon us and around us. Narrative is threaded through every conceivable kind of device and technology, recorded and broadcast in countless ways.

There is such power in the human imagination, in its capacity to dream. And yet, even with the great capacity for dreaming and imagining, as a species, we are also somewhat obsessed with wanting to see the whole of things. Perhaps this is so because we are physically designed in such a way that we can never see all of our physical selves without assistive technologies. In our world today, we have put assistive technologies everywhere to help solve this problem. We now have cameras posted on every street corner, we use machines to see deep into the cellular layer of things, and we have sent our lenses astonishing distances into outer space.

But when it comes to the flow of destiny, to the onward dreaming of a lifetime, all the cameras and microphones in the world don't help much. Here is where the story steps in. The world's stories form an archive or a map of human experience. There is logic, there are leaps of faith, the unseen becomes seen as a story unfolds—as it enfolds us into its wisdom. One of the great powers of working with story is the ability to glimpse the whole of things, as shamans have always known.

Stories are landscapes. They are spiritual and soulful terrains. Stories give us a sense of place, lead us toward our destiny.

In many old tales, one of the key features is that the main characters are, for the most part, anonymous and faceless. All we know is that they were the youngest son or the youngest daughter. All we know is that they had no definable, marketable skill-set. They are without a face. They are “foolish” enough to listen to the unseen and to trust in the crazy-wisdom of the Otherworld.

These characters have the sense to offer simple kindness without expecting anything in return, and the doors fly open, and the Great Adventure is launched. They survive difficulty and testing and still somehow find their way, listening to the voices of wisdom, holding true even in the darkness. We

are comforted and inspired, and have a renewed sense of how to unfold our own myth.

There is wisdom in the Story. There is nourishment in the Song. They wait for us, they hunt us, they call to us.

The old stories don't have to be presented as epic pieces or performance art. Simple, short unfoldings are enough to bring the enchantment. There is a reason these old stories have survived so long amid so many ruthless cultural cleansings. In simple and powerful ways, they show us how human beings find and live their destinies. Story holds teachings together in any context. It becomes a reference point that we share for holding our ideas together.

After many years and countless performances, bringing stories alive on the harp has taught me absolutely that although there are many powerful stories, the power of any tale is in its Telling, not in the text of it. The power is not in having people read it silently to themselves. The power is not in reading a story aloud from a piece of paper. The power is not in memorizing and reciting it. The power is in just letting the story come alive! Letting it breathe, change, pause, find the listener... letting the story tell us.

Live storytelling is like shamanic journeying. There is an astonishing flow of connection that opens. The imagination stirs, and the world falls away. Although storytelling is a physical thing woven on the breath and the movements of the body, the cadence and rhythm of the voice matter even more than the words themselves. As a story unfolds, it becomes for a time a shared destiny, a shared dreaming. It reaches from the “outside world” deep into our private dreaming. As listeners, we are woven together for a time, brought out of our separateness. In storytelling, we discover profound nourishment in watching human beings unfold, understand, and live their own myth.

From the Noble Strains to Viral Strains

It may be that the idea of conferring the Three Noble Strains in Celtic myth sounds a bit absurd and far-fetched in our modern-day world. Can we really confer the experience of sorrow, joy, and blessed peace? There is much competition in our world today.

There are one hundred hours of new video clips uploaded to YouTube every minute, each clip conferring a 2-6 minute altered state on the viewer. There are countless sound files available for purchase on iTunes, each conferring a 3-6 minute altered state of consciousness. The media seems to wait with bated breath to announce that one of them has “gone viral,” and the trumpets are sounded! I remember when something viral was a bad thing, and greeted with murmurs of sympathy.

These conferred states can be vivid, sticky, and cling to us for some time afterwards. In our time of ever-present media, the air is awash with countless messages, tacked onto the sides and riding the top of every web page we visit, arriving in our inbox, blaring from speakers, spasming across the HD screens in the living rooms of the world. There does not seem to be a great deal of nobility in those conferred states.

What does it mean to live in shamanic ways? I think poet William Butler Yeats may have said it best when he coined the phrase the “deep heart’s core.” Whatever our mailing address, where we live is the deep heart’s core.

I sometimes think that with the amount of recorded media we have access to, we have lost the sense of the vital power of song and story. All of us, and especially we who work in the shamanic realm, need to reclaim the power of song and story. Song and story, particularly when aligned with relations with the spirits, bring deep change to the lived human experience and perspective.

Although both song and story are highly entertaining, they offer far more than entertainment. There is a nourishment that comes from them.

We forget in our hurried, media-saturated culture, the power of being personally sung to. To be sung to live, with deep purpose, with heartfelt emotion is such an extreme rarity that many adults never experience this. Many adults never hear another story told aloud once childhood has ended. As environmental author Barry Lopez reminds us, we forget that stories care for us, that there are times in every human being’s life when a person needs a story more than they need bread to stay alive.

When Song or Story pass through the air, when they are breathed into us, they resound and settle into the bones and memories of our beautiful bodies. They strengthen us.

The Weaving of Song, Story, & Blessing

One of the things that has always struck me about the Celtic cultures is the legacy of the Blessing. A Blessing is woven on the winds with both language and intention. A soulful Blessing is one of the most generous things that we can actually give to another human being.

