

Fate of the Lhapa • Drumming the Soul Awake



The Journal of
**Shamanic
Practice**

Volume 2, Issue 1
March, 2009

Exploring Traditional and Contemporary Shamanism

Heart Medicine & Painted Songs
An Andean San Pedro Healer
The Surgery of John of God
Shamanic Spirituality



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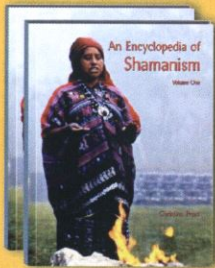
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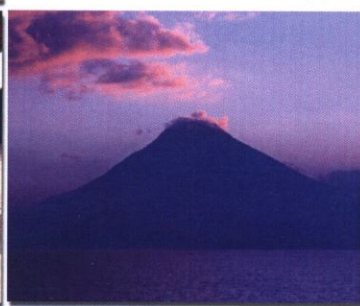
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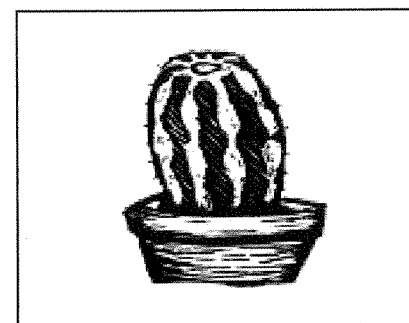
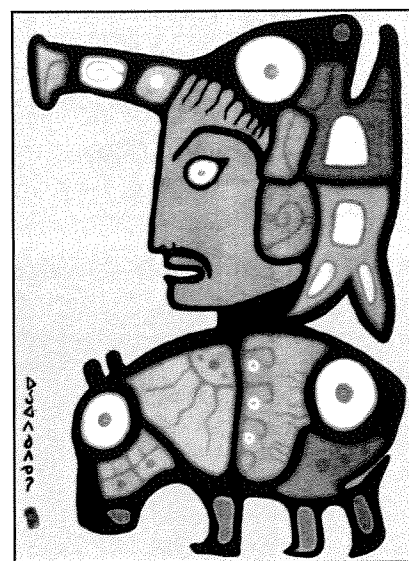
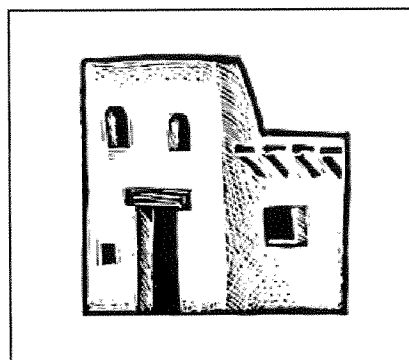
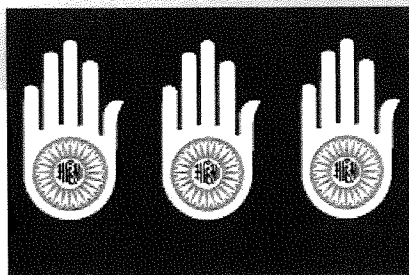
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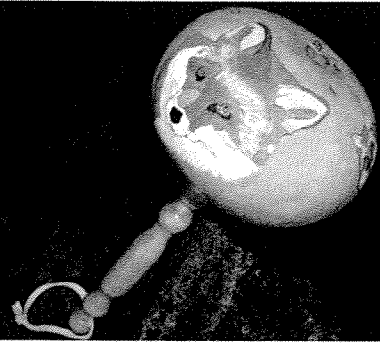
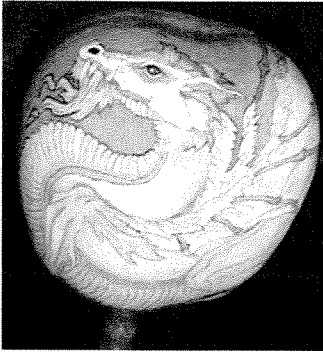
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COVER: This month's cover, "Wren," is a painting by Mia Bosna. Many of her paintings express images seen in shamanic journeys. Other work by Mia may be seen at www.GuidingSpiritDesign.com.

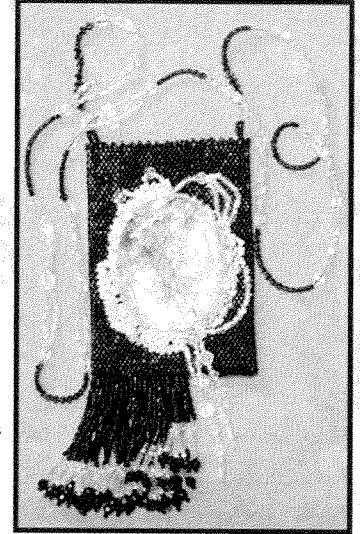


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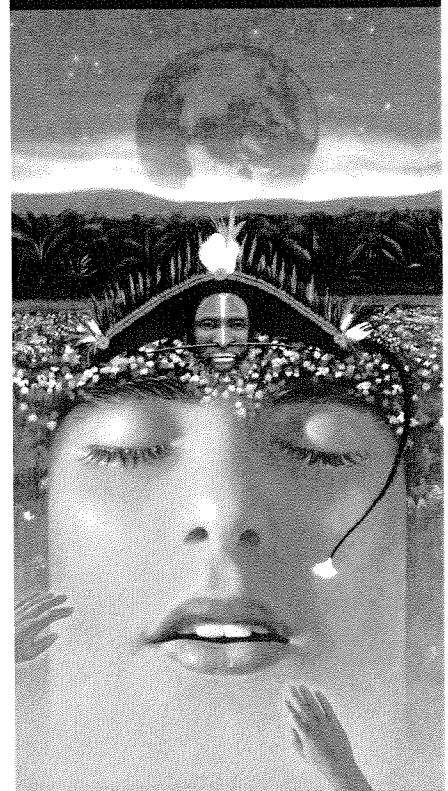
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A STUDY OF THE MEDIUMISTIC SURGERY OF JOHN OF GOD

Having experienced great personal benefit from working with a "psychic surgeon" on several occasions, I was pleased to receive and review the article about this influential practice with a focus on the popular John of God in Brazil. While mediumistic surgeons are not always shamans strictly speaking, they often work within shamanic cultures and because of their huge popularity and influence in the world today, I believe we should consider them under the broad umbrella of shamanic practice. Although millions of people visit John of God, a well-documented mediumistic surgeon, the scientific community has largely ignored or debased the practice.

Hoping to correct this prejudicial stance and bring attention to this important phenomenon, the authors reviewed the literature, carefully collected their own data and prepared a standard research paper that one might find in a medical journal. Instead of asking them to simply give us their "findings" or "conclusions" in essay form, we felt that the entirety of what they have written is an important contribution to the literature and should remain in its current format. So, we invite you to read their article — A Study of the Mediumistic Surgery of John of God, page 21 — and feel that you will not be disappointed. — Jose Steven, PhD

CORRECTION

Kyoim Yun's paper "Aspiring to Prestige: On Becoming a Great Shaman in South Korea" published in the September 2008 issue of the Journal of Shamanic Practice was partially supported by the New Faculty General Research Fund provided by the University of Kansas Research and Graduates Studies Office.

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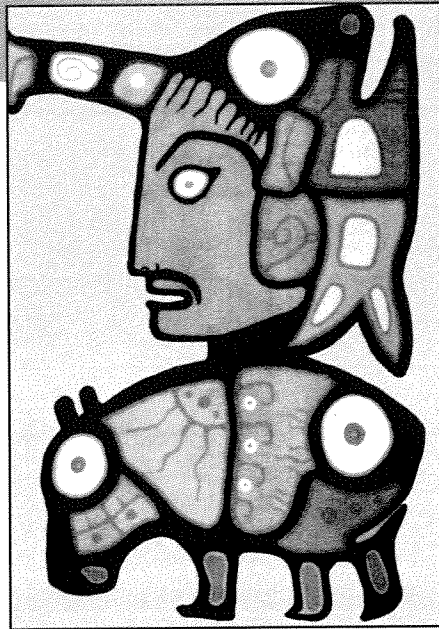
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HEART MEMORY AND PAINTED SONGS IN THE HOUSE OF INVENTION



"The Sacred Bear Shaman" by Ojibwa artist Noval Morrisseau. (above) was a poster for a show (Feb 25- June 1, 2008) in the anthropology museum at Colgate in Hamilton New York.

Barbara Tedlock, PhD

Dream incubation—including omen reading, drawing without lifting the pencil from the page, vision questing, conscious dreaming, and the ingestion of sacred plant medicines—is practiced worldwide. These dreams and visions provide experiential signals and icons, manifesting spiritual power. Shaman-artists among the Wixárika (Huichol) of Mexico, the Shipibo, Yu'pa, and Q'ero of

South America, and the Anashinaabe (Ojibwe) of North America, are well known for creating multisensory spiritual art works.

Shamanic Vision and Audition

In the mountains of northwest Mexico the Huichol, or Wixárika as they call themselves, make miniature woven textiles and tiny embroidered clothing as well as bead designs pressed into fragrant layers of pine resin and honey spread on gourd-shell bowls. In 1965, a *mara'akame* (shaman) by the name of Ramón Medina began creating large narrative yarn paintings based on ancient myths and peyote visions to sell to visitors in Guadalajara. He called these paintings featuring deer, birds, deities, and peyote buttons floating on intensely colored backgrounds—ranging from cobalt blue to fuzzy peach, lime-green to deep purple—*niarakate*, mirrors or doors, reflecting back on and opening out into realms of divine creation and transformation. While a number of men took up yarn painting, women were less interested since they already had their own visionary arts—weaving and embroidery—in which they recorded their peyote visions, dreams, and interior consciousness known as *iyari*, "heart-memory."

A baby receives heart-memory at birth, which grows as the child matures. Children, who wish to make yarn paintings, or weave and embroider textiles, ask the gods to help them to develop their heart-memory. They leave offerings—a miniature loom, a tiny circular

Shamans commonly experience remarkable multisensory stimulation by means of fasting, imbibing plant medicines, drumming, rattling, whistling, singing, or dancing. They see rainbow-colored wavy and jagged lines resolve into bead-work or embroidery designs; access the divine powers that animate life by swimming in visionary underground lakes filled with multicolored fish emitting bolts of spiritual lighting; or walk and talk with bears and jaguars learning the arts of healing. Not only do they experience vibrant colors and beautiful songs, but they hear and taste colors, and see and touch songs.

Dreaming, trancing, and journeying create a spiritual refuge between ourselves and the multilayered world surrounding us. The reality of this sanctuary—located between the tangible and the intangible, the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible—has long been recognized and described by shamans and other mystics. In shamanic traditions children's dreaming is encouraged in dialogue with elders. As they learn to enact their dreams and visions, they move beyond being into becoming and understand dreaming as a process of transformation within the landscape of their souls. When they enter this magical inner world they find themselves able to shapeshift into a bird—perhaps a pelican or a gull—and fly rapidly into the sky, or else flip into a dolphin and plunge deeply into the ocean, then suddenly turn and shoot upwards, breaching joyfully into the open air.

yarn painting, a thread cross, or a small decorated gourd bowl—at the altars of the deities. Of all these the decorated gourd bowls, called *xukúri*, are considered the most effective way of communicating since they are visual metaphors of the life-giving womb which is consecrated to the goddesses in charge of rain, plants, and fertility.

Stacy Schaefer, a North American ethnographer, explained in her book, *To think with a good heart: Wixárika women, weavers, and shamans* (2002), that during her five-year shamanic-weaving apprenticeship she was taught how to manifest her dreams, peyote visions, and heart-memory designs in her weavings. Her teacher, Nicolasa Aguilar, a woman *mará'akame* (shaman) from the community of San Andrés, instructed her to do this since the designs she was receiving were pictographic communications from the deities, and thus a means of spiritual growth and a mirror of her transformation. She made miniature textiles as offerings for each deity she petitioned for luck, and reports that as she developed in dialogue with them her personal thoughts, dreams, and designs blended into spirit-filled artistic expressions.

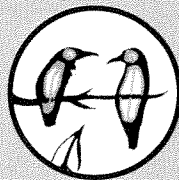
In the final year of her apprenticeship Stacy visited Wirikúta, the sacred land of peyote in the high desert of San Luis Potosí, with her adoptive family. This place, filled with sacred beings, becomes embedded in the heart-memory of pilgrims who say they go there “to find our life.” During her pilgrimage she visited shrines and left woven offerings together with beaded gourd bowls, coins, chocolate, and cookies. When she and her family reached their destination, the leading shaman sang as the pilgrims made five ceremonial circuits around the fire. At dawn they painted one another’s faces and ate peyote.

The remarkable ability of peyote to simultaneously generate color visions and auditory sensations is well known and many people have reported experiencing multicolored geometric shapes, vibrating patterns, and the haunting sounds of wind followed by spontaneous singing. Since this pilgrimage marked the termination of her five-year apprenticeship, when Stacy saw her multicolored peyote-induced images resolving into goddesses, she felt a deep emotional connection to each one of them and ex-

perienced an overwhelming sensation of wellbeing and joy.

Shamans in this tradition perceive brilliant colors transforming into songs reverberating at sacred sites. As Eligio Carrillos Vicente put it: “Colors are words, and they are magical songs that understand each other.” Peyote pilgrims also report experiencing music kinesi-
thetically within their bodies; their throats tingle, then they feel an almost involuntary urge to play their violins and

*In the West it is called
“synesthesia,”
meaning “feeling
together,” or “joined
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associated response
in another.*



dance. And as they do so they see music emerging out of the air by itself and then watch it settle down closely all around them, like a cloud lowed onto the earth. The linkage between music and visual designs is also found among the Yu’pa of Venezuela who draw upon their nightly dreams as a spiritual reservoir. In order to memorize dreamt visions they sit up in their hammocks, immediately after experiencing a dream, and sing the vision out aloud, transforming it into a sequence of vocal sounds. The resulting song remains engraved in consciousness and facilitates recalling the dream in the morning.

Synesthesia

This method of perceiving sensations as emerging out of or projected onto the environment, and the remembering of such experiences by using a different sensual modality to record them, characterizes shamanic societies worldwide. In the West it is called “synesthesia,” meaning “feeling together,” or “joined sensation,” and it describes the mixing of two or more senses so that the stimulation of one encourages an associated response in another. Synesthesia is an experience rather than an idea or thought. If you’ve ever noticed that your senses sometimes seem to mingle: a particular cheese tastes jagged or sharp, or some of your favorite songs produce shapes, movements, and colors in your mind’s eye; then you have experienced synesthesia.

Some synesthetes studied by Western scientists are able to sense the color of someone’s voice, while others are able to see music. Both are examples of the crossing of two sensory modalities, known as “two-sensory synesthesia.” There also exists “multiple-sensory synesthesia,” for example, when you hear or see a number, you may experience it as a shape such as a triangle, lozenge, or circle.

The most famous case study of this phenomenon was that of a young man simply known as “S”. In *The Mind of a Mnemonist* (1968), written by the Russian psychologist, Aleksandr Romanovich Luria, we follow thirty years of his research on this single individual whose cross-modal sensory associations were “pentamodal,” or stretched between four senses: sight, sound, taste, and touch. S could solve difficult math problems as well as control his body temperature and heartbeat by means of a combination of visualization, audition, and both colored and tactile gustation. He could regulate pain by visualizing it as a red thread growing larger and larger, eventually blocking everything else out, then he cut the thread over and over, making it smaller and smaller, until it was a single point. At this moment he no longer felt the pain.

He also described his remarkable abilities in memorization: “I recognize a word not only by the images it evokes but by a whole complex of feelings that image arouses. It’s hard to express...it’s not a matter of vision or hearing but

some over-all sense I get. Usually I experience a word's taste and weight, and I don't have to make an effort to remember it—the word seems to remember itself."

Until rather recently, synesthesia has been thought of as "rare" and even "abnormal" by Western scientists. However, it's actually rather common and even central to many aesthetic, spiritual, and healing systems practiced by members of indigenous cultures worldwide.