The most powerful Blessings I have ever encountered are woven with and through the living world around us, as enduring as the earth, as gentle as the rain. A Blessing allows us to glimpse the whole of ourselves with new eyes.

A Blessing is not just the pretty language of greeting cards. A Blessing is a rare and deeply precious thing. It is powerful enough to change the trajectory of a lifetime (when it comes from the right place and is delivered in the right way). Within the hands and heart, on the tongue of the shaman, song and story become such living Blessings, weaving us together, making us strong.

We never fully know the journey another person is on, who will walk through the door, what they are calling out for their hearts and souls. But the odds are that in our shamanic work, in some way, they are passing through a moment of dreaming, of destiny, of unfolding their own myth.

They come to each of us because shamanism is not just about the training we have undertaken, nor just about the ways in which we live with, relate to, serve with the spirit allies we work with. They come to us because we know the ways to sing Blessing back into the daily. They come to us because we truly listen. They come to us because we know the songs and stories that will catch the ear and coax the heart past the grayness of daily life. They come to us because we know intimately the deep heart’s core, and the secret pathways there.

They come to us because they are looking for what poet Rainer Maria Rilke meant when he said in his *Book of Hours*

*I believe in what I have felt but not yet
spoken
I want to free the dream that waits within
me
So that what I have longed for may spring
forth
....*

I will sing Life as no one has before me

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Stockton’s studies and training in shamanism began in 1996 on the strings of the Celtic harp. In addition to his work in the shamanic realm, Jeff weaves song and story on the strings of the harp in performance and recorded works. His web site is www.jeffstockton.ca. He can be reached at contact@jeffstockton.ca

Shamanic Healing Within an Iranian Cultural Context

by Elham (Ellie) Zarrabian, Ph.D.

I am a third generation shamanic healer, born in 1969 to a Jewish family in Tehran, Iran. I lived there with my family until early 1979 when the Islamic Revolution began. Overnight we packed our bags and fled to London to avoid possible imprisonment and persecution of religious minorities. We lived there for four years until 1983, when we immigrated to and settled in the United States. My story is much like the one of million other Iranians who ultimately immigrated to the United States.

Iranian Jewish Cultural Background

Jews of Iran have been living in the Middle East since Biblical times. Perhaps the earliest mention of this cultural group is narrated in the story of Purim, which tells of the deliverance of the Jews from Persia and from the efforts of Persian leader Haman to destroy them. In the story, Esther, a Jewish Persian woman and a queen to King Xerxes I, successfully appeals to the King to spare the lives of the Jewish people.

In present day Iran, Jewish Iranians are but one of many minority groups occupying the region. Many other subcultures also are present, including Armenian, Assyrian, Zoroastrian, and Bahaii Iranians. Each subculture is imbued with its own distinct richness and beauty, including unique customs, practices, rituals, dialects, and belief systems. Each subculture is as distinct from any other as any two cultures could be. The one unifying force for many if not all Iranians is their attraction, love, and connection to Sufism, including its philosophy, poetry,

art, music, and symbolism. One only has to visit an Iranian home of any faith to find the *Divan* of Hafez or Rumi's *Masnawi* placed beside their Holy book.

Many Iranians also are steeped in religiosity, fanaticism, dogma, and superstition in addition to esoteric and folk healing practices. It is not uncommon for Iranians to consult a healer to mend a broken bone, heal pain, perform animal sacrifices for blessings, remove or place curses, and keep away the evil eye. My paternal grandmother, although illiterate, was very much involved in such practices alongside her devout practice in Judaism.

Iranian Americans

Despite Iranians' rich cultural history, similar to other immigrants, Iranian Americans over the past 30 years have been preoccupied with assimilating into American culture and achieving the "American dream," typically through higher education, social status, and material wealth. Thus, Iranians are well represented in high paying professions such as medicine, law, dentistry, business, information technology, and engineering.

Although assimilation generates some amount of quantifiable success, many traditional Iranian belief systems and healing practices have gone underground and even possibly lost. Other practices, such as Sufism, may continue to be practiced in Iranian homes, but often are altered to fit Western spiritual norms. For example, traditional Sufism incorporated meditation, contemplation, reflection, *zikr* (chanting), prayer rituals, *sama'* (trance inducing dance), and folk and

herbal healing practices and remedies. In contrast, contemporary Sufism is an intellectual pursuit studied in personal growth classes and lectures on Rumi, Hafez, and other Sufi masters by eminent Iranian Sufi scholars and teachers.

The abandonment of traditional practices may be most evident in healthcare. Many Iranians today would not readily acknowledge the existence or even the importance of traditional practices, favoring instead Western models of health and healing. Iranian Americans may even express deeply rooted skepticism and negativity over the efficacy of the traditional practices.

My Own Background in Eastern Shamanism

My own initiation into Sufism came at age six on a school outing to a local museum in Tehran. Upon our entrance into a local museum, I was immediately drawn to a dimly lit room in the corner of the vast building. Leaving behind my class, I set off alone toward that room. As soon as I entered, I was overtaken by a profound state of awe. The room was dedicated to artifacts, clothes, and paraphernalia of ancient Dervishes (spiritual wayfarers) of Iran. Presumed lost by my teachers, I remained in that room for what seemed like hours, taking in as much as I could until I was found.

After school, I rushed home and began asking my father as many questions as I could about the Sufis and the Dervishes of Iran. Under my father's tutelage, I began learning about Sufism and the alchemical journey of the soul

toward Love. He explained that it is the Dervish who leaves behind the world of the profane in search of the sacred and who must learn lessons about transcending the ego, all the while understanding and embracing the immanent and the transcendent nature of all things. The journey of the soul is experienced as the Lover in search of the Beloved through invoking the presence of Saghi (the wine bearer) who, through meditation, contemplation, *ziker*, and *sama'*, will unite the Lover and Beloved as one. This union creates a drunken state of ecstasy in the Dervish, which allows for his or her soul to transcend dis-ease of the mind, body, and spirit. This union further creates a state of perpetual and all encompassing Love within the Dervish that emanates out into the world toward all living beings.

I was awed by this new spiritual learning and sought to know more. Moreover, increasing levels of danger in my childhood world only pushed me further toward gaining spiritual insights, culminating in an opening and engaging with the spirit world.

My first encounter with the unseen world came at age eight at the onset of the Iranian revolution. Social unrest had become ubiquitous and angry mobs were forming everywhere. One particular day, they were roaming and looting the street right outside our second story apartment. Terror struck my parents. They feared that as Jews, we would become scapegoats and targets for revenge killings. As the mob grew in numbers, my parents ordered us all to turn off the lights and hide under our beds.

However, I did not follow those instructions. Instead, I felt drawn to a window that oversaw the mob forming below. Standing there in that dimly lit room watching the crowd heralded the same feelings of profound awe that I felt that day in the museum. There and then, a clear, deep, and penetrating knowing arose in me echoing these words: "You and your family will go unharmed. But you must witness this for yourself." From that day on, I developed my second passion in life: To understand the nature of conflict, war, and destruction.

These various experiences instilled in me a deep calling to practice shamanism as it was taught and passed down through my culture and upbringing. However, immigration to the United States set me on a different course. Like many other Iranian American young adults, I soon ignored my traditional roots (along with my unique calling) and decided to pursue Western professions—in my case, Western psychology.

Over twenty years, I pursued graduate studies in psychology with an emphasis in transpersonal studies and earned a certificate in Therapeutic Massage. I worked on healing my own mind and body and later on, developed my craft as a healer to heal others. I became a drug and alcohol counselor and, eventually, took a faculty member post in the Department of Psychology at Santa Monica College. All the while, I continued my own studies in Sufism under the guidance of teachers in both the physical and ethereal plane. In time, eventually I more formally honored my Sufi roots by blending psychology with shamanism.



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My knowledge and practice of shamanism came easily because I was born into a culture where it was practiced for centuries. My grandmother had healing skills which she passed on to me as did my father who, although he did not practice shamanism, was well-read in Sufism. Over the years I was able to blend the healing work from my grandmother with the knowledge passed down from my father, and then with continued study and practice with teachers, body work, Therapeutic Touch, and psychology, I created a craft which is now a form of contemporary shamanic healing. By 2012 I had been a healer for over twenty years and had actively practiced contemporary shamanic healing practices for six years.

It was then that I encountered my first Iranian client seeking shamanic work.

Joseph: My First Iranian Client

Joseph (not his real name) is an integrative psychiatrist who is open to non-traditional healing practices. He was born and raised in Iran until age four and has lived most of his life in the U.S. Joseph suffered from a deep sense of emptiness, meaninglessness, and disconnection from others, despite having a good marriage, a recent newborn, and a thriving medical practice. He described himself as “just hovering” over his life. When he tried to engage with others, he experienced great anxiety and coped with this by avoiding the situation or by turning to food, smoking, and drinking. He had not found relief through psychotherapy and contacted me expressly for shamanic work.

I described to him the concept and symptoms of soul loss and ways to address it through dream images, guided imagery, and visualization—modalities with which he was comfortable. We examined his experiences of soul loss—beginning with his immigration—and framed his symptoms as outcomes of this and other traumatic life experiences.

Joseph believed his life changed for the better over the year that we worked together: his depression lessened, he became more comfortable with himself, felt more tolerant of his own suffering, became more available to others, and improved his relationship with his wife. Yet, his nagging sense of emptiness persisted. I contacted my spirit guides for direction and intuited that the emptiness represented ancestral work that needed to be done. Within a Western frame, it would be common to pursue this work immediately. However, within a Native cultural mindset, it is critical to request permission from spiritual and ancestral guides before doing such work. I checked in with my spiritual guides but did not broach the topic of ancestral work with Joseph and trusted that I would know when the right time came.

A few months later, Joseph told me that his 95-year-old grandmother, the family matriarch, had succumbed to severe arthritis pain and become bed-ridden, although she had been active, strong, exuberant, well-loved, and well-respected just a few months earlier. She also was requesting physician-assisted suicide. Medical testing revealed no advancement of her arthritis; yet, her pain was intractable and unresponsive to medication. He asked me to do shamanic healing with her, and I recognized this as permission to begin ancestral work with him.