Visionary Healing Arts

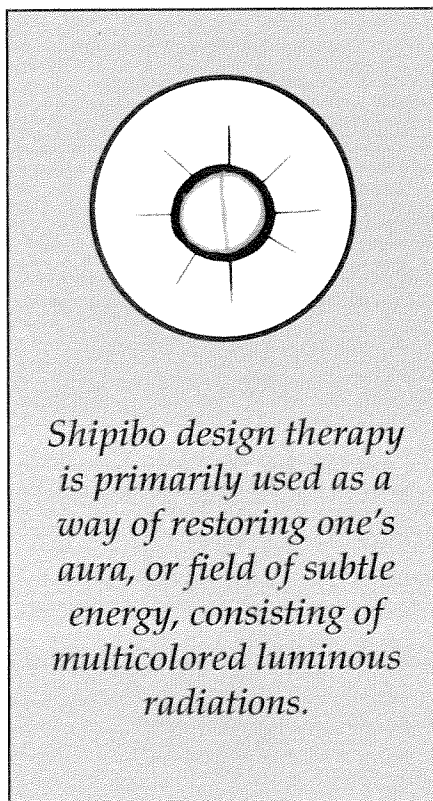
Shipibo people living in eastern Peru, like many other indigenous South Americans, paint their faces on ritual occasions. The intricate geometrical patterns they draw as body, clothing, and ceramic decoration are based on a cosmic anaconda whose skin includes all imaginable earthly and spiritual patterns. This world snake, called Ronin, also embodies vibrating, radiating, rattling sounds, tastes, fragrances and colors. The practice of experiencing multisensory designs begins in early childhood and over a lifetime becomes so reinforced that it saturates and penetrates the body. Then, upon death the individual is easily identified by the overlapping patterns of sound, sight, and fragrance as Shipibo.

Shipibo synesthesia is deeply mystical and shamans during the early stages of their ayahuasca trances perceive sheets of geometrical designs flashing rapidly before their eyes. Slowly, filaments break away bit by bit and drift into their mouths, metamorphosing into luminous healing chants known as *icaros*. Such patterned singing creates multisensory channels that repair emotional damage caused by envy, fear, anger, and rage. During visual-auditory healing, the songs are heard, seen, and sung simultaneously by the shaman and his or her attending spirits.

The German ethnographer Angelika Gebhart-Sayer in her classic essay, "The geometric designs of the Shipibo-Conibo in ritual context" (1985), describes how shamans operate synesthetically combining three sensory levels—visual, auditory, and olfactory—to form a beautiful therapy of deep cultural relevance and sophistication. They listen to a chant by looking at painted designs, and paint these same patterns

by listening to music. In describing this phenomenon, a shaman explained to her that "my song is a result of these design images." Reference to this phenomenon also occurs in the texts of shamanic songs. Thus, a medicine song can be described variously as "my painted song," "my ringing pattern," or "my voice, my little painted vessel." Design medicines may also be described as sweet smelling; for example, "I see brilliant bands of designs, curved and fragrant."

A comment from a particularly ar-



ticulate Shipibo indicates that besides visual, auditory, and olfactory perceptions their synesthesia may also include a fourth sensory level; kinesthesia, or the experience of bodily motion. As a shaman explained, "In my visions, I watch Hummingbird hover above the patient. With each swish of his wings, a part of the design emerges. He also draws with his beak and tongue. If the design refuses to become clear, I know that I cannot heal the patient. I am not told the meaning of the individual design elements, but I know by my overall impression of the designs, what I have to sing. I feel that designs and melodies are

rotating."

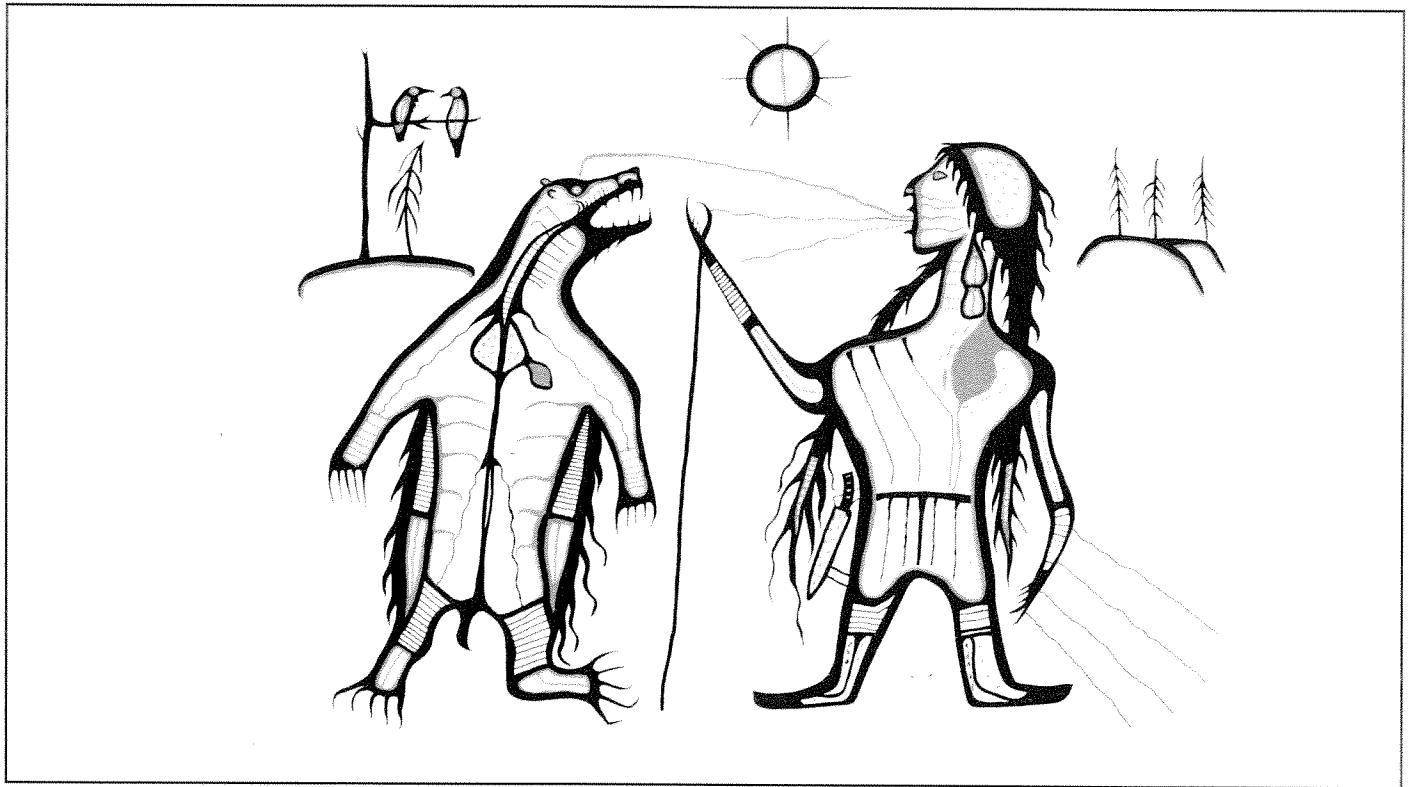
Shipibo design therapy is primarily used as a way of restoring one's aura, or field of subtle energy, consisting of multicolored luminous radiations. Other indigenous South American societies have similar ideas. Alberto Villoldo in his book, *Shaman, Healer, Sage* (2000), describes the luminous energy field perceived by the Peruvian Q'ero as surrounding our physical body the way energy fields of a magnet organize iron filings on a piece of glass. His teacher, Don Antonio Morales, explained that we can all access this luminous energy field since it is part of the unmanifest light of Creation. Each one of us is enveloped in a multicolored translucent orb pulsing with blues, greens, magentas, and yellows which contains an archive of personal and ancestral memories that healers can access in order to maintain and restore our health and wellbeing.

Anashinaabe Shamanic Healing Arts

Among my grandmother's people, the Anashinaabe, or "spontaneous people," living in the Great Lakes region in Canada and the United States, there are many types of shamans: Midé ceremonialists and healers of illness, Jessakid shaking-tent seers, Nanandawi sucking doctors, and Wabeno fire handlers. While each of these groups has a distinctive area of knowledge they all use the power of sensory-crossing, or synesthesia, in their shamanic healing performances.

When my grandmother actively participated in the semiannual meetings of the Midéwiwin, or "mystic drum doings," more commonly called The Grand Medicine Society, they were held in late spring and early fall. During the five-day-long ceremonies the Midé offered public healings and initiated new members into the society. Their ceremonies featured smudging with sweet-grass and tobacco wands; overlapping rhythms played on water drums, rattles, and tambourines; and interlocking melodies played on long wooden flutes and sung as healing dream songs.

A current Anishinaabe spiritual revival, known as the "Three Fires Midéwiwin Lodge," meets four times a year and the members are keepers of herbal and mineral medicines, songs, myths, and birchbark books. Midé blue-and-white



From the book *Windigo & Other Tales of the Ojibways*, written by Herbert Schwarz (1969) and illustrated by Ojibwa artist Noval Morrisseau. The story is "Grandfather Potan and the Bear."

stone medicine, found oozing out of rocks near copper deposits along the shores of Lake Nipigon, is said to have originated from the thunderous meeting of the *manitouk* (spirits) of above known as Pinesiwak, or Thunderbirds, with the *manitouk* of below including Mishebeshu, or Serpents and Wild Cats.

Some of the visual, auditory, tactile, and emotional elements of this shamanic healing tradition were harnessed by the Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau (1931-2007). He was the first-born child in an Ojibwe family living on the San Point Reserve near Thunder Bay in northwestern Ontario. As the eldest of seven boys he was expected to be the link between his grandparents and his own generation and thus was raised by his maternal grandparents. His grandfather Moses (Potan), who was both a Midé shaman and a Jessakid seer, taught him dozens of stories, myths, and other spiritual matters.

When Norval almost died his family took him to a famous woman Midé shaman who healed him and bestowed

on him the name Miskwaabik Animiiki, meaning "Copper Thunderbird." According to tradition a renaming ceremony helps a person near death to rally strength. Copper Thunderbird, with its union of a mineral healing substance, copper, with the mythical Thunderbird connected to the fury of thunderstorms, underscores the remarkable destiny she saw for him as a go-between uniting the opposing powers of healing earth and violent sky.

He left school after the fourth grade to become a gold miner in northern Ontario. This ended with his hospitalization for tuberculosis. In the sanatorium he began drawing and painting his visions and dreams on birchbark and paper bags. There he met his future wife, Harriet Kakegamic, a Cree who was visiting a family member. It was she who showed him how to write his Ojibwe name in Cree syllabics. From that moment on he used a syllabic rendition of "Copper Thunderbird" as his artist's signature. He had no artistic training but believed he was "a born painter" and noted that

when he started to draw or paint, images just came to him in fully saturated colors, vibrating before his eyes.

Despite a strict taboo against recording his culture he began working as a folklorist, ethnographer, documenter of rock art, and book illustrator. In his foreword to a book by Herbert Schwarz, *Windigo and Other Tales of the Ojibways* (1969: 8-10), Norval explained why he was breaking the taboo against drawing, painting, and writing about his culture.

Grandfather Potan and the Bear

One mild spring morning, Grandfather Potan decided to take a walk to the Beardmore garbage dump to pick up some magazines and comics thrown away by the white man. He found his white brothers rather strange and difficult to understand, and in this way he hoped to learn something about them.

As Grandfather was picking through the rubbish, he heard a truck coming, and when he looked up, he saw the Beardmore garbage truck on its way to the dump.

Grandfather was ashamed to be caught taking things from the garbage by the white man, so he slipped into the bushes and hid. Eventually he found a narrow path through the forest which took him home in a round-about way.

He had walked about a mile and a half when he suddenly came face to face with a large brown Bear, who was busily digging at the roots of a tree at the side of the path.

The Ojibway have great respect for the Bear. According to their legends, in the distant past the Bear had a human form, and was an ancestor of all the Ojibway. Therefore he understands the Indian language and will never attack or fight any Indian if he is addressed properly. So Grandfather stopped and politely addressed the Bear in Ojibway: "Oh Grandfather, please let me pass, for I am in a hurry and on my way home."

The Bear made no reply, but continued digging at the roots of the tree.

So once more Grandfather politely asked him to let him pass; still the Bear would not budge.

Grandfather was becoming very perplexed and angry, so he picked up a large stick from the ground and addressed the Bear for the third time: "You Grandfather of us all! Go home and let me pass!"

At this, the Bear reared up on its hind legs and growled menacingly.

Now Grandfather was a proud man, and no Ojibway would tolerate such rudeness, even from an ancestor of his race. Pale with desperation, Grandfather swore at the Bear in English: "You ugly brute of a Bear! Go home and let me pass!"

At this, the Bear dropped to the ground and disappeared into the bushes.

Grandfather walked home deep in thought. "Things must be pretty bad with the Ojibway," he told me later, "that even our ancestor the Bear no longer understands us. Indeed, since the coming of the white man we have fallen very low, forgetting our ancient legends and ancestral beliefs.

"The time has come for us all to write and to record the story of our people; not only for ourselves but also for our white brothers so that they will be able to understand and respect us."

These were the words of my Grandfather Potan. And as the years went by I understood the truth of what he said. So I listened to his many stories and to our legends and ancestral beliefs as they were told to me by the wise men of the

Ojibway. I wrote some of them down on paper, and I drew and painted them as best I could for the Ojibway and for all the children of our white brothers to see.

Norval, as the first Native Canadian to collect and paint the ancient myths and legends of his people, found this path both a burden and a blessing. By his early thirties he had invented an en-

dian Shield.

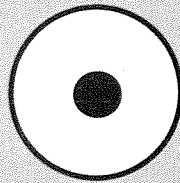
His paintings are filled with lines radiating inner spiritual power to the world outside, heart lines connecting the seat of the soul (heart) with speech. The beings he depicted include animals, humans, plants, and spirits emerging from one another, or connected by lines with one another. He revealed an entire world of healing with the power of nature and spiritual beings. He used wavy lines revealing spiritual power relationships, and x-ray views of figures indicating internal body parts or organs, such as the trachea or heart. One of his favorite shapes was an oval filled with dots; in Midewiwin birchbark scrolls this connotes a sacred area.

As the founder of the Woodland School of Art, Morrisseau's paintings influenced more than seventy-five First Nations artists working in two distinctive regional styles. Each group integrated some of his iconography and pictographic style. The northwestern Ontario artists use thick black form lines to segment and interconnect brightly colored folkloric animals and spiritual creatures, while the artists from Manitoulin Island use blended colors, sophisticated textures, and thin spidery lines to express their dreams and aspirations.

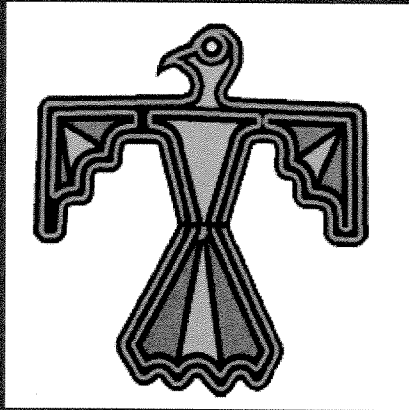
Morrisseau published two remarkable books, *Legends of My People: The Great Ojibway* (1965) and *Travels to the House of Invention* (1997). In *House of Invention* we get some important insight into his art. "Before the settlers and priests came from the Old World in Europe, the Native people all over America used their imaginations freely. There was a vast amount of culture. I believe the people were going to the House of Invention. By being unconditioned they were able to travel easily on the inner highways, right to the source of all knowledge and invention."

He was not only an artist but also a shaman who depicted his most powerful dreams and visions. Whenever he arrived at the House of Invention, he believed that he was visiting the point of origin, or the place where all human creativity lives. As he put it: "The House of Invention gave me the color. All of the colors of the spectrum are there. So this work is soul imprinted or imbued with colors. My art reminds a lot of people of what they are and they heal themselves."

His paintings are filled with lines radiating inner spiritual power to the world outside, heart lines connecting the seat of the soul (heart) with speech. The beings he depicted include animals, humans, plants, and spirits emerging from one another, or connected by lines with one another. He revealed an entire world of healing with the power of nature and spiritual beings.



tirely new style of narrative painting called "Medicine," or "Legend Art," in which he combined his dream images with the pictographs and traditional iconography that he had seen in his grandfather's birchbark scrolls and the rock paintings he studied while canoeing along the rivers of the Great Cana-



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His artist's statement, published in *The Art of Norval Morriseau* by Lister Sinclair and Jack Pollock (1979: 7), nicely sums up his philosophy: "I am a shaman-artist. Traditionally, a shaman's role was to transmit power and the vibrating forces of the spirit through objects known as talismans. In this particular case, a talisman is something that apparently produces effects that are magical and miraculous. My paintings are also icons; that is to say, they are images which help focus on spiritual powers, generated by traditional belief and wisdom. I also regard myself as a kind of spiritual psychologist. I bring together and promote the ultimate harmony of the physical and the spiritual world."