Shamanic Healing within an Iranian Jewish Family

Shamanism traditionally takes place in a communal setting, consistent with traditional Iranian cultural norms. Working with Joseph’s grandmother required working with the entire family system and gaining their permission to do ancestral work. Moreover, collectivist norms dictated that I needed to make contact with the family through a referral—in this case, Joseph. Joseph briefed the family and gained their agreement that: (a) I was a doctor for the soul and would not use conventional medical procedures; (b) I would use oils and do some gentle

laying of hands on Grandmother; and (c) if at some point, Grandmother wished to move on with her life and requested my help, I would help guide her transition. Once they agreed, I was ready to begin my first session with Grandmother.

I met Grandmother at the first session in her home. Although neither Joseph nor Grandmother’s five children were present, her nurse was present to oversee the session. Once I introduced myself, Grandmother described her excruciating pain. I took her hand, closed my eyes, and invoked my own and her spirit guides to be present and guide the healing ceremony. I was instructed to have her lay down on the bed and told her that I would be using some oils to massage her hands and feet.

A great deal of information came through Grandmother. As soon as I laid my hands on her, the spirit of a young woman rushed toward me, crying hysterically, begging me to help her mother. I realized this was the spirit of Grandmother’s daughter who had passed, yet was spiritually present and connected to her mother. She told me that her mother was still thinking about her and had never let her go. I also was informed through this ceremony that the inflammation in Grandmother’s body comprised “many souls buried in her”; that is, she had taken into her body the many souls of loved ones who had died or suffered. By going into a trance which I am readily able to access, I was able to release these souls. As a result her body progressively began to relax. I also noticed her frequent use of Farsi phrases that translate into “I will die for you,” suggesting she energetically imbibes others’ pain and suffering when she says these words. All of this had resulted in substantial inflammation and joint pain.

Joseph contacted me the next afternoon, saying that after our session, “Grandmother was calmer and slept deeply, like a baby.” He also confirmed that she had a daughter, Farrah (not her real name), who died in her late teens due to a “physically degenerative disease,” although he had not known of this family member before. Thus, began a grieving process that was fifty years overdue.

Farrah's story began to unfold upon my second visit to Grandmother. As soon as I entered her room, she was beside herself and asked how I knew about her daughter. In Farsi, I said, "When I touched you, I was able to see your pain." Joseph informed me between sessions that Farrah had contracted polio as a child and lost the use of her limbs. Despite her physical limitations, she was very happy, loving, and somewhat mobile. Now in our second session, Grandmother shared that when Farrah was sixteen, a young doctor in Iran had approached the family, telling them he could "cure" Farrah of her affliction and that she would be able to walk again.

He performed spinal surgery, leaving Farrah with excruciating pain that no medicine could alleviate. She only screamed day and night. After three months of being bedridden at home, the family returned Farrah to the hospital in hopes that the doctors and nurses could better manage her pain. Grandmother visited every day but had to leave at night to tend to her other five children. Later, they learned that Farrah was moved to the hospital basement each night because her continuous screaming would not allow the other patients to sleep.

Then, one day, seven months after the surgery, Farrah just stopped screaming. Soon after, she died alone on her hospital bed.

Farrah was quickly and quietly buried—along with her family's final memories of her, her suffering, and the circumstances that led to her death. The family members suffered silently—if they grieved at all.

I saw Grandmother three more times. Her pain progressively lessened, and it became clear that her pain was emotional and spiritual rather than physical. Our last session was with Joseph, Grandmother, and all her children. Grandmother sat upright in her chair at the head of the circle we formed. Although frail and hard of hearing, she was totally present, listening, and engaged in everything that was taking place.

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I began by sharing how Grandmother had taken on the pain of her daughter and had wanted to die with the same fate as Farrah. I added that Grandmother was now free of the pain that had haunted her all these years. I also affirmed that Grandmother did not need to die with the same legacy as her daughter. Although the family members' reactions varied from receptiveness to skepticism, each readily shared their memories of Farrah and her impact on him or her.

After this session, Joseph shared that Grandmother entered into a calm state of being. Although she passed in and out of consciousness, her pain subsided and the medications were discontinued. Even though the family still needed time to heal, I realized that my work with Grandmother was complete.

Two months after my last visit, I checked in with Joseph to see how Grandmother was doing. He wrote,

She is now hours to days left of remaining here with us. Her breathing is very slow. She has been in a coma for the last three days and is at home with hospice care. She is very peaceful. I find her to be very much at peace and waiting to go. The day we all met together was the turning point for her heart and a return to a relationship with God. The family is ready for her transition too.

Shortly thereafter, she peacefully made her transition.

Even though I knew Grandmother for a short period of time, I was deeply

affected by our encounter. Her openness and willingness to trust a complete stranger to come into her home and touch her soul was a deeply humbling and loving experience for me. Recognizing that a transcendent force was created between us, the lines between the one healing and the one being healed became blurred. I, too, came away from that experience with greater inner peace.

My work with Grandmother is an example of how shamanism can offer a culturally rich and effective way to help individuals process their emotional and spiritual pain—even when that pain operates beyond the person's consciousness and even when it has been suppressed for decades. By accessing spiritual guides and honoring insights while taking into account and working with Grandmother's Iranian cultural roots, I was able to deliver culturally sensitive care that supported her in the ways she needed to move through life—and death.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Michael Harner Writes His Testament

by Jörgen I. Eriksson

Michael Harner's book *The Way of the Shaman* (1980) opened a new dimension in the lives of many Westerners. The ground was already prepared by Carlos Castaneda's writings about his experiences with his master, don Juan Matus, in Mexico. But, in contrast to Castaneda, Harner wrote a manual – a systematic description of how shamans can work hands-on.