Copper Thunderbird was a remarkably articulate, artistically talented, and powerful shaman who united earth with sky—copper with thunder—creating a strong synesthetic healing unity. We can learn from his and other shamanic healing traditions, how to braid our senses together into a single flexible, yet tough, multicolored strand enabling us to enter the House of Invention. Shamanic inter-sense creativity is one of the most powerful healing medicines available to us all today: one worthy of exploration and emulation.

Barbara Tedlock, PhD, is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the State University of New York at Buffalo and Research Associate of the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her research and writing has been funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Institutes of Health, Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard, American Council of Learned Societies, and the Mellon Foundation, among others. She has published more than 100 essays and articles together with five books: *Teachings From the American Earth: Indian Religion and Philosophy*; *Time and the Highland Maya*; *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*; *The Beautiful and the Dangerous: Encounters with the Zuni*; and *The Woman in the Shaman's Body: Reclaiming the Feminine in Religion and Medicine*.

Email: tedlockb@buffalo.edu

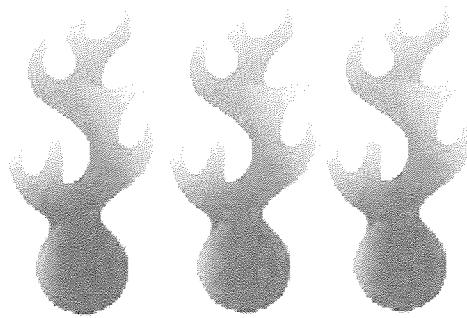
ESSAY

SHAMANISM, NATURE CONSERVATION AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Many people today believe that by practicing an environmental ethic they are following in the path of traditional, or indigenous, shamans. This assumption may be ill conceived since there is a need to distinguish the aspirations expressed in ideology from human practice. In the 1960s and 70s ecological norms within mystical aspects of Buddhism and Taoism were described as more likely to save the world than Judeo-Christian ideology. In practice, however, this has not been the case. To the contrary the rapid destruction of Southeast Asian rainforests along with the voracious appetite for tiger bone, rhino horn, and other natural species for the Chinese medicine market demonstrate human frailty.

We are hypocrites and rarely assume responsibility for the ideas we so easily accept at a theoretical level. Ideology exists in the realm of romance whereas practice exists in the idiom of tragedy. We are flawed and our myths describe a fall from harmony. If we take this as a challenge rather than a curse we realize that our weaknesses may become the foundation for our evolution. The shaman is not immune from the effects of this crack in our being. Several years ago in northern Peru I witnessed the transformation of a man, who I had naively written off as an alcoholic, shrug off his drunkenness and metamorphose into a mysterious being communicating with spirits in order to heal a sick child.

The West carries a heavy karmic burden as a result of the wanton destruction by conquistadors and colonial-



Stuart R Harrop, PhD, LLB

ists of sacred books, groves, and even entire societies. But we should not romantically assume that the grass was always greener in the primordial world of the hunter-gatherers and nomads who gave us the shaman's legacy. The old world was never in exclusive possession of the solution to the environmental puzzle. Traditional peoples have an inconsistent conservation record. Those who lived in small groups in vast swathes of land filled with natural resources consumed without the need to consider the consequences. However much they killed and hacked, they could not make a difference to the vast and rapidly re-growing forests and the diversity of plants and animals. There are also examples of dramatic ecological crises caused by humankind. One is the Pleistocene megafauna extinctions in North Amer-

ica that followed humans as they crossed the land bridge from Asia.

Contemporary practices and descriptions of lost traditions enable us to examine the past as reflected in the mirror of the present. At the time when Amazonian peoples were few and far between, the Machiguenga of Peru enjoyed infinitely renewable foodstuffs. Without any sense of sustainable management they exploited nearby populations of fish and extinguished entire species. Tukanoan peoples living in southeast Colombia, by contrast, skillfully integrated their land drainage techniques with their fishery-conservation strategies so as not to remove flood-plain vegetation which sustained the fish that were a major food source. They also prohibited fishing in certain streams to ensure that there were refuges for fish.

Wherever traditional knowledge encouraged ingenious conservation methods we can be sure that it was thoroughly tested and refined. The earth's laboratory was available to hunter-gatherers over the greater part of human existence during which environmental knowledge was transmitted in cosmologies and myths. Dynamic and responsive to external forces, traditional techniques grew in robustness and resilience. Today, we find fluid systems operating on the edge of inhospitable natural conditions.

Indigenous shamans have long created and embraced traditional knowledge systems that support the biosphere. Their role is visible in the simplest hunting-and-gathering soci-

eties as well as in agricultural societies with complex systems that even our own sophisticated mathematical models cannot emulate. Shamans journey to invisible worlds to heal both people and the land. By communicating with nature spirits they find the missing connection between the inner person and the outer world. They divine the time to plant, irrigate, and reap crops as well as where to hunt and when to refrain from hunting. Spirits communicate with humans by means of shamans who harmonise the microcosm with the macrocosm.

The world from which the shaman arose presents us with environmental lessons for the future. Some are of little use to us today in our heavily-populated and under-resourced world; nevertheless, the vast body of knowledge from thousands of years of human survival has given us a wealth of information about resilience, robustness, and harmony. We would be fools to jettison these hard-learned lessons and depend only on scientific empiricism. Instead, we must consider the fact that scientists have not performed longitudinal studies of the earth's ecosystems, whereas our ancestors engaged in just such a lengthy experiment. Moreover, the multinaturalist shamanic paradigm (see Barbara Tedlock's opening editorial in the first issue of *The Journal of Shamanic Practice*) provides an excellent basis for a twenty-first-century eco-ethic.

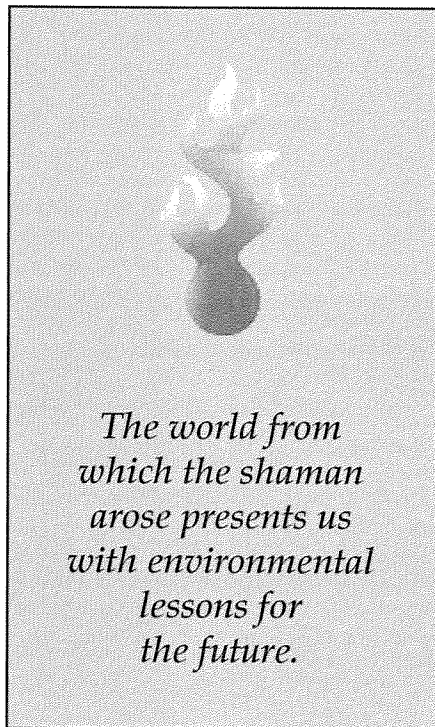


The First Earth Summit

In Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during June of 1992, the United Nations held the First Earth Summit. At the conference over 30,000 people, representing 172 nations produced a number of important instruments of international law and policy. One of these is the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) which included direct support for many aspects of indigenous knowledge. Since most of the nations in attendance ratified the convention and thus obliged themselves to implement its terms (although notably the USA did not), it should have considerable influence. From a legal perspective, although the CBD possesses many frailties, it is a ground-breaking document. For the first time in international conservation law, it was recognised that

biological diversity and entire ecosystems should be preserved, rather than just a limited collection of endangered species.

The CBD defines an ecosystem as a *dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit*. This echoes the multinaturalist paradigm based on the belief in the spir-



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itual unity and corporeal diversity of all living beings. In addition, it acknowledges, for the first time, that the cultural heritage, embodied in traditions long neglected and persecuted by modernity, has a key part to play in the preservation of our planet. Because of the prevalence of shamans within traditional communities, this wealth of cultural tradition necessarily includes shamanic practices. This acknowledgement was put into practice by provisions directly requiring states to support and respect traditional practices that conserve biodiversity. The CBD, however, does not support all traditional practices. For example, the Machichuenga approach to fishing that extinguished entire species of fish in their riverine territories may have worked when humans were scarce but has little to teach us today in our over-

crowded and depleted world.

The key provision in the CBD is Article 8(j) which includes the requirement that member-states *respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application*. In the full text of the article some extra phrases, which watered down the provision, were added as part of the tangled web of negotiating compromise. There are also several ambiguities which require further resolution. For the present purposes, however, we are counting our blessings and rejoicing that at least this imperfect provision is firmly on the international agenda.

Note that traditional practices must be *relevant for the conservation* and also for the *sustainable use of biological diversity*. The contemporary concept of "sustainable use" is an extra qualification which has been imposed on ancient cultures that developed in low-population areas with a vast abundance of biological diversity. For this reason, and also because shamanism has many functions in traditional communities, not all indigenous practices are contenders for support. When shamanism developed, it evolved symbiotically with nature and became embedded in such a way as to secure the survival of the community and contribute to sustainable lifestyles. Thus, if we look deeply enough there may be a common thread that supports the concept of universal shamanism.

It is not clear whether this part of Article 8 seeks to divide practices into those that work and those that do not work. To pick and choose within a complex of community traditions would take the utmost audacity. Wherever shamanism and other indigenous practices that have the effect of conserving the natural world are embodied within the traditional world, they are entangled in a complex web of cultural traditions, norms, and practices that flow with the transmission of custodianship from generation to generation. Choosing to sever what we with our linear, modernist, mercantile minds consider "the good" from "the bad" might prove to be a mistaken strategy at a number of levels. First, there may be a fundamental failure to understand the importance, nature, complex-

ity, and functioning of traditional knowledge. Second, to impose Western priorities may be a condescending intrusion into the right of a people to maintain the entirety of their cultural heritage. Third, choosing only part of a complex of practices may result in freezing some practices and thereby creating ineffectiveness within an interwoven system designed to fluidly respond to the changes of the people who carry and transmit the tradition.



Indigenous and Western Scientific Conservation

Indigenous peoples do not necessarily approach conservation in the same way that ecologists would; in fact, their strategies may be so different as to be invisible to modern eyes. When aboriginal peoples in Australia were encouraged, and even coerced, to leave their nomadic way of life and move to centralised settlements, the desert and scrub wilderness where they lived quickly converted to a far poorer environment. Unknown to those who assumed control of the land, the seemingly arbitrary burning of vegetation carried out by Aboriginals was a sophisticated form of fire management. This system derived from traditional knowledge that used dreams and omens in decision-making. The epistemological gulf, between indigenous and settler populations, was so great that ancient wisdom could not be recognised.

The Cree peoples of subarctic North America were described by early pioneers as indiscriminate killers of wildlife. Ethnographers, however, have demonstrated that these indigenous people still maintain impressive conservation strategies. The James Bay Cree, when they were permitted to operate within their own cultural pattern, managed the hunting of moose and other large mammals in a way that secured stable animal populations. Indeed, wildlife authorities who relied on contemporary scientific methods could not emulate this achievement. The Cree multinaturalist perspective envisions nature and society integrated into a world of persons. For them animals and humans originate from a unified matrix of spirit and share individual selfhood. To prevent over-hunting they work at a shamanic ener-

getic level and use the norms established, maintained, and transmitted within their culture to interpret omens from the natural world. This strategy of achieving a subtle balance within a cosmological perspective is a far cry from the ecologist's analysis of population dynamics, carrying capacity, and logistically regressed statistics.

An even more complex example is illustrated by Balinese water temples. Anthropologist Stephen Lansing in his book, *Priests and Programmers* (1991), describes how water temples were designed to control and manage irrigation in terraced rice fields. The overall system ensures the persistence of ingenious agricultural mechanisms that defy linear understanding and yet solve a set of environmental challenges. The responses to the perturbations faced by this integrated system include spiritual practices that access what Lansing refers to as "a collective unconscious." A relational view of these challenges depends on a correlation between the mastery of the inner self and its reflection in the outer world. Ultimately these local practices far outperformed those of the ecologically dangerous green revolution. In *Perfect Order: Recognising Complexity in Bali* (2006), Lansing further revealed the amazing ingeniousness of the native system. However, he was not able to explain why it worked. Perhaps the missing link is the shamanic relationship with the numinous which is subtly hidden within the complexity of local ecological practices.



Traditional Knowledge and the CBD

Not all traditional knowledge is protected by the United Nation's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); only that which supports conservation. However, protected knowledge can include indigenous shamanic practices embedded in wider traditional structures that may not have an immediate effect on conservation. Tiger shamanism is a dying tradition that is not, at a superficial level, designed to conserve natural resources. Nevertheless, it engenders powerful pro-conservation measures for a charismatic species and its rainforest habitat. In the Far East, where tiger populations retain a fragile hold within a di-

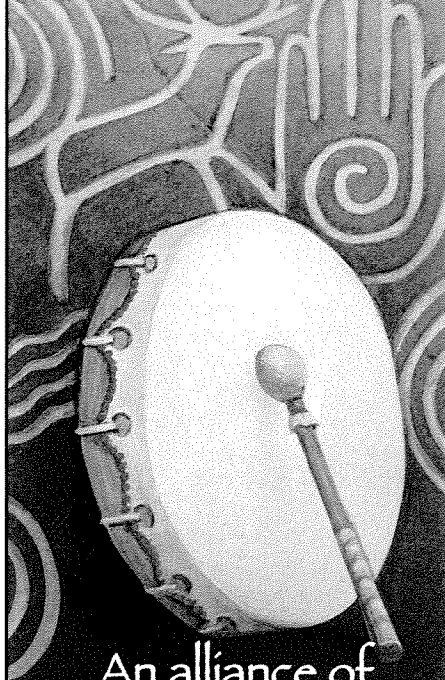
minishing habitat, legends of Tiger Shamans persist. In Vietnam an individual tiger took as prey only women from a particular village until a divination revealed the reason was widespread marital infidelity. Once corrected the problem tiger ceased to take human prey and stopped being a victim of human anger.

In my 2007 fieldwork in Kerinci, Sumatra, I learned that the Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*) is endemic and retains its tenuous stronghold, now numbering no more than 400 individuals. Here Tiger Shamans or Pawang Harimau mediated between humans and tigers. In a number of instances this resulted in the assumption of responsibility for the problem rather than the more typical persecution of the tiger. Although the dominant religion in Kerinci is Islam, a multicultural idiom prevails and many practices have been assimilated into the religion. Consequently there is wide respect for the tiger and this positive attitude may be that species' last chance for survival. In one instance a mosque in the forest regularly received the visits of a tiger and rather than hunting it down people gave the tiger an epithet, "The tiger who wants to convert to Islam." Respect for one species in a habitat may also have wider repercussions. The tiger survives because there are still pockets of rainforest in montane areas on Sumatra, and respect for the tiger through the divinatory intercessions of shamans generates respect for the forest and contributes to the halting of the tiger's decline.

Respect for animals in their natural environment, which is dependent on the persistence of traditional beliefs, requires state and international support because development and modernization beliefs devalue traditional perspectives. As we have seen the international legal provisions are already in place and, in theory, they should assist in halting this growing lack of respect for what is becoming an increasingly alien epistemological perspective.

The CBD supports the maintenance of some traditional knowledge and aspects of shamanic practices, but how does it set about preserving such knowledge and practice? The phrase *respecting, preserving and maintaining knowledge and practices* in Article 8 seeks to secure the

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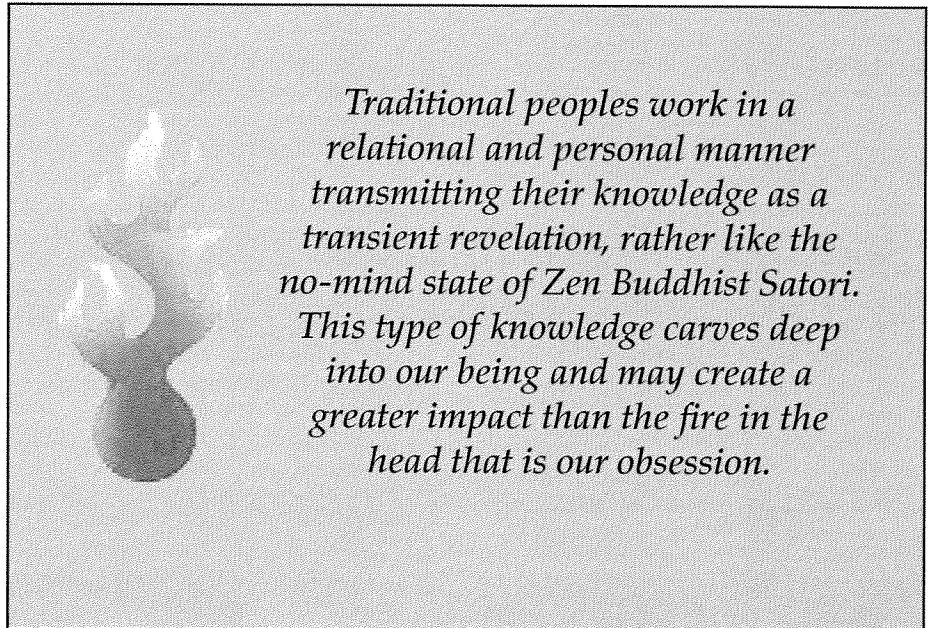
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preservation of more than an archival remnant of practices. Tradition is always dynamic and the reference to "maintenance" suggests a continuation of the development of such knowledge and practices. While the word "respect" may seem to be helpful, it does not lend itself to a clear interpretation from a legal point of view. Perhaps it connotes the perpetuation of traditional culture beyond the dust of museums by requiring that it be taught by knowledge holders

The predominant approach to conservation in the West is scientific empiricism. However, this is not the only accepted paradigm; universities encourage differing methods of research from the arts and humanities through the social sciences to the natural sciences. While these may function in an exclusive manner, we are nonetheless exhorted to cross the boundaries of disciplines in our search for environmental solutions. Despite the breadth of our approach tradi-



Traditional peoples work in a relational and personal manner transmitting their knowledge as a transient revelation, rather like the no-mind state of Zen Buddhist Satori. This type of knowledge carves deep into our being and may create a greater impact than the fire in the head that is our obsession.

as well as by conservation policy makers. Indeed, it is understood by the CBD policy makers to mean that "relevant traditional knowledge should ... be accorded a status in national life comparable to that shown to scientific knowledge" (see <http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/tk/wstbd-01-02-en.pdf>).

This radically different but necessary suggestion brings us to the epistemological gulf between traditional knowledge and contemporary scientific knowledge. The distinction between these perspectives is revealed by the James Bay Cree approach to conservation in which nature is understood as a "social cosmos" while a Western science approach uses an "ecosystem model." Science links animals, vegetation, and inorganic habitats while the Cree link all potentially active spirits and entities in a unified cosmos.

Traditional paradigms are rarely encountered in contemporary curricula except in ethnographies where they are studied as objects and not as subjects. The CBD appears to be urging us to address this issue. The suggestion is not that we jettison our current way of thinking but rather that we assimilate traditional paradigms. The result may surprise us and be greater than the sum of its parts.

Traditional peoples work in a relational and personal manner, transmitting their knowledge as a transient revelation, rather like the no-mind state of Zen Buddhist Satori. This type of knowledge carves deep into our being and may create a greater impact than the fire in the head that is our obsession. The Western approach assumes that everything is ultimately knowable and thus we cannot rely on transient revelation. It is possible, however, that we live in a

triple-tiered world where there is the known, the unknown, and the truly unknowable. To access the truly unknowable we may have to accept the shaman's paradigm.

The Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro points out in his paper, "The transformation of objects into subjects in Amerindian cosmologies" (1998), that there is a single virtually universal Amerindian notion; that of the original state of non-differentiation between humans and animals. He describes this condition as humanistic rather than animalistic. Taking this as a plausible description we may find that shamanism maintains rather than destroys natural resource sustainability in a manner that is not susceptible to rationality.

The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity suggests that many aspects of traditional knowledge, including shamanism, should not only be taught as ethnographic and historical snapshots but also as essential practices. Thus, lurking within international law there is a seed supporting the shaman's worldview in which even the stones and trees may speak to us and guide us to ways in which our planet may be nurtured back to health.

Stuart Harrop, PhD, LLB, is Professor of Wildlife Management Law at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, and also Deputy Head of the Department of Anthropology, at the University of Kent at Canterbury. He is a wildlife photographer and a faculty member at the Sacred Trust where he co-facilitates shamanic workshops and retreats with Simon Buxton. He has served as trustee and director of a number of organizations concerned with conservation and animal welfare including the Global Diversity Foundation, Kent Wildlife Trust, and Gilchrist Educational Trust. Email: S.R.Harrop@kent.ac.uk

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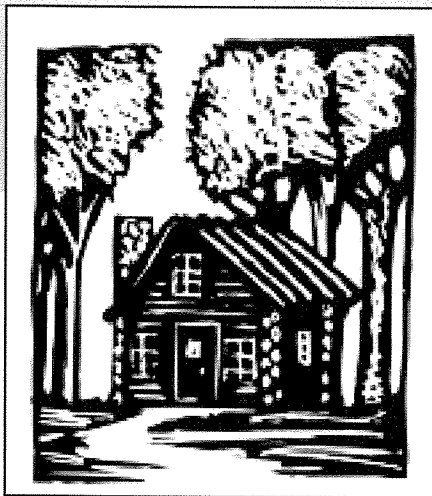
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SHAMANIC SPIRITUALITY IN A PLACE CALLED HOME



Evelyn C. Rysdyk

*Once people begin to
see themselves as a part
of the larger cosmos,
they develop a more
compassionate
orientation toward the
rest of creation.*

Many Western people deeply desire to learn from indigenous shamans; likewise indigenous shamans desire to teach North Americans and Europeans. Fredy "Puma" Quispe Singona, a Peruvian *paqo*,¹ told me that he is drawn to North America because he fears that shamanic wisdom is being lost in his own home country. He tearfully described how the ancient practice of making offerings to Pachamama, or Mother Earth, is being forgotten as farmers no longer go into the fields with reverence, praying, and asking permission to enter Mother Earth's sacred body before breaking into her surface with their plows. He pointed out that they have begun to use chemical fertilizers on their crops, which reduces the fertility of the land, while many North Americans are returning to organic farming. Also, since Western culture is a power center that the rest of the world emulates, he believes that if people in the West begin to live a more connected, spiritually aware, and heart-centered existence, it might change the world for the better.

North Americans have roots that extend all around the globe. We come from Scandinavia, the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Pacific Islands, to name just a few. Yet in spite of our varied origins, we share an important trait—whether our ancestors came here by free choice, because of

famine, to find new lands, at the hands of slavers, as refugees from war, or as outcasts—each of us is either a dislocated person or the descendent of a dislocated person. Perhaps the root of our angst is that we are longing for Home. This Home, however, is not in our na-

tions of origin, but rather in the living Earth and all her creatures.



Shamanic Reality

Shamans can travel beyond the ordinary reality of the five senses into spiritual realms and back again. Hence they are called "Those who walk between the worlds." The experience of traversing the realms beyond ordinary perception alters a shamanic practitioner's sense of reality not only during the shamanic journey but afterwards. Practitioners begin to see, hear, and experience ordinary reality in a different way. Michael Harner observed that even after just a few shamanic journeys people who were not ecologically focused begin to express new views about the interconnectedness of all species. He attributes this to the fact that once people begin to see themselves as a part of the larger cosmos, they develop a more compassionate orientation toward the rest of creation. He suggests that shamanic journeys produce experiences of the self and world that are more in alignment with those of indigenous people and children everywhere. For very young children connectedness is an intrinsic experience of the world; they retain a sense of magic and communicate with invisible friends, perceive that their favorite toys are alive, and have lively conversations with the ants in the

garden until they go to kindergarten. Feelings of being connected with non-human companions can linger well into school age.

There is an intrinsic human desire for magic: the sense of awe and mystery about the world that is deeply embedded in our consciousness. Maybe that is what has driven us to exhaustive explorations of our planet and beyond; we long for wonder and once it loses its appeal, we search out another. I believe this longing is actually an expression of a hunger for the ancient ways of perceiving the world and her creatures: a hunger for what I call Home. That explains the fascination that many hundreds of thousands of people feel about Earth-centered spirituality and for the healing rituals of cultures that retain this awareness. Many people are also deeply involved with environmental causes and movements for social change. Their passions are fueled by the understanding of our interconnection and interdependence on one another and on other species. And the more deeply they explore these interconnections, the more awestruck and humble they become before the magic that creates the fabric of life on Earth. Our ultimate survival as a species hangs on these slender threads which may yet weave us a splendid future.

We are sacred beings born into a sacred world. As, Stephen Jay Gould once said, "We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we do not love." If we want to heal the ecosystem, perhaps we need to become lovingly reacquainted with our larger family in nature and find our sense of Home there.



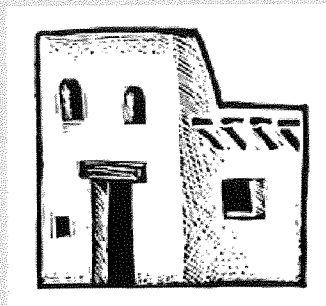
The Role Shamanic Healing Plays

Ervin Staub, in *The Roots of Evil* (1992), argued that trauma often makes people fulfill their needs in a destructive manner.² The traumatized person becomes disconnected from others in an effort to save themselves. If this is the case, then supporting patients to resolve and heal their displacement or disconnection trauma, by giving them a sense of home, would be an excellent way to begin moving North America closer to its role as a

beneficial global leader. The *Textbook of Complementary and Alternative Medicine* (2001) reports that shamanic healing is



We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we do not love



beneficial in treating cases of physical trauma (past or present) as well as emotional or mental trauma.³

Implicit in the shamanic understanding of the world is the belief that

everything is alive, or spirit-filled. Spirit is the framework on which physical existence is created and sustained; when this foundation suffers imbalance, illness may ensue. By treating the patient through the doorway of Spirit, tribal shamans and Western shamanic practitioners alike address the underlying, nonphysical imbalance and mend the places where one is disconnected. Whether a person arrives at a healer's doorstep due to physical, mental or emotional illness, they are suffering from disconnection. They may have perceptual disconnections within the self—in the body, mind and spirit—as well as with the larger social or natural world.

In my own healing practice I see individuals who experience isolation; others may have rewarding human relationships but cannot see themselves as a part of the natural world; yet others do not perceive their connection to the Divine; still others see their spirits as separate from their bodies, or feel that their bodies are somehow less important. All of them have inadvertently become victims of the dislocated, hierarchical, and compartmentalized Western worldview.

Shamanic practitioners and shamans alike work in partnership with their spirits to reclaim patients' health and spiritual balance. Upon completion, some of the essence of that spiritual-healing partnership is transferred to the patient. However, for the healing to have the most power and depth, it is necessary to cement that relationship. In most traditional cultures, patients are expected to perform certain actions that reinforce the healing that occurs on their behalf.

An Ulchi shaman I know refers to this phase as part of the "fastening of the healing."⁴ In other words, through rituals patients experience a transfer of energy and become more fully empowered. This gives them opportunities to reclaim their health and balance and take personal responsibility for their continued wellbeing. In my conversations with allopathic, osteopathic, and naturopathic physicians it became clear that their traditions also recognize more effective results when patients assume a partnership role in their health. This transference of power from the practitioner to the patient is a key component

of continued health and wellbeing that should not be underestimated.



Using Shamanic Spirituality for Reconnection

While shamanic journeying produces a sense of connectedness, it is also possible through focused intention to support individuals in reconnecting with one another and the environment. Intention can be enhanced by taking experiences from journeying and implementing them in ordinary reality. In bridging the two realities one parallels, magnifies, and strengthens the experience and makes it part of everyday awareness.

Interior Journeys

Journeying to experience ourselves on a cellular level can be profound. Our physical bodies are composed of approximately 50 trillion cells with minute biochemical mechanisms that mirror those of our bodily organs. Our cells breathe, eat, excrete, and in concert with each other, perform a myriad of other functions that keep us alive. When we bring our consciousness into our body we can get a tangible sense of the power of cellular interconnection. Journeys to meet individual blood cells, muscle-tissue cells, skin cells, heart cells, and brain cells produce a different view of the community of the Self which is a reflection of the wider Whole.

Another remarkable interior experience awaits those who journey along the DNA to meet the other beings whose codes have been preserved inside their genetic material. Like insects preserved in amber, the life forms who contributed their chapters to the evolutionary story of human beings still exist in our DNA. Journeying to meet them is like looking deep into our family tree.

Practicing Gratitude

The World Health Organization defines environmental health as "human health, including quality of life determined by physical, chemical, biological, social, and psychosocial factors in the environment."⁵ While it was once thought that our biological destiny was written in our DNA, we now know that our lives unfold as a result of the cellular molecules interacting with inner and

outer environments.⁶ The environment impacts the regulatory proteins that control what part of the DNA script is available to be read, which in turn determines what portion of the material is duplicated to write the program for the proteins that make cellular function

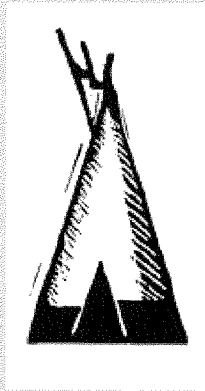
work. Epigenetics, the new science that studies this phenomenon, reveals that this process is not linear but holographic, in that there is a feedback loop by which all elements impact each other. This tells us that we have the ability to change the environment which influences how the Book of Life is written.

Studies by Glen Rein and Rollin McCraty of the Institute of Heart Math have demonstrated that the emotions of love, gratitude, and compassion support the DNA's ability to accomplish its tasks of sustaining life while emotions of fear, anger, and rage distort DNA conformations and hamper its abilities.⁷ They have shown that our feelings affect the DNA not only within our body but also the genetic material that is all around us. Our feeling energies radiate from our bodies as a non-Hertzian field beyond the range of standard electromagnetic measurement. This nonlocal capability means that our feelings exist both in a point of time and space in our body and beyond the limits of time and space outside our body. Shamans describe this region beyond time and space as the realm of Spirit.

Journeying to experience how ordinary reality is transformed by our feelings can be extraordinary. When we become conscious of our feeling states we can begin to take more responsibility for what we are projecting into the inner and outer environments. We can spend more time generating life-affirming energies instead of disruptive ones. As physicist and mathematician Mark Comings suggested, feelings of gratitude provide a direct way to align ourselves with the multidimensional "sea of radiance" which unites All.⁸ In other words, the practice of gratitude provides a way of becoming more seamlessly harmonious with creation while feeling the kind of connectedness we experience during shamanic journeying.

The Square Yard

A thorough study of our planet's many ecosystems can be a lifelong quest due to the remarkable diversity and complexity. Consequently, the thought of learning about Nature can seem rather daunting. We need a simple way to approach the natural world to begin our sacred relationship. One method is by creating a square yard of space. Begin by



This nonlocal capability means that our feelings exist both in a point of time and space, in our body, and beyond the limits of time and space outside our body.

and regeneration possible. Basically, it is how well these proteins are made, depending on the template provided from the body's response to the environment—not our genetics—which determines how well and how long our bodies

choosing a place that borders on different zones—such as a garden and lawn or a meadow around a tree—that won't be disturbed by mowing or pedestrian traffic. Push sticks into the ground in the cardinal directions to form the corners of an area that is roughly a yard square, and then run a string around the sticks to create an area separated from the adjoining property. The resulting square yard becomes an area in which to observe nature, a portal for shamanic journeying, and a sacred space.

Leave the square yard set up for at least a year so there is time enough to get to know the changing seasonal dynamics. Depending on the time of year and place in which the yard is located, one may find signs of many different life forms. If a square yard is located in a tidal estuary it might contain as many as 100 clams, 2000 worms and 30,000 amphipods.⁹ Even a suburban lawn holds a wide variety of life if one refrains from using synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides.¹⁰

After getting some sense of the

creatures that live within or regularly visit your square yard, you can journey to meet with them in the spirit world. Rather than relying on general ideas about a given species, we become acquainted with individuals in that species with whom we can enter into relationship. Each tree, stone, bird, or animal in the square yard has a story to share if we are willing to listen.

Backyard Sanctuary

The World Wildlife Federation has developed the Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program as an incentive for individuals who are searching for ways to improve their local ecosystems. They offer certification for people who become conscious about the choices they make in maintaining their yards.¹¹ To create a healthy, wildlife friendly yard, one needs to provide food, water, cover, and places to raise young.¹²

When my partner and I certified our yard we began cataloging the species that visited or made their homes around us. We bought a large three-ring binder,

filled it with blank sheets of card stock, and browsed through field guides looking for the species we knew lived in our backyard. We photocopied each one and pasted it on its own page. Every season we updated the pages with new inhabitants and got reacquainted with old friends. We kept notes whenever a bird arrived in the spring or a wildflower bloomed, as well as notes about the journeys we have taken to meet with the spirits of these creatures. By now we have cataloged over 60 species of birds, 12 of wild mammals, several amphibians, reptiles, innumerable insects, and many native plants. Our home-and-garden care became a form of Earth stewardship and an important part of our shamanic spirituality.