I remember how I almost feverishly turned the pages of *The Way of the Shaman* and felt an intractable desire to start drumming and journeying into the other worlds. The fact that Michael Harner himself came to Sweden and gave a basic workshop in shamanism in the summer of 1983 was like a gift from Dreamtime. The impetus of this workshop was far-reaching; drumming groups were formed and a lot of soul journeying and ecstatic dancing was being performed. *The Way of the Shaman* was translated into Swedish and I had the privilege of writing the preface where I stated: "To those who want to try the way of the shaman, Michael Harner's book is indispensable."

I wouldn't make such a statement on Harner's new book *Cave and Cosmos – Shamanic Encounters with Another Reality* (2013). Rather I would say that it might be indispensable to transcend and go beyond Harner's version of shamanism if you really want to deeply root your shamanic way in Mother Earth.

I am deeply indebted to Michael Harner not only for the workshop in 1983 but above all for two pieces of advice on my own shamanic work; he advised me to go North in order to learn from Saami healers and shamans, and he had the good idea of how I should find a teacher in non-ordinary reality who could teach me the essence of the old Nordic runes. But this cannot stop me from being downright critical of *Cave and Cosmos*. To me it is a boring read, partly due to the long and detailed stories from Westerners (mostly white middle class Americans) about what they have experienced when journeying into the dimension that is called the upper world or "heaven" in core shamanism.

I guess that Harner's point is that reading those accounts will demonstrate that Westerners can have similar experiences as traditional shamans but then it would have been enough with just a few journeying reports. After all, one of Harner's main theses is that we all experience different things and that

the meaning of the experiences only can be fully understood by the individual doing the journey. Another question that follows, and that Harner doesn't address, is if you really can compare what an Inuit shaman-to-be experienced naked and alone in a snow hut after fasting for a couple of weeks to what a Westerner experiences during half an hour lying in a cozy and warm room with sonic driving sounds in the earphones. Are the experiences really of the same dimension? Doesn't the Inuit shaman have a point when he claims that wisdom only comes through suffering and loneliness?

I remember how Harner in 1983 frenetically took notes of what people in the workshop told about their journeys explaining that he was working on a cosmological cartography. After 30 years we have part of this mapping in *Cave and Cosmos* - but it is hardly a coherent map of non-ordinary reality, since all maps of non-ordinary reality are individual and no one can draw a universal one. Some of the book's drawings by Harner's disciples describing the different levels of heavens remind me of the Swedish theologian, and Christian mystic Emanuel Swedenborg and his book *Heaven and Hell* from 1758 (In Latin: *De Caelo et Ejus Mirabilibus et de inferno, ex Auditibus et Visis = Heaven and its Wonders and Hell From Things Heard and Seen*).

Is Harner trying to establish a new religion? He himself rejects such an idea. According to him, core shamanism is no religion since it is based on what each individual can experience. You don't believe what other people tell you – not even Harner – instead you find out for yourself by directly experiencing how things are. That sounds good and is also a traditional shamanic standpoint, but core shamanism has been developed into its own brand of shamanism. This is quite obvious if you compare *Cave and Cosmos* to *The Way of the Shaman*, which really was a general introduction to some of the methods that traditional shamans use. Core shamanism has now been cleansed from most of the cultural and traditional features that you will find in "old" shamanism and turned into a modern, Western, individually designed kind of shamanism.

According to Harner, this "culture free" kind of shamanism is what best suits Westerners. This might be so, especially for those Americans who have lost contact with their own European indigenous traditions and haven't found any creative way to connect to the land of Turtle Island. But there is a danger that this "culture free" kind of shamanism will be decoupled from

the landscape, the world view and the ways of life where shamanism developed.

Even if you don't look at core shamanism as a new religion, it is obvious to me that it certainly has the potential to move in that direction. The core shamanism of *Cave and Cosmos* seems to be totally focused on soul journeying with the help of a drum or other sonic driving devices which only is part of what shamans traditionally devote themselves to. It represents a coherent system, a shamanism that is systemized in a way that is unknown to traditional shamans. One might call what Harner has created a shamanic "body" held together by certain basic theoretical key tenets that bears many similarities to religion. For years, Harner claimed that core shamanism has no "dogma." Sadly, *Cave and Cosmos* negates that statement.

The main topic of Michael Harner's paradigm seems to be the question of spirits – the existence of spirits, the proofs that they exist and the differences between varied types of spirits, those that dwell in this world (the middle world), those that dwell in heaven and those that dwell somewhere between. In *The Way of the Shaman* Harner wrote about energies, power and power animals, now this has changed into detailed descriptions and classifications of spirits. The shaman is seen mainly as a mediator between the humans who need help and the "compassionate spirits" who always know what everybody needs.

Which spirits do Harner's disciples meet in heaven? It can be Benjamin Franklin, or Albert Einstein, or Jesus, or Buddha. The spirits are clever and adopt guises that are adjusted to the journeyer. These compassionate spirits, according to Harner, all have experiences from life on earth, either as humans or animals; they know everybody's need and they only wish to do good – in contrast to some of the spirits in the middle world that have not been able to make it into heaven. Those spirits may cause chaos, sickness and all kinds of problems. For me, this talk about good and evil spirits is distressingly familiar and gives me

bad vibrations. Has Michael Harner turned into a prophet? He stresses that his heavenly journeyers have the same experiences as the founders of the great religions and he interprets his disciples' reports as proof that the heavens do exist. I accept that this is Harner's experience, but my own thirty years of shamanic work tell me quite other stories about the cosmos and Mother Earth.

Harner writes that the power of the universe is so strong that shamans have to work with mediators such as power animals and spirits. My experience and understanding is that the cosmos chooses to let its power take familiar forms when it meets our consciousness, just to make it possible for us to handle this power. Carlos Castaneda wanted to take a further step, namely to experience energy directly instead of via its mediated forms. In his book *The Wheel of Time* he lets don Juan Matus explain how he has used shamanic rigmarole about allies, power plants, Mescalito, the little smoke, the wind, the spirits of rivers, mountains and chaparral as a way to lure Castaneda's attention, as a way to trick him into the way of the spiritual warrior. Harner chooses the opposite way; instead of transcending form and experiencing energy directly he elaborates a highly systematic way on how to deal with the forms of power. This is not what I call spiritual freedom.

To me, shamanism has always had a political dimension, a Mother Earth dimension, and shamans sometimes have to take a stand in very practical and concrete ways, e.g., trying to stop

the building of a pipeline or the mining for uranium or supporting indigenous peoples in their struggles to preserve their culture and land base. But the core shamanism of *Cave and Cosmos* seems to be more concerned with – and to prefer – Heaven than with Earth.

To Michael Harner core shamanism is sufficient unto itself. To me core shamanic methods can be used to reconnect to the shamanic traditions of your own landscape, but then you also have to transcend core shamanism. Shamanism cannot be "culture free," at least not if you really want to put your shamanic feet deep down into the earth, making yourself accessible to the kiss of knowledge that is given not in heaven but by the spirits of the Earth, the landscape, from real existing animals and plants, from Mother Earth herself and through ceremony and prayer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jörgen I. Eriksson has been working with the runes and shamanism since 1983 and was a co-founder of the Swedish shamanic network, Yggdrasil. He has written books in Swedish on Saami and Navajo spiritual traditions. Today he lives north of Stockholm and is a devoted horticulturist and teacher of shamanism. His book on the runes *Rune Magic and Shamanism: Original Nordic Knowledge from Mother Earth* is available through his website www.norrshaman.net



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Reflections on Michael Harner's *Cave and Cosmos*

by Tom Cowan, SSP Board Member

Reading Michael Harner's new book, *Cave and Cosmos: Shamanic Encounters with Another Reality*, is like listening to a very old man (which is how he describes himself several times in the book) who has spent many years practicing and studying shamanism and listening to others' shamanic experiences. You feel like you are sitting with a wise storyteller who has a wealth of wisdom tales to share with you. If you were trained by Harner, you will have heard some of these stories before, and hearing them again reminds you how they once energized your longing to know the mysteries of shamanism however many years ago. But the book is rich with new stories, some personal accounts from his own life, and many insights passed on to him by indigenous shamans and other anthropologists, as well as his own students who have shared their journeys and healing experiences with Harner over the last thirty-plus years. In fact, one of the values of this book is that Harner thoroughly honors the shamanic knowledge that his students have acquired in their own shamanic journeys, and demonstrates, as his own mission in life has demonstrated, that Westerners are fully capable of discovering the other realities that traditional shamans have known about for centuries.

I enjoyed the chapters in which Harner recounts his early experiences in South America and elsewhere as he learned firsthand about the various doorways into shamanism and how he discovered and created core-shamanism out of his experiences and years of study. People trained either by him or teachers in his Foundation for Shamanic Studies will appreciate the account of how he was first awed by the power of the drum at a Zuni Pueblo in 1948, and then through the 1950s, 1960s, and into the 1970s "rediscovered" (as he says) what shamans the world over have long known: that the repetitive sonic driving of a steady drumbeat can bring the shaman into the altered state of consciousness that Harner eventually called the "shamanic state of consciousness." This book reveals the truth of what the

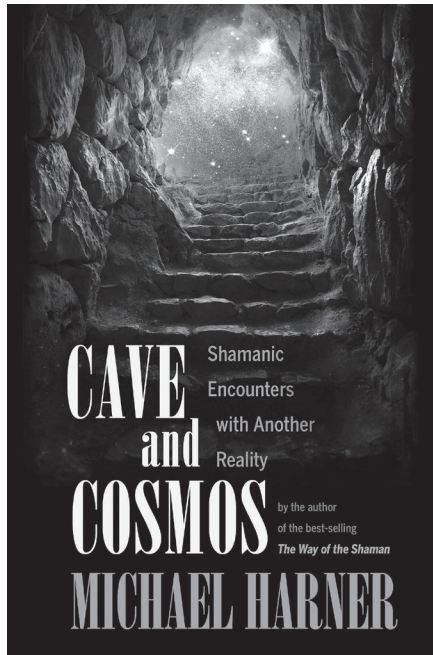
Sami people of northern Scandinavia say about the drum, and what Harner has encouraged thousands of people to discover for themselves: It is "a thing out of which pictures come."