Conclusions

Shamanic spirituality offers many ways to re-enter into relationship with beings with whom we share our world. We can communicate with the spirits of trees, rivers, and ants in a way that both our

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ancient ancestors did and that we ourselves once did as children. Through the shaman's journey, our perceptions of reality shift, expanding our awareness of the larger world and our place within it. Once the lines of communication and relationship are re-established, we prodigious sons and daughters of the Earth have opportunities to heal our disconnection traumas and regain our place as compassionate stewards of our Home.

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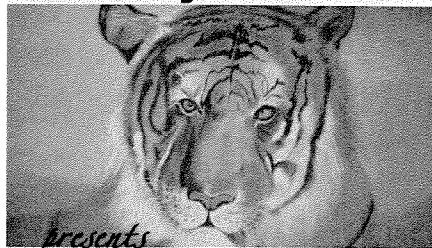
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insatiable curiosity and a notebook, discovers the rich and varied life living in and around her yard.

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12. www.nwf.org/backyard

Evelyn C. Rysdyk is the author of *Modern Shamanic Living: New Explorations of an Ancient Path* (1999) and the executive editor of *Spirit Living*, an eco-spiritual e-magazine. She is an artist, healer, and shamanic teacher in joint practice with C. Allie Knowlton at Spirit Passages a training center for advanced experiential shamanism. As founding members of True North, an integrated medical center in Falmouth, Maine, they also collaborate with physicians, nurses, a psychiatrist, naturopath and other complementary health practitioners. She may be contacted through her website: www.spiritpasages.org.

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RESEARCH

A STUDY OF THE MEDIUMISTIC SURGERY OF JOHN OF GOD

*Alexander Moreira-Almeida, MD, PhD
Tatiana Moreira de Almeida, MD
Angela Maria Gollner, MD, PhD
Stanley Krippner, PhD*



ABSTRACT

“Mediumistic surgery” is a popular form of complementary medicine that faces challenges regarding its authenticity, although it has received little scientific evaluation. We conducted a preliminary investigation into the veracity of mediumistic surgeries performed by John of God in Brazil, as well as the specific procedures involved in his practice. Thirty surgeries were observed and videotaped; tissues were removed and submitted to histocytopathological analysis in 10 of them. Aspects related to antisepsis and analgesia also were investigated. John of God actually made incisions in the skin, as well as scraping the cornea, usually without pain and without the apparent use of anesthetics or antiseptics.

In the three days of follow-up we failed to identify infection in any of the surgical sites. Tissues and cells were compatible with their site of origin and, apart from a 210 gram lipoma, without discernible pathology. Further studies are necessary, especially regarding efficacy, the reported analgesia and the lack of antiseptic.

Non-orthodox treatments are referred to by many names including alternative, complementary, unconventional, and integrative medicine. Regardless of what they are called, these practices are widely used by patients around the world (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Lin, 1998). In 2004, the National Center for Health Statistics reported a survey involving a national sample of 31,044 adults in the United States (US). It showed that 62% of the US population had used some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) during the past 12 months. Examples would be the utilization of traditional Chinese, Tibetan, or Ayurvedic medicine, chiropractic, osteopathy, naturopathy, homeopathy, and various types of bodywork and massage. The use of CAM was more frequent among women, people with higher levels of education, and those who had been hospitalized in the past year (Barnes et al., 2004). In Brazil, an investigation found that 89% of cancer patients had used some form of CAM (Samano et al., 2004). Despite the widespread use of CAM, health professionals are usually unfamiliar with these techniques (Lin, 1998) and patients frequently do not tell their physicians about their use of CAM (Eisenberg et al., 1993, 1998; Samano et al., 2004).

This widespread reliance on untested therapies raises serious concerns about the impact of these practices on public health, especially when one considers the fact that health professionals are usually uninformed about CAM and their patients' use of them. Potentially effective therapies may have been underutilized; by contrast, inefficient and even deleterious practices probably have been used by millions of patients globally (Lin, 1998; Barnes et al., 2004; Kronenberg et al., 2005). With this situation in mind, there is an urgent need for rigorous studies investigating the available CAM procedures (Jonas, 1998). According to the US National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, "the list of what is considered to be CAM changes continually, as those therapies that are proven to be safe and effective become adopted into conventional health care and as new approaches to health care emerge" (NCCAM, 2004, p.1).

Many CAM procedures involve

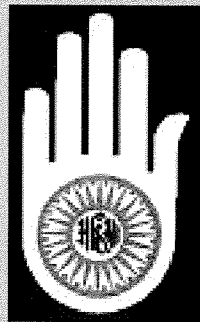
spiritual beliefs and thus are referred to as "spiritual healing," a type of intervention involving alleged otherworldly entities or energies (e.g., spirits, saints, "energy fields"). In fact, the most widely used form of CAM is praying for specific health outcomes (Barnes, 2004; Samano et al., 2004). Spiritual healing also includes laying on of hands, meditation, religious rituals, and other procedures

interest in the subject among scientists and health professionals (Hodges and Scofield, 1995). Much of this interest is due to research revealing the effectiveness of spiritual healing and other forms of CAM, as well as their increased utilization (Freeman, 2004).

One of the most interesting and controversial forms of spiritual healing is so-called "mediumistic surgery." During this procedure, healers claim to be under the influence of spiritual entities and appear to use knives or other sharp instruments to make incisions in patients' bodies, extract tissues, scrape eyeballs or perform other unconventional and disconcerting maneuvers. Usually these "surgeries" are performed in circumstances that expose the patients to many sources of infection: surgeries are performed in open areas or in dirty rooms with hundreds of people closely observing. Many times, mediumistic surgeons do not wear gloves, do not wash their hands before or between surgeries in rapid turnovers, do not clean the skin to prepare for the surgery, and use dirty or rusted tools. Many observers claim that these procedures are performed with no anesthetic or antiseptic procedures yet result in no pain or infection (Fuller, 1974; Cumming & Leffler, 2007).

Mediumistic surgeries seem to be a phenomenon that gained worldwide attention during the 20th century. In the middle of the last century, some mediumistic surgeons from Brazil and the Philippines became well known, if not notorious. These practitioners commonly treated hundreds to thousands of patients each day, many of whom had come from other countries (Fuller, 1974; Krippner & Villoldo, 1987; ACS, 1990; Dein, 1992; Estado de Minas, 1995; Lieban, 1996; Omura, 1997).

Currently, the most famous mediumistic surgeon in Brazil, the United States and probably in the world is João Teixeira de Farias, known as "John of God," about whom several books have been published (see Pellegrino-Estrich, 1997; Ravenwing, 2002; Bragdon, 2002; Cumming & Leffler, 2007). In 2005, ABC devoted a one-hour program during prime time to John of God. The program observed that "for nearly 30 years, millions have visited" him (ABC, 2005). Soon after the program aired, a "skeptical" periodical published a paper with a strong



One of the most interesting and controversial forms of spiritual healing is so-called "mediumistic surgery."

(Barnes, 2004). Reports of spiritual healing practices have persisted since ancient times and have emerged from various cultural and religious traditions, including the Christian historical record of the life of Jesus, which involves many events and practices resembling CAM (Hodges & Scofield, 1995; Benor, 2000).

In spite of being such a popular and ancient practice, spiritual healing remains largely ignored by the scientific community (Clague et al., 1983). However, recently there has been increased

criticism of this program, alleging bias and a failure to include alternative explanations for the phenomena (Randi, 2005).

It is not unusual for CAM to raise controversy, some of it informed and some of it prejudicial (Ernst, 1995). If we understand it according to the definition offered by *Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary* (1996) "prejudice" is "a judgment formed beforehand or without due examination." With this definition in mind, we can safely claim that there is an abundance of prejudice for and against CAM. These biases are even more acute regarding spiritual healing, especially mediumistic surgery, which starkly defies mainstream Western medicine. Undoubtedly, there are many cases of charlatanry and trickery; however, it is necessary to determine if all mediumistic surgeries are fraudulent or if they have a value that deserves more consideration. Healers often complicate difficulties with scientific investigation by refusing to allow scientists to submit material supposedly extracted from patients to laboratory examination (Meek, 1977; American Cancer Society, 1990). In some of the cases where samples could be evaluated, the analysis of blood and tissue purportedly removed from patients was demonstrably non-human in origin (Lincoln & Wood, 1979; Clague et al., 1983; American Cancer Society, 1990; Dein, 1992).

Opinions vary regarding not only the authenticity of mediumistic surgery, but also its efficacy (Nolen, 1974). For example, the American Cancer Society (1990, p.184) published a paper on mediumistic surgery concluding that there was no evidence to suggest that the procedure resulted in objective benefits for the treatment of any medical condition. However, only Filipino mediumistic surgeons were cited in this article, which generalized to the claim that all cases of mediumistic surgery involved fraud and trickery. Finally, the paper's conclusion "strongly urges individuals who are ill not to seek treatment by psychic surgery." (1990, p.184) A similar warning was issued ten years later by the BC Cancer Agency (2000). On the one hand, medical agencies have good reason to be concerned with the health of vulnerable patients; on the other hand, these statements have not been made on the basis

of field research or first-hand observation.

A number of other authors have been less negative regarding the efficacy of mediumistic surgeries. Dein (1992) found that these treatments reduced suffering and increased patient satisfaction, perhaps as a placebo, but he was not sure if they impacted the underlying disease. There are also several case reports in which data were gathered in uncontrolled conditions, concluding that spiritual healing may have cured severe organic diseases (McClenon, 1993; Savaris, 1995) and some controlled studies that suggest that it could have produced effects not attributable to psychological suggestion (Hodges & Scofield, 1995; Benor, 2000).

Krippner (1976) stated that "the controversial nature of psychic surgery cannot be resolved because it is still at the level of uncontrolled observation"; regretfully, this is still true. Open-minded but scientifically rigorous studies are crucial to determining the nature and effects (positive and negative) of mediumistic surgery.

Health professionals also have been concerned about potentially adverse effects of other types of CAM but unfortunately there is a lack of solid documentation regarding the risks of CAM (Kronenberg et al., 2005). A survey involving 161 Australian oncologists indicated that psychic surgery was among the CAM that these physicians reported knowing the least, but it was also considered to be among the most likely to be harmful to patients, a seeming contradiction (Newell & Sanson-Fisher, 2000).

The primary objective of clinicians and health researchers should be to help patients to keep or restore an integrated pattern of health. When using the term "integrated," it is necessary to keep in mind the broad definition of health provided by the World Health Organization (WHO): "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease, or infirmity" (WHO, 1948). Given that, it is necessary to study CAM practices and evaluate their impact on people's health. Health professionals should be informed about the optimal conditions for administering CAM and supplied with the criteria for assessing them (Lin, 1998). Procedures that promote health

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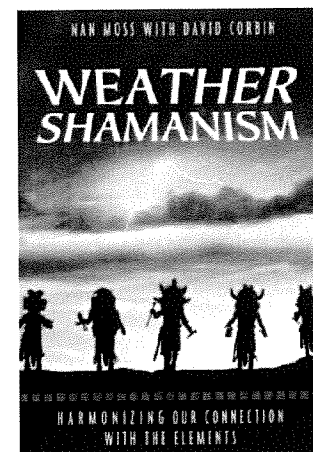
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should be encouraged and those that are futile or harmful should be exposed and proscribed (Krippner, 1993; Hodges & Scofield, 1995).

Moving more quickly than mainstream health professionals, patients seem to have already built the bridge between CAM and mainstream Western medicine. Most of the US population reported using CAM in conjunction with conventional medical treatments rather than as an alternative to them (Barnes et al., 2004). But in recent years, many mainstream health professionals have started to close the gap. Joyce (1994, p.1279-80) interpreted the foundation of departments of CAM in medical schools around the world as a process "of domesticating as scientific knowledge much that was once regarded as too unruly to be tamed: What was 'philosophy' is now experimental science." This same author also claimed that orthodox medical research has its own methodological weaknesses and that "it is unreasonable to demand higher standards of proof from complementary than from orthodox medicine," a perspective also taken by Kleinman (1988) and West (2006) in noting the tendency of Western medicine to dismiss indigenous medical practices.

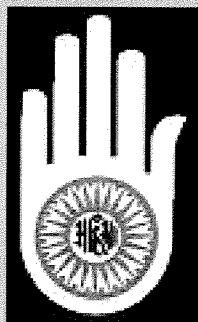
Given the current interest and the lack of scientific studies, we have undertaken an exploratory investigation of the mediumistic surgeon, John of God. The main purpose of the present study was to examine the claims by proponents and practitioners of mediumistic surgery of its curative powers and authenticity. The specific aims of this investigation were as follows:

- To determine whether the surgeries were actual surgical interventions.
- To perform histocytopathological analysis of the tissues supposedly extracted from patients.
- To investigate the use of antiseptic and anesthetic procedures and the occurrence of pain or infection.

Methods

João Teixeira de Farias was born in 1942 in Brazil. He still works on his farm and has only a rudimentary education. Since early adulthood, he has served as a so-called "spiritual healer" and became known as João de Deus (John of God). In the last three decades, he has attended

to patients in a small town named Abadiânia, located in the central part of Brazil, 70 miles from Brasília (Brazil's capital). Mediumistic surgeries and other healing practices are performed at Casa Dom Inácio (the House of St. Ignatius de Loyola) an ecumenical temple entirely devoted to these treatments. At the time of this study (1995), John of God worked three days a week as a mediumistic surgeon, seeing hundreds of pa-



*In a large room,
John of God saw
hundreds of
patients during
each day of the
study.*

tients each day. Patients are said to come not only from all parts of Brazil, but also from the Americas, Europe and Asia (Savaris, 1995).

The first two authors (A. Moreira-Almeida and T. Moreira de Almeida) obtained permission from the directors of Casa Dom Inácio to perform the investigation and observe the treatments between August 16th and 18th, 1995. Investigation in loco lasted just three days because, at that time, John of God worked as a mediumistic surgeon three days a week and patients who came to treatment only stayed in the town these three days. The last author (Krippner) visited Casa Dom Inácio in 2005, making his own observations. The main findings

were previously published in Portuguese (Almeida et al., 2000). In order to broaden access to the investigation of John of God, who has become better known globally, despite a scarcity of scientific study, we decided to update and write this paper in English.

We focused our investigation on the most extreme type of mediumistic surgery, that is, when the mediumistic surgeon allegedly makes incisions in the skin and/or extracts tissues from a patient's body. This type of procedure allowed us to make first-hand observations and to collect specimens for histocytopathological analysis. Although this was not the most frequent kind of procedure undertaken by John of God, we chose it because it was more relevant to our objectives, namely to offer some evidential assessment of John of God's procedures.

Procedures

- All those patients who were submitted to mediumistic surgeries and whose tissues were allegedly removed were selected for this investigation.
- All patients read and signed an informed consent form.
- All surgeries were recorded with video and photographs.
- During the observations we (AMA and TMA) paid special attention to whether John of God used any anesthetic or antiseptic procedures.
- All tissues removed were collected in a formaldehyde solution and the results were deposited in containers for microscopic analysis. These materials were submitted for histocytopathological analysis at the Laboratory of Pathology of Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Brazil by the third author (AMG).
- After the surgery, a clinical examination, including anamnesis and physical examination focusing on the surgical wounds, was performed (by AMA and TMA) while the patients were in the recovery room. Certain questions were asked in all of the interviews. These questions identified: religious affiliation, educational level, current medical diagnosis, past and current treatments, and pain during the mediumistic surgery. Patients were also questioned about how they found out about John of God and whether they had arrived believing that he would help them. The investigators

also examined each patient's surgical wounds just after the surgery and up to three days later.

•We also observed the environment where the surgeries were performed: light conditions, cleanliness, how many subjects were present observing the surgeries and the emotional attitudes of those individuals undergoing the surgeries.

•Some other factors were investigated: whether fees were charged, evidence of financial exploitation, and whether patients were counseled to continue or abandon their current medical treatments.

•Six months later, follow-up questionnaires were sent to all patients whose tissues had been submitted to histocytopathological examination.

Results

Volunteer staff and patients who had visited Casa Dom Inácio prior to the investigation reported that the three days we observed were similar to any other day of treatment. They reported that our presence did not seem to alter the proceedings of Casa Dom Inácio in any important way.

No fees were charged for the treatment and no one solicited donations. Casa Dom Inácio offers a free bowl of soup to anyone who wishes to eat it (usually, hundreds of people a day). A bottle containing a liquid compound made from herbs and roots (primarily flowers from passion fruit plants) and prescribed by the medium was sold for R. \$3.00 (about US \$1.50). Each patient was usually given a prescription for several bottles. Patients who could not afford the compound received it free of charge. Some souvenirs were available for purchase: rosaries, t-shirts and videos about the healer.