Cave and Cosmos demonstrates with many examples of shamanic journeys from Harner's students that spirits really do exist and they want us to know that they exist. He reminds us how scientists have never disproved the existence of spirits and that Alfred Russel Wallace (who developed the theory of natural selection simultaneously with Darwin) actually noted that if the most scientific theory is the one that explains a whole series of phenomena, then, as Wallace stated, "the spirit-hypothesis is the most scientific, since even those who oppose it most strenuously often admit that it does explain all the facts, which cannot be said for any other hypothesis."

Shamanic practitioners will readily concur. The section in the book on the "bound shaman" is an example of how an almost impossible phenomenon can occur through the mediation of spirits. In ordinary reality the shaman is bound with tightly tied ropes and then set free by the intervention of spirits. Harner reminds those of us who

have personally experienced this how there really seems to be no other explanation for it. When the knotted ropes and twisted bindings fall from our bodies and we are freed, it's spirits—and nothing else—that have done it.

Cave and Cosmos focuses mainly on upper-world journeys reported by Harner's students, which will be very familiar to seasoned practitioners. His treatment of lower-world journeys is thinner as he seems to want to focus on the realm most commonly thought of as "heaven." One of Harner's major goals in the book is to show that shamanism is an alternative to organized religion and that shamanic journeying allows each practitioner to discover "a heaven that is perfect for him or her." Nevertheless he points out that some Westerners "encounter(ed) quite heavenly realms below" in the lower world.



Practitioners who work in the middle world may find his descriptions of middle-world spirits a bit confusing. Harner's perspective is that middle-world spirits are amoral and seldom compassionate and can be manipulated by unethical shamans to do harm which he sees as sorcery. There is a kind of risky dualism in this: that the compassionate spirits reside primarily in the upper and lower worlds and non-compassionate spirits dwell only in the middle-world. Readers who do work with middle world spirits (such as faeries, vegetation spirits, elementals, weather spirits, and spirits of places) and find them to be capable of compassion toward humans might disagree.

Harner's objective is to allow the numerous journey accounts to reassure newcomers to shamanism that their own journeys are in line with a long-standing tradition of visionary experiences in the spirit world. They will see that their own journeys parallel the same landscapes, spirits, and adventures that indigenous shamans have been having in the other worlds for thousands of years. These journey accounts by Westerners are interspersed with Harner's comments and teachings that point out how in remarkable and sometimes miraculous ways people in contemporary Western societies are exploring the same realms that have existed since time immemorial.

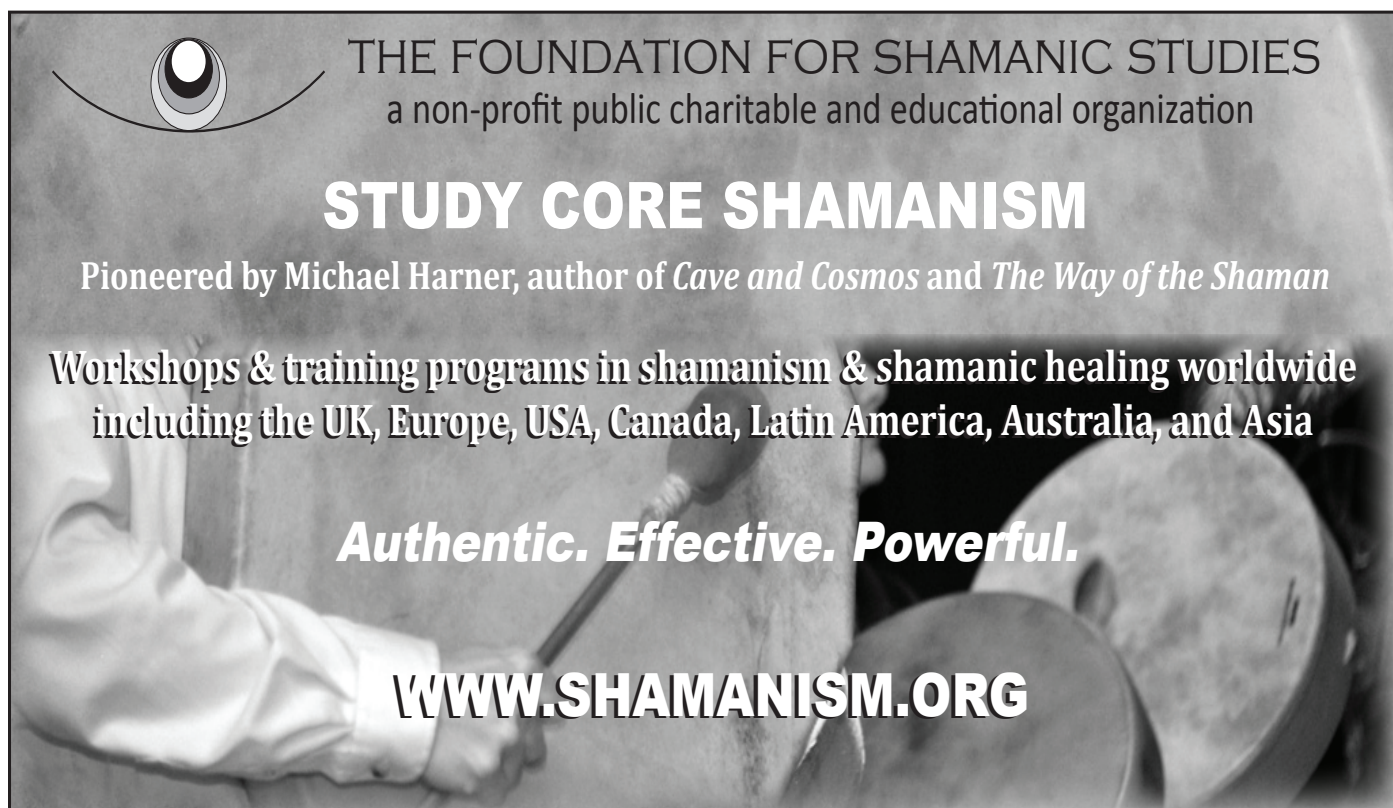
Some of these reports include experiences that, as Harner says, cause us to "(remember) our union with the infinite, the ineffable, the total universe," giving us knowledge that is "beyond the confines of language." Like shamans of old, we are not "bound" by what he calls "a fractious and perilous world willing to quarrel interminably about spiritual matters on the


basis of belief in old stories" left by the founders of the major religious traditions. The shaman's way is to acquire spiritual truths first-hand, discover his or her own stories, and become what many cultures call "the one who knows." Harner reassures us that we need not even accept *his own stories* if they interfere with finding our own.

For Harner "the shaman's drum is the ballot box of spiritual freedom." He suggests that the unbound shaman is a lesson about how the spirits can set us free. If "spirits can miraculously unbind the shaman, so can they liberate humanity from its limiting bindings of belief and disbelief." The heavenly, upper world realms that are described in the many journey accounts in this book show that each of us can approach the divine through shamanism in our own authentic way. And if by chance we don't see God, perhaps we will be like the Canadian Athapaskan people whom Harner quotes: Those who drum themselves up to heaven "don't see God. They just see people who are working for God." And that's a good place to start. Or end up.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

TOM COWAN has been a shamanic practitioner for 30 years. He has studied with and taught for the Foundation for Shamanic Studies and is on the board of directors of the Society for Shamanic Practitioners. He is the author of several books on shamanism and Celtic spirit-ways. He lives in New York's Hudson River Valley.





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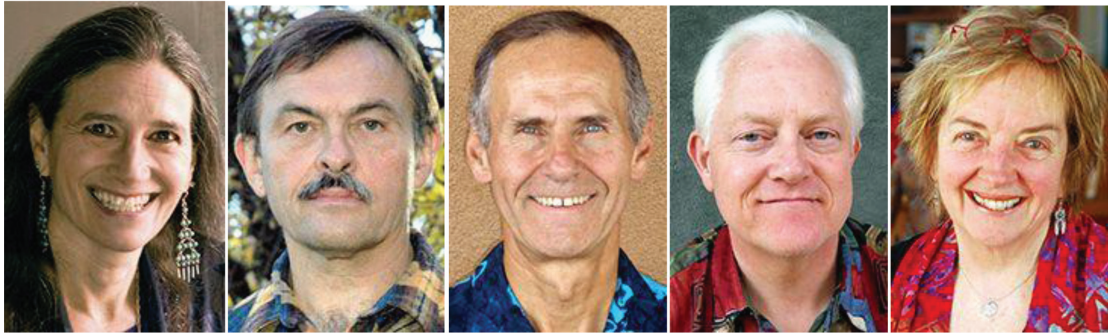
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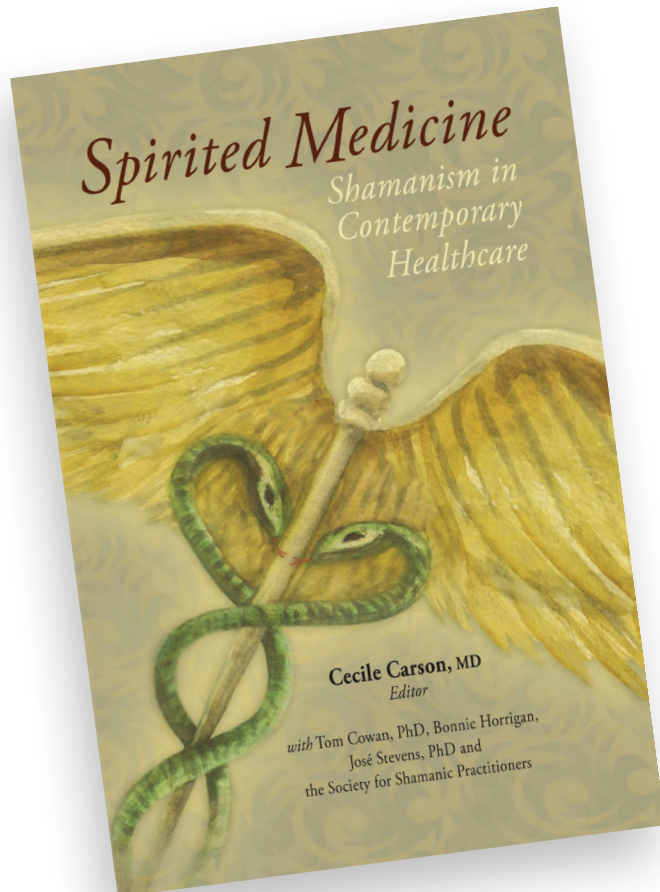
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