We talked to patients suffering from a wide range of diseases, such as chronic degenerative neurological disorders, cancer, breast nodules, heartburn, chronic pain, visual disorders, goiter and vertigo. John of God and members of his staff offered no guarantee that the patients would be cured, claiming that the results depended on "God's will." Also, no recommendation was made to curtail or abandon patients' existing medical treatments.

In a large room, John of God saw

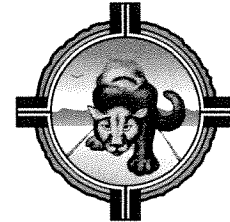
hundreds of patients during each day of the study. In this room, patients stood in a long line to see the medium, who would typically sit in an armchair, writing prescriptions after seeing the patient for a few seconds. Patients were not treated privately, but in a public fashion and prescriptions did not require any input from patients. Prescriptions were written in a style illegible to outsiders, but one which was decoded by the staff members who were selling the liquid compound.

In some cases, mediumistic surgery was recommended by John of God's self-declared "patron saint," St. Ignácio de Loyola, or one of the "spirit guides" from the alleged "spirit world." During this consultation process John of God claimed that he was not aware, but was allowing the manifestation of one of several spirits from his "spiritual team," who purportedly took over his body. This procedure occurred despite John of God showing no visible signs of altered consciousness.

Patients for whom surgery was recommended could choose between "visible surgery" (performed on the physical body and the focus of this study) and "invisible surgery" (performed on the "spiritual body" while they were reclining in a bed in a specific room). John of God said that "visible surgeries" were not necessary and that all treatments could be "invisible." However, patients who questioned the efficacy of "invisible surgeries" or who desired physical evidence of the treatment usually requested "visible surgeries."

Patients who were told that surgery was needed and who had chosen "visible surgery" were scheduled for the next surgical session. Such surgical sessions took place twice a day (late morning and late afternoon) and each of them included patients from a wide variety of health conditions. The surgeries were always performed by John of God and occurred in a large, non-sterilized, and open room with dozens of spectators – most of whom were other patients and their relatives or friends. During each of these "surgical sessions" approximately five patients usually remained standing side by side in front of one of the room's walls. Rarely, patients were submitted to the surgeries while they were seated in a chair. "Visible surgeries" were per-

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formed in a few minutes, in a very grandiose and theatrical way, evoking strong emotional involvement and even perplexity among the audience. Incisions were performed with either sterilized scalpels or kitchen knives and surgeries were performed in rapid succession. The cleanliness of the instruments contrasted to reports of other mediumistic surgeries performed with dirty or even "rusty" implements. As soon as a surgery was finished, John of God moved to the next patient who was standing beside the previous one. John of God did not wear gloves, wash his hands, or clean patients' surgical sites prior to or between surgeries. After surgery, an assistant accompanied the patient to a recovering room where he/she remained in a bed for several hours.

During the three days of this study, a total of 30 mediumistic surgeries were performed within 6 healing sessions (2 sessions per day). John of God removed tissue from 10 patients and we were able to collect the tissue from all of them.

However, due to logistical obstacles (four patients left the recovery room before we arrived); we were only able to perform a clinical examination on six of these patients. Of these six patients:

- All declared that they were Roman Catholic and believed in the possibility of being assisted by John of God.

- Three had heard about the medium through neighbors, one through his parents, one through friends and another through articles in the Brazilian press

- Four patients had come to Casa Dom Inácio for the first time, one for the second, and another for the fourth time.

We observed during our examination:

- No use of antiseptic procedures. During the three days of observation, we observed no sign of infection in the surgical wounds.

- No use of anesthetic procedures. All six patients that we interviewed reported being aware during the surgeries and only one mentioned experiencing pain (during a breast incision).

We noted that John of God sutured some of the surgical wounds. During one surgery, John of God invited the first author (AMA) to suture a 5cm skin incision in the right lower quadrant of the abdomen of a 40-year-old woman (case 4), which he did. This patient reported no pain. Other common procedures include corneal scrapings and a procedure in which the practitioner twists a gauze-tipped steel forceps in the patient's nostril. No hemostatic procedures were performed during the surgeries.

Descriptions of patients' stated problems, procedures performed, and results of histocytopathological analysis are summarized in Table 1.

We obtained six months of follow-up information from four out of the six patients. Two subjects reported significant improvement (i.e., improved visual acuity, diminished chronic pain) and two reported no improvement or change in their medical conditions (i.e., retinal hemorrhage and chronic sinusitis). The two patients who claimed to have benefited from the psychic surgeries are described below.

Case 3: A 58-year-old man who had suffered from alcoholic hepatopathy, hypermetropia and disabling back pain during the last five years. In his contact

with us, six months later, this patient claimed that his pain had disappeared and that he had resumed his athletic activities. He also claimed that his hypermetropia had decreased one month after surgery, still withdrawn from alcohol intake and using the prescribed herbal treatment, his Gamma-Glutamyl Transpeptidase serum level had dropped from 221 to 113 U/l and his prothrombin activity had increased from 44% to 68%.

Case 4: A 40-year-old woman suffering from a macular cyst and disabling idiopathic abdominal pain, which had been previously subjected to in-depth investigation and even submitted to an exploratory laparotomy (a surgical examination of a section of the abdominal wall). This patient reported a marked improvement in her visual acuity and abdominal pain. The pelvic incision left a scar but was not infected.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain a medical report regarding any of these follow-ups because the patients lived in distant cities. Furthermore, Brazilian physicians have been reluctant to write statements that provide an implicit approval of spiritual healing practices (de Carvalho, 1996).

Discussion

Mediumistic surgery is a phenomenon that differs from "orthodox healing" in that it is practiced by someone without a medical degree, no formal training in surgery and in the absence of mainstream medical, ethical and legal controls. However, as has been noted by Greenfield (1987), who observed another Brazilian mediumistic surgeon, John of God does not conceive of himself as in opposition to mainstream medical practice, but as a complement to orthodox medicine.

The process of choosing to undergo mediumistic surgery, especially "visible surgery," has several potential therapeutic implications. When patients are involved in the choice of a surgery, there is an incentive for them to report benefits to justify their decision (Johnson, 1994). The symbolic and metaphorical meaning of a healer's performance may be decisive in its effectiveness, evoking an unconscious mobilization of the body's self-healing faculties (Moerman, 1979; Lieban, 1996). The strong emotional

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involvement of patients in the healing process can have therapeutic value (Akstein, 1984; Krippner & Villoldo, 1987; McClenon, 1993; Oppitz, 1993). Some authors argue that surgeons with charismatic and enthusiastic approaches may be more vulnerable to a placebo effect than other health professionals. A surgeon's behavior, and the whole overall atmosphere in which a procedure is selected and executed, can influence the outcome beyond the effect of the actual surgical intervention (Johnson, 1994). Many authors have emphasized the importance of the performative aspects of healing (Krippner & Villoldo, 1987; Lieban, 1996).

Another factor that likely influences reported benefits of surgery is the financial investment in the treatment. According to Johnson (1994), if someone is paying a large amount of money for an operation, there is a stronger incentive to report benefits. At Casa Dom Inácio the treatments are free of charge (except for the few dollars expended paying for the herbal and root compounds), hence there is no such incentive to claim beneficial outcomes. However, financial investments can be significant when patients come from other parts of Brazil or the world. In the literature on mediumistic surgeries, there are documented cases in which payment is received for treatment (American Cancer Society, 1990; Dein, 1992; McClenon, 1993) and others in which it is offered free of charge (Dein, 1992; Cavalcante, 1987). In Brazil, mediumistic surgery is largely free of charge (Greenfield, 1987). However, even where financial expenditures are small, emotional investments in mediumistic surgery are often substantial, since the procedure frequently represents a last resort.

The practice of not asking patients about symptoms before making prescriptions is used by other healers as well (Cavalcante, 1987; McClenon, 1993; Greenfield, 1987). Lieban (1996) reported that a Filipino mediumistic surgeon spent little time (less than a minute) with each patient. Omura (1997) studied another Brazilian mediumistic surgeon who attended hundreds of patients in one day, giving them less than one minute each. Unfortunately, the present study did not investigate the accuracy of these "mediumistic diagnostic proce-

Table 1: Summary of Cases

Case 1

Male, 35yo, economist
 CC: heartburn for 7 years
 Procedure: introduction and twist of a gauze-tipped steel forceps in nostril.
 Pain: no
 Cytol: Ciliated columnar cells and scattered globet cells, erythrocytes, neutrophils and coccal forms of bacteria.

Case 2

Female, 56yo, elementary education, housewife
 CC: benign breast nodules, goiter, joint pain
 Procedure: breast incision with tissue extraction, and suture
 Pain: yes
 Histol: superficial mature adipose tissue.

Case 3

Male, 58yo, pharmacy technician
 CC: alcoholic liver disease, chronic and disabling back pain in the last 5 years and hypermetropia.
 Procedure: Corneal scraping and needle introduction at the wrist
 Pain: no
 Cytol: anucleated squames and stratified squamous cells
 Outcome: end of back pain, higher well-being and report of decreasing of refractive error.

Case 4

Female, 40yo, physical education teacher
 CC: macular cyst, lower abdominal pain for 4 years
 Procedure: 1) right lower quadrant abdominal skin incision, tissue removal, and suture. 2) tissue extraction from bulbar conjunctive.
 Pain: no
 Histol: Normal skin and adult subcutaneous adipose tissue.
 Outcome: report of partial pain relief and improvement of visual acuity.

Case 5

Female, 48yo, illiterate, cook
 CC: headache for 8 years due to a chronic sinusitis with polyps in maxillary sinus
 Procedure: introduction and twist of a gauze-tipped steel forceps in nostril.

Pain: no

Cytol: stratified squamous cells, ciliated columnar cells with scattered globet cells, and
 Outcome: no change.

Case 6

Male, 59yo, accountant
 CC: visual loss due to retinal hemorrhage
 Procedure: corneal scraping
 Pain: no
 Cytol: Anucleated squames and stratified squamous cells
 Outcome: no change.

Case 7

Male
 Procedure: introduction and twist of a gauze-tipped steel forceps in nostril.
 Cytol.: Ciliated columnar cells and scattered globet cells, erythrocytes, neutrophils and coccal forms of bacteria.

Case 8

Male
 Procedure: Skin incision and back tumor removal
 Gross description: well circumscribed yellow mass, weight: 210g
 Histol: A superficial circumscribed and expansile benign neoplasm composed of mature adipose tissue.

Case 9

Male
 Procedure: molar tooth extraction
 Histol: inflammation of the connective tissue surrounding the dental carie.

Case 10

Male
 Procedure: introduction and twist of a gauze-tipped steel forceps in nostril
 Cytol: squamous cells, neutrophils and coccal forms of bacteria.

CC = chief complaint

Proced = procedure

Cytol = cytological description

histol = microscopic description

dures," but this could be a worthwhile and rewarding avenue for further research.

The absence of antiseptic procedures and use of unsterilized tools during the surgeries could have caused infections to develop in the first 5 to 10 days after treatment (Barie & Eachempati, 2005). Unlike another Brazilian mediumistic surgeon described by Greenfield (1987) and orthodox medical surgeons, John of God did not prescribe antibiotics to prevent infections. We did not identify any case of infection; however our sample was small and we followed up with patients for only three days. Infections could have occurred later or in a larger sample group.

Another curiosity warranting further investigation is the lack of pain reported by most patients at Casa Dom Inácio, even without the use of anesthesia. Chaves and Barber's 1974 model of acupuncture analgesia might yield a relevant explanation, as it stresses such fac-

tors as distraction and suggestion. We observed incisions in the breast and hypogastrum and extraction of a 210 gram dorsal lipoma and of a molar tooth. Only the breast incision caused the patient pain. The common practice of painlessly scraping the cornea with a knife or scalpel is a noteworthy phenomenon because the corneal epithelium is extremely sensitive to pain on account of its high density of free nerve endings (Rozsa & Beuerman, 1982; Kanski, 1994).

In spite of that fact, no patient submitted to corneal scraping reported pain. The cornea is so sensitive to pain that one writer even doubted that any real contact with the cornea takes place during these alleged scrapings (Randi, 2005).

However, the authors' observations along with videotape of these procedures added to the results of cytological exams, which seemed to conclude that the scrapings were indeed real. The efficacy of the scrapings, of course, remains unresolved.

Stressful situations can promote the release of such endogenous analgesic substances as endorphins and corticotrophin-releasing factors (Lariviere & Melzack, 2000; Ribeiro et al., 2005). Nickell (2007) proposed that emotional states created by healing services, like those offered by John of God, may release endorphins. However, it is not clear whether this discharge occurs during these surgeries or if it can explain the virtually unanimous absence of pain in John of God's patients. Some authors claim that the healer could induce hypnotic suggestion in the patients before initiating the surgery (Greenfield, 1987), although there is no available evidence of that effect and the patients reported being aware during the treatment. This explanation does not seem to be the major dynamic at work (Barber, 1999). Given these anomalous findings and their potential clinical usefulness, it seems worthwhile to continue with investigations on this subject.

Regarding the histocytopathological analysis, there are few studies available in the scientific literature with which to compare our findings. Reports vary from animal blood (American Cancer Society, 1990) to human blood of the same type as the patient's (Dein, 1992), or of a different type (Lincoln & Wood, 1979; Singer, 1990). There are cases where ex-

amination revealed animal tissues (American Cancer Society, 1990), human tissues (Singer, 1990), and in some instances, unidentifiable tissues (Dein, 1992). Singer (1990) found that the purportedly extracted tissues had no relationship to the parts of patients' bodies from which they were allegedly removed and most of them were degenerate and necrotic tissues.

In this study the observed surgeries and scrapings were actual procedures and the extracted tissues were compatible with the body region from which they were removed. No evidence of fraud was detected, but matching blood type and tissue histocompatibility would be a valuable procedure for future studies.

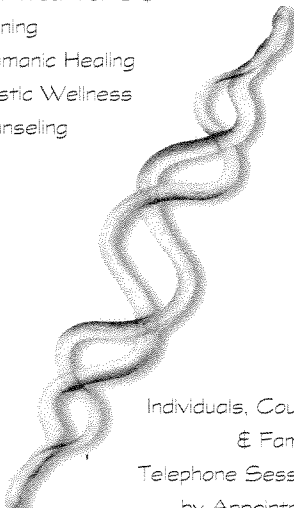
Further complicating the results, these extracted tissues did not show signs of malignization or specificity to a given pathology. All observed incisions were superficial; none of them reached any cavity or any internal organ. The predominance of superficial surgeries and procedures in the eyeball was previously reported among mediumistic surgeons in Brazil (Greenfield, 1987; Nickell, 2007) and the Philippines (Lieban, 1996). Despite unverified claims of cancer removal (see Savaris, 1995), the tissues extracted in the surgeries observed during this study could not directly explain a hypothetical cure (except in the case of lipoma removal). This aligns with the fact that even patients who reported improvements did not display a one-to-one match between their ailment and the tissue that was extracted.

Like other Brazilian mediumistic surgeons, John of God contends that the "visible surgeries" are completely dispensable because spirits heal patients directly through "invisible surgeries." This contention is similar to the most frequently observed forms of spiritual healing around the world. "Invisible surgeries" could be included in the domain of what CAM has called "energy medicine," defined in a National Institutes of Health sponsored paper as a practice that "involves the use of energy fields, such as magnetic fields or 'biofields' (energy fields that some believe surround and penetrate the human body)" (NCCAM, 2004, p.1).

John of God claims that many patients need to see the procedure being

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performed on their own physical bodies to be convinced of the treatment's reality. In performing bodily manipulations, this procedure could also be classified as "manipulative and body-based practices" that are "based on manipulation or movement of one or more body parts." NCCAM recognizes that these areas sometimes overlap (NCCAM, 2004, p.1). Perhaps these "visible surgeries" may help to assist patients (and occasionally heal them) in a manner not yet understood (Hodges & Scofield, 1995). If these treatments have any effect, they appear to work through some natural pathways, even if the particular mechanisms are still unknown.

Undoubtedly, these surgeries also work as a placebo. The magnitude of the placebo effect in outcome of surgeries is similar to other placebo responses (around 35%). Usually the placebo effect in drug trials fades after about twelve weeks, however, this response seems to last longer after more invasive procedures. Because of ethical concerns, it is very hard to evaluate the placebo effect of surgeries (Johnson, 1994).

With this in mind, we should not dismiss mediumistic surgery altogether as a placebo effect because in doing so we would be moving from one realm of perplexity to another. Even the concept of placebo is a source of strong controversies. Götzsche (1994) stated in *The Lancet*:

The placebo concept as presently used cannot be defined in a logically consistent way and leads to contradictions. (...) Because of the logical problems, and since placebos may be powerful interventions, the focus of interest should switch from whether or not an intervention is a placebo, towards the magnitude of the effect and the choice of effect variable. This shift would help to bridge the gap between scientific and unscientific medicine (p.926).

According to Götzsche (1994), we do not fully understand the acting mechanism in placebos. In the end, focusing on the effects of a treatment is more valuable to patients than determining whether the placebo effect is at work. The larger the effect of a given intervention when compared with the absence of any treatment, the more useful the procedure is. For a long time medicine has done harm to patients by basing its interventions more in conjectures and hy-

pothesis than in empirical tests (ex.: bloodletting; applying lidocaine to myocardial infarction). This distinction between placebo effects and specific effects

timely.

As shown in a study suggesting that physicians are more likely to consider CAM therapies involving physical or invasive procedures harmful (Newell & Sanson-Fisher, 2000), a thorough investigation is overdue. While our study was limited, no side effects to the procedure were detected. However, the small sample and the restricted follow-up could have impaired our ability to detect adverse effects.

Conclusions

The authors have concluded that the mediumistic surgeries studied were actual physical interventions and the tissues extracted were indeed from the patients' bodies. Despite the absence of detectable antiseptic or anesthetic procedures, no infections were observed and only one patient reported pain during the surgery. As our follow-up was not long enough to cover the entire window for the infection of surgical sites, they may have developed after this investigation ended. Although no blatant chicanery was observed, this kind of CAM deserves further investigation, especially regarding pain, infection, general efficacy and possible side effects.

Given the lack of solid evidence for both the therapeutic and adverse effects of most CAM procedures, health professionals should keep a careful and respectful approach to a patient's use of CAM. According to Kronenberg et al. (2005):

Obviously, patients should be discouraged from using treatments that have been shown to be harmful. However, in the absence of data, a more useful approach is to ask about CAM use in a nonjudgmental way at each visit. Physicians should systematically record this information so that they can attempt to document observed effects, or lack thereof (p.424).

Because various types of spiritual healing are widely used around the world and because some authors report beneficial effects (Hodges & Scofield, 1995; Benor, 2000), these practices should be better investigated. Further scientific results on these issues would make it possible to incorporate potentially helpful procedures into mainstream health care, while also helping to avoid the harmful or ineffective ones. A serious discussion about spiritual healing and



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can be blurred still more due to the older focus of health care on the repair of organic damage to bodily tissues. Currently, health care is expanding to include quality of life and various subjective aspects of health (WHO, 1948).

The efficacy of mediumistic surgeries is an important topic that has not been adequately empirically addressed in the scientific literature. Because of this therapy's rising popularity and the relatively unknown efficacy of its methods, a more involved examination would be

other forms of CAM does not imply accepting the beliefs and assumptions involved, but simply a consideration of the public health impacts of practices used by hundreds of millions around the world. Neither naive acceptance nor blind skepticism will help patients or the development of health care (Chibeni & Moreira-Almeida, 2007; Ernst, 1995).

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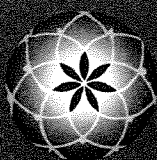
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Alexander Moreira-Almeida, MD, PhD is Professor of Psychiatry at the School of Medicine of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), and Director of the Research Center in Spirituality and Health at UFJF, Juiz de Fora, Brazil.

Tatiana Moreira de Almeida, MD is ophthalmologist in private practice in Juiz de Fora, Brazil.

Angela Maria Gollner, MD, PhD is Professor of Pathology at the School of Medicine of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Brazil.

Stanley Krippner, PhD is Professor of Psychology at Saybrook Graduate School in San Francisco, USA. He is the co-editor of *Varieties of Anomalous Experience*.

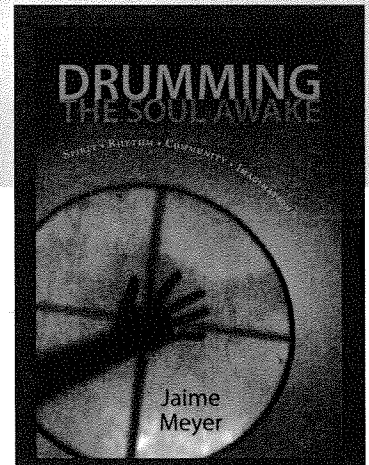


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BOOK REVIEW

DRUMMING THE SOUL AWAKE

by Jaime Meyer



Review by Tom Cowan, PhD

For years I've wanted a remote that would change the channels in my head. I especially want to turn off the one that continuously plays re-runs of my sparring partner—the guy quick to hurl at me doubts, counter-arguments, hyped-up rationality, abuse, and insults. It's not fun living with someone in your head who suspects you're a fake. I've met many people in the shamanic community over the years in this same situation. Maybe there's something indigenous to the shamanic path for middle-class Americans that fosters what some psychologists call "the Imposter Syndrome." That

nagging voice that keeps telling us we're not "real shamans" (or teachers or lawyers or doctors or parents) and some day the "real shamans" (or teachers or lawyers or doctors or parents) will expose us for what we are. I wish I could believe the psychologists' claim that the people who suffer this most acutely tend to be the best in their fields.

When I first read Jaime Meyer's *Drumming the Soul Awake*, I knew I had met someone who could handle this inner critic, could pin the sparring partner to the mat, and as I read his smart, penetrating, laugh-out-loud funny re-

telling of his journey into shamanism, I found myself, yes, laughing out loud as I cheered him along on every page. I wanted desperately for him to win because I knew if he could do it, there's hope for the rest of us.

This is the story of a man who woke up to his shamanic calling, fought the sparring partner he calls Big Steve (based on a real-life friend with whom he once had philosophical-theological arguments), and figured out—with the drum—how to reconcile the deep strains of his life. The result is a shamanic practice of contemplation, action, and community service. Meyer reminds us of Socrates's adage that "the unexamined life is not worth living" and then turns it on its head suggesting that a shaman might say, "The un-lived life is not worth examining." Meyer calls us to examine our lives and live them.

Drumming the Soul Awake is a wonderful account of the author's discovery of shamanism and his uniquely personal way to use shamanism for the greater community. The book overflows with "crazy wisdom" mined from an unusual mix of religious studies in which Meyer earned a Master's degree in Theology and the Arts from a Midwestern seminary, his training in Celtic shamanism that triggered a deeper understanding of his ancestral inheritance, his life as a struggling playwright, and his service as

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a community organizer in the Hmong community in Minneapolis where he co-founded and managed for ten years the first theater in the world for these South-east Asian refugees. Also in this mix, and equally important to his shamanic life, he became a husband and father.

At some point Meyer realized that the words "shaman" and "showman" sound disturbingly similar—an important insight for someone who once performed magic tricks on the streets in Cornwall, England, for tips. Big Steve noted gleefully that two-thirds of the word shaman is "sham." The die was cast. Meyer knew he had to weave the strains of his life into something shamanically worthwhile and meaningful. And so he created a form of healing ceremony that is part shamanic theater, part guerrilla theater, part drumming circle. His twice-monthly ceremonies draw large numbers of people from all over the Twin Cities area. *Drumming the Soul Awake* recounts the creation of this community and how it has provided profound healing experiences for participants and for the author

himself. As he puts it, "It is up to each person to make sense of the odd theatrics that happen in ...ceremony... (E)ach person (has) to decide if what is happening is interesting theater, psychological archetypal work, or the spirit world coming to heal them."

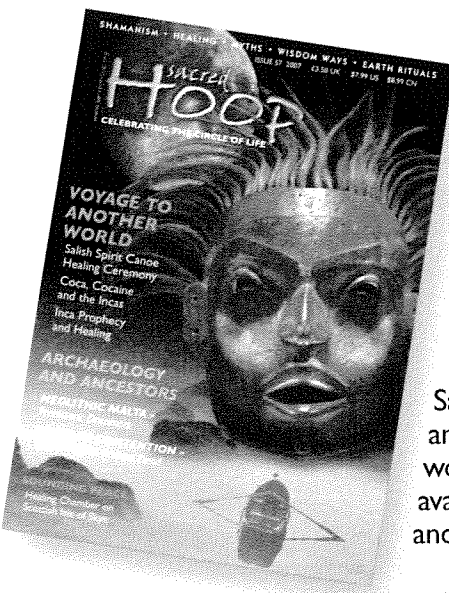
Meyer's goal in accepting himself as a shamanic leader in his community required that he make sense—or crazy sense—of his background and core identity just as many of us had to do. He has had help along the way from many teachers and teachings: from shamans, theologians, philosophers, poets, playwrights, thinkers, and scholars old and new. He shares them with us so that their words too might take up residence in our heads and help derail the demons of our spiritual doubts.

Throughout his account of how he resolved these conflicting energies is his deep love and reverence for the drum—the archetypal instrument of our spiritual lives as shamanic practitioners. If you've grown too accustomed to your drum over the years and have forgotten the great ro-

mance you had with it when you first discovered shamanism, read this book. It'll re-awaken you to the beauty and mystery that the drum brought into our lives.

Jaime Meyer has thought long and hard on what it means to be awake in our culture. He has written an inspiring book you'll want to dip into from time to time: for one of the little nuggets of traditional wisdom he scatters throughout, for the beauty and lyricism of his own prose and poetry, for another chuckle at some of his irreverently told tales of human folly, or for some additional muscle to use against your inner sparring partner. But you'll also go back to it sometimes just to be comforted by a man who writes, "my life, like yours, is about finding the right story to believe and live. When we find the right story and live it, we can sing from the deep belly and do ceremony."

Drumming the Soul Awake can be ordered by going to:
www.drummingthesoulawake.com.



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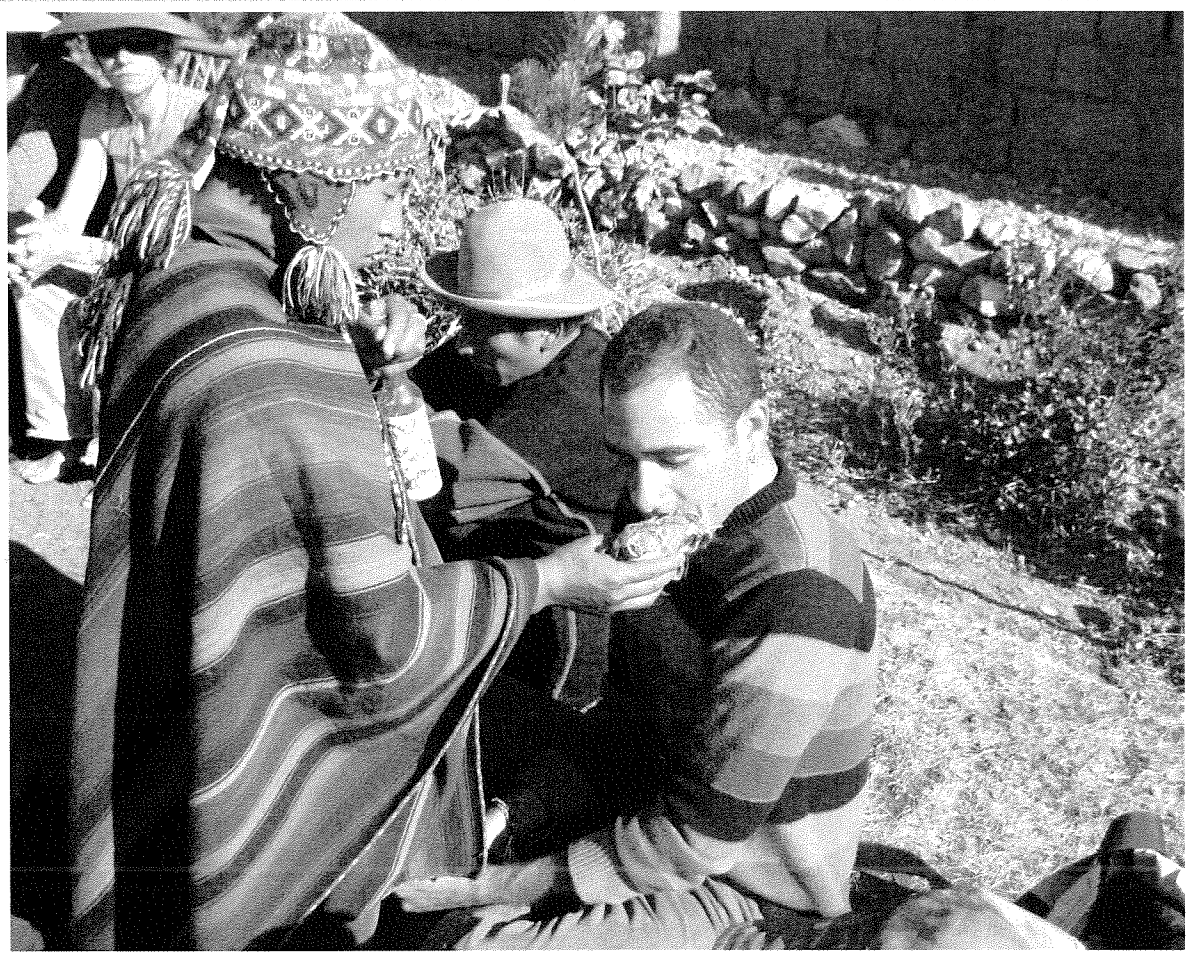
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INTERVIEW

AN INTERVIEW WITH AN ANDEAN SAN PEDRO HEALER



Participants snort herbs and agua florida as a cleansing before the ceremony begins. The officiating shaman is Puma.

Ross Heaven

San Pedro cactus (*Trichocereus pa-chanoi*) also known as Achuma or Huachuma in Aymara, is the visionary teacher plant of South America associated with the curanderos of the Peruvian Andes. Its other names El Remedio, or “the remedy,” refers to its healing and visionary powers, and San Pedro, or Saint Peter, refers to its ability to open the gates into another world where people can heal, discover their divinity, and find their purpose on Earth.

The earliest archaeological evidence for the use of San Pedro as a sacrament dates back more than 3,500 years. Support for the antiquity of this tradition include a stone carving found at the Jaguar Temple of Chavín de Huantar; textiles depicting the cactus and its jaguar and hummingbird guardian spirits surrounded by visionary spirals; and a carved ceramic vessel featuring an owl-faced woman, probably a curandera, holding up a long ribbed cactus.

Today, cactus ceremonies are held to cure illnesses of a spiritual, emotional, mental, or physical nature; to know the future; to overcome sorcery or saladera (an inexplicable run of bad luck); to ensure success in one’s ventures; to rekindle love and enthusiasm for life; and to experience the world as divine. The ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes wrote of San Pedro in his book *Plants of the Gods: Their Sacred Healing and Hallucinogenic Powers* (1992) that it is “always in tune with the powers of animals and beings that have supernatural powers... Participants [in ceremonies] are ‘set free from matter’ and engage in flight through cosmic regions... transported across time and distance in a rapid and safe fashion.” He quotes one Andean shaman who describes some of the effects of the plant: “First, a dreamy state... then great visions, a clearing of all the faculties... and then detachment, a type of visual force inclusive of the sixth sense, the telepathic state of transmitting oneself across time and matter, like a removal of thoughts to a distant dimension.”

Lesley Myburgh, known in the Andes as La Gringa or “the outsider woman,” is another of these shamans. She has led ceremonies with San Pedro for nearly twenty years. “It is a master teacher,” she says. “It helps us to heal, to grow, to learn and awaken, and assists us

in reaching higher states of consciousness. I have been very blessed to have experienced many miracles: people being cured of all sorts of illnesses just by drinking this sacred plant. We use it to reconnect to the Earth and to realize that there is no separation between you, me, the Earth, and the Sky. We are all One. It’s one thing to read that, but to actually experience this oneness is the most beautiful gift we can receive. San



Cactus ceremonies are held to cure illnesses of a spiritual, emotional, mental, or physical nature; to know the future; to overcome sorcery or saladera (an inexplicable run of bad luck); to ensure success in one’s ventures; to rekindle love and enthusiasm for life; and to experience the world as divine.

Pedro teaches us to live in balance and harmony; it teaches us compassion and understanding; and it shows us how to love, respect, and honour all things. It shows us too that we are children of light—precious and special—and to see that light within us. Each person’s experience will be unique, as we are all unique, and drinking San Pedro is therefore a personal journey of discovery, of the self and the universe. There is one thing in common though: the day you meet San Pedro is one you will never for-

get; a day filled with light and love, which can change your life forever and always for the better.”

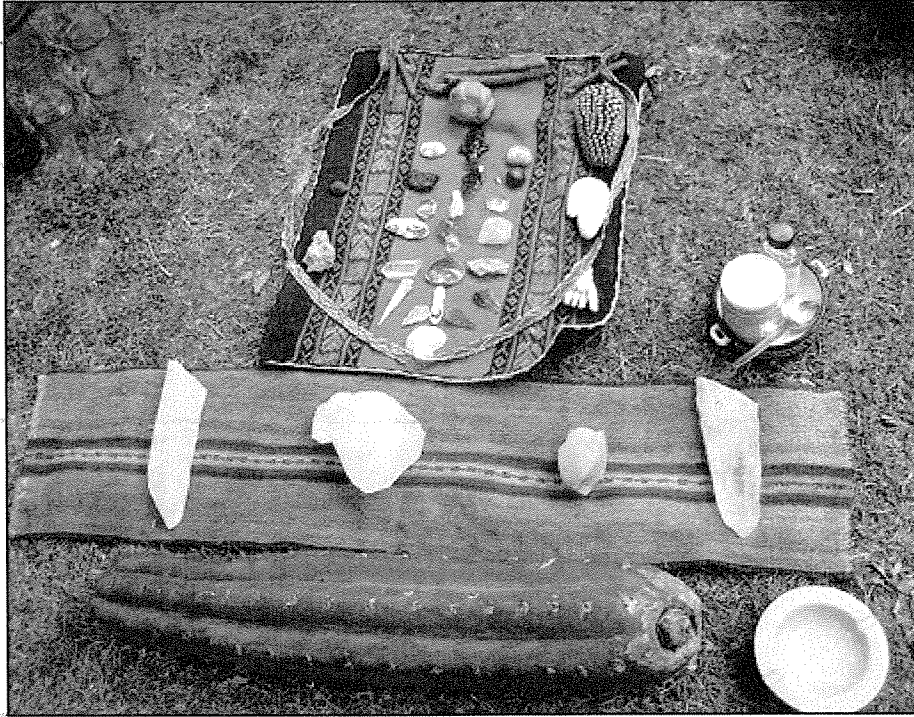
In 2008, during one of my many visits to Cusco, Peru, I interviewed La Gringa about her life and experiences with San Pedro. Her answers show not only the healing potential of this plant but cast light on the surrounding traditions. What La Gringa has learned from Huachuma is of interest to those who work as shamanic healers because it suggests where illness comes from and how it may be healed.

* * * * *

Ross: How did you come to be involved in shamanic practice?

Lesley: I first drank San Pedro in the 1990s and that experience overturned everything I thought I knew about reality. During my visions in the mountains, I saw a stairway of light on a nearby hill and I called my shaman over to describe it. “There is nothing to explain,” he shrugged. “It is a stairway of light.” “You mean you see it too?” I asked. “Of course,” he said. “Take a photograph if you don’t believe it is there.” I thought he was crazy. How could I photograph a vision: something that was just in my head? But I didn’t want to be disrespectful so I took the picture. Later I got it developed, and there it was: a stairway of light, just as I’d seen it, although I had never seen it there in the mountains before and you will probably not see it now. I called my shaman and he looked at the picture, although he didn’t seem surprised by it. “That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you,” he said. “These things are not just in your mind. They exist. San Pedro opens your eyes to what is already there.”

San Pedro had shown me reality as it actually is, but it had also changed what I thought of as real. I now understand the vast power we humans have; we can manifest anything we choose, we just have to believe we can. San Pedro teaches us how to believe. It teaches us that we are part of everything, that we are brothers and sisters, and that nature in its true form is beautiful. It wakes us up and shows us how to be conscious of the Earth. Before San Pedro I used to



*Above: A close-up of the mesa with, in the foreground, the San Pedro cactus itself.
Below: A San Pedro shrine featuring spiritual and religious (Catholic) artefacts and two bottles of the brew itself.*



walk through the world and not notice it.

Now I notice everything.

That wasn't the only "miracle" I saw that day. My shaman was a gentle man and I felt peaceful and protected as I lay in the sun. When I opened my eyes and saw two children looking down at me, they were so beautiful I thought they were angels. It took me some moments to realise they were real and were crying for help. They said their father was sick at home and they had no mother, so they didn't know what to do. They were frightened that he was dying. I went to their house with my shaman and when I saw the man I also thought he was dying. But the shaman walked calmly over to him and started to blow on the top of his head through some coca leaves he had with him. He ran a feather over the man's head and body, and said a prayer. The man sat bolt upright and started to vomit; immediately he looked better. The shaman said he'd be fine and when we left the house the man was already out of bed taking care of his children.

That was my first experience of a shamanic healing, and all the shaman had used was a feather and some leaves and, of course, the knowledge given him by San Pedro. After that I knew that I wanted to work more with this plant.

Ross: You trained with other shamans too. Tell us about your present teacher.

Lesley: His name is Ruben. I met him ten years ago and began learning from him right from the start. He is a famous anthropologist who for many years ran the Machu Picchu sacred site, but he is also a shaman so he knows why and how things work from both a historical and a spiritual perspective.

His shamanic training was very hard. He was not like my first teachers, who were much gentler. He made me drink San Pedro twice a week for several years. Sometimes I would beg him not to have to drink it. I'd sob and say I was too sick to drink, because I just couldn't face another session. But he would say, "Good. You're sick. That, and the fact that you can't face the healing you need, is exactly why you need to drink it. Get your coat and let's go."

At the time it was agony, but now I know he was right and drinking San Pedro was the best thing that happened

to me. I saw all the bad things in a new light and was able to let them go. I cleared whole lifetimes in those years and I learned so much about healing. I still work with Ruben and I hope I always will. He has softened a little now and no longer demands that I drink every week.

Ross: He is an old-school shaman, though, isn't he, with lots of ritual as part of his ceremonies: the *singado* and *contrachisa*. Did he teach you those traditions also?

Lesley: Oh yes. But I never felt comfortable with those rituals and Ruben agreed that I should work differently, especially as I was now healing many Westerners who didn't really understand the rituals anyway. San Pedro guided me and said I should keep things simple. I say a prayer to open the ceremony and then allow San Pedro to do its work without getting in its way. I sometimes use tobacco smoke in ceremonies though, but not the *singado* [tobacco leaf macerated in honey and alcohol which many shamans ask participants to snort to clear negative energies]. It is good to blow the smoke over people if they are going through a tough time, or if they have stuck energy within them the smoke frees it. I also use Agua Florida [a plant-based perfume with healing properties] to balance people's energies.

Mostly I ask them to sniff it from the bottle or from their hands and it helps to ground them. Sometimes I spray it over them. And of course I use a *mesa* [a cloth altar laid out in a ritual way], although mine is much simpler than many others. In Peru, shamans work with many different layouts of *mesa*, but when you have your own you learn to use it in a way that suits you. It is a living being so you develop a relationship with it. San Pedro teaches you how to use it. The objects at the centre of my mesa are shells and stones which have meaning and power for me. I arrange them in a straight line, like a spinal column with the stones as the vertebrae. This follows the notion in Peru that spiritual energy is held in the small of the back and as we advance on our paths and the plants guide us it begins to rise up the spine to the head, where it resides when we become fully conscious.

In the Andes we have three sacred animals: the serpent, puma, and condor. You will sometimes see statues of all three, one on top of the other. The serpent represents the divine energy we hold in our backs; the puma is the body; and the condor is the awakened self, the mind that soars above the world. These statues are a representation of energy flowing through us and bringing us into new consciousness.

Some shamans also use wooden staffs, or *chonta*, to beat participants in

were more natural and flowing. So what I do may be an evolution, but it is also a return to what was always done. It is as if we have evolved backwards rather than forwards in time.

Ross: Is your decision to hold ceremonies in the day instead of at night part of this backwards evolution too?

Lesley: Ruben holds his ceremonies at night and that is how he taught me, but as I grew in my understanding of San



The good energies of people with positive and uplifting thoughts can create a good wind but, by the same token, negative thoughts can create a bad wind. In both cases they are a sentient force which circulates in the world.

order to move their spiritual energies around, and swords to change the energies of patients and heal them. I don't, because I have always known that San Pedro protects me and my participants anyway and there is no greater protection or more powerful healer than the plant. So why would I need to hit participants with sticks and interrupt their healings by doing so?

Ruben is a historian and regards my approach as a modern form which gives people the healing they need through proper ceremonies for our times. But it is also a simplification, or de-evolution, because so many rituals and objects were artificially added to San Pedro mesas and ceremonies through the influence of Roman Catholics. Before the Spaniards came to Peru, Andeans believed in Inti, the god of the sun, and Pachamama, the goddess of the earth. Their rituals were simpler and needed fewer symbols, appeasements to God, or ways to keep evil at bay. The idea of guilt and a god who needed appeasing arrived with the Spanish Catholics and it was they who made our ancestors change their rituals. Before this, they

Pedro, night ceremonies became another thing that did not really work for me. Perhaps it is to do with the Spanish again and their Catholic notions of guilt and "suffering for our sins" that most San Pedro ceremonies are held at night. I always found it so cold and uncomfortable that I could never really relax enough to receive the healing of San Pedro. I mentioned this to Ruben and he understood exactly what I meant, so he began to hold ceremonies for me during the day.

Then I really noticed the difference. In daylight is where all my breakthroughs have come. For one thing, with San Pedro, you can look around and see the beauty of the world and notice how connected you are to everything: that you are beautiful and part of a beautiful creation. You can't do that in darkness.

What people need to understand is that San Pedro is not a hallucinogenic like Ayahuasca, so they will never see images and pictures, and there is no point, therefore, in lying in the dark waiting for something to happen. San Pedro's teaching is visionary instead, in the revelations it brings about the natural, not the spirit world, and in daylight

you can see that more clearly. That is why we hold our ceremonies in sunlight: because San Pedro wants it that way and that is how it was first done.

Ross: How do you prepare San Pedro?

Lesley: Most shamans peel and cut the cactus then boil it for between four and eight hours and they may also add alcohol and other plants. I cook mine for twenty hours, so it is much stronger. Other San Pedro brews feel weak to me and rarely give the same visions. Some shamans say you don't really need visions for a healing to take place with San Pedro. They have a point, but I still think they are important, because as well as healing people, they need to know they have been healed. When the visions come they can feel it, then they understand it is real and pay attention to what they are shown; how to stay well, their place in the world, and the beauty of their lives. Without the visions they can't know these things.

I only work with cactuses that have seven or nine spines because they pro-

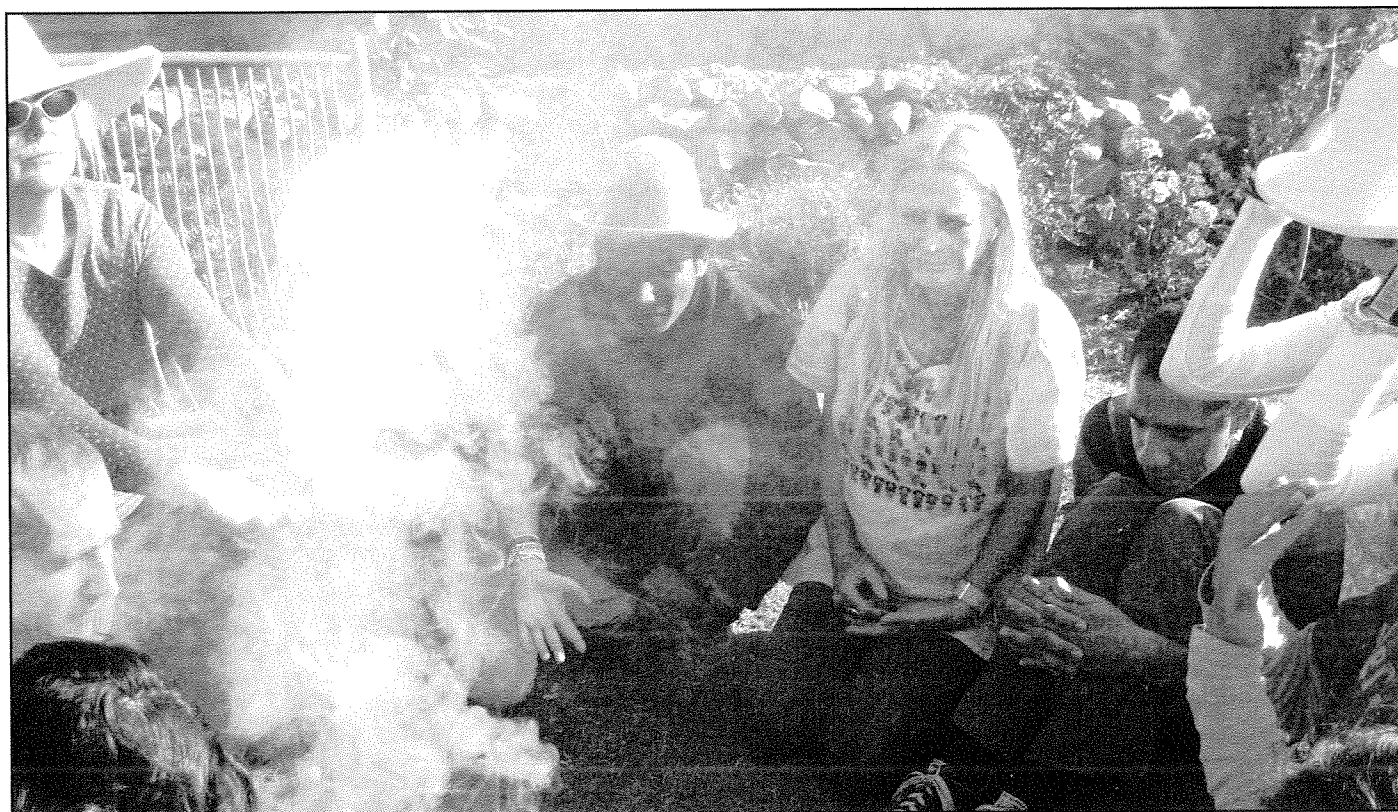
duce the most beautiful brews. Those with six or eight spines are not so strong, while elevens and thirteens can be very intense but also sometimes dark. I never use either with patients. Those with four spines are used for exorcisms and both the patient and healer must drink. You don't ever want to try a San Pedro like this though. It is horrible and the visions take you straight to Hell.

While the cactus is cooking we sing songs and offer prayers that it will produce good healings. Every time we stir it we offer a new prayer, so maybe twenty prayers go into each bottle. Sometimes the spirit of San Pedro shows up while we are cooking it in patterns on the surface of the water which tell us who will be coming to drink it and why. I have seen patterns in the form of ovaries, for example, complete in every detail; or hearts enclosed by circles. Then the next day a woman arrives for help with a fertility problem and brings her man whose heart was closed to her dreams. In this way San Pedro can show us what people need before they even arrive.

Ross: What healings have you seen in San Pedro ceremonies?

Lesley: One that meant a lot to me was healing a woman who always said she would never drink San Pedro. This woman's husband died a few years ago. He was a strong man but his disease wasted him away to nothing. It took him a year to die while the woman nursed him. Then, just three months after that, her twenty-six-year-old son was murdered in South Africa, stoned to death. She was shattered and became like the walking dead. Soon afterwards she had a stroke which paralysed her arm and, from the shock of all that, she got diabetes.

Finally, despite all her reservations, she asked me if she could drink San Pedro. I gave her the tiniest amount but it was perfect for her, as San Pedro always is. She lay in my arms and cried her heart out for five hours. This is a good expression for what actually happened. I had drunk San Pedro too and through its eyes I saw strands of energy coming from her heart and circling her chest and



A ritual cleansing in the smoke of Palo Santo prior to San Pedro healings.

arm like a tourniquet. I began pulling them out of her and throwing them away. The next morning was like a miracle. Her arm, which had been totally paralysed, regained its movement. When she returned home she saw a specialist who tested her diabetes and found it was gone as well. Now she has no problems. Later, when I asked her about her San Pedro experience, she said she had felt a lot of pain in her heart, which is where I had also seen the energy of grief that was binding her. So as well as curing her physical problems, San Pedro showed her why she had them: because of the emotional distress she had been unable to let go of before.

What I have learned from San Pedro is that illness is never a thing that is in us; it is not diabetes or a stroke. It is a belief that we carry: that we must mourn for the ones we have lost, for example, or for ourselves, through a pain or disability that makes our suffering visible and real. Illness is a negative thought-form, a pattern we hold and reproduce. San Pedro not only heals us but reveals the thought-form so that the next time it arises we can choose to think differently.

Ross: The woman you described sounds like she had a "psychosomatic" problem, a term that has lost much of its power in the West today. Can you elaborate?

Lesley: Every illness we have arises from our minds and souls. A woman came to me after she was diagnosed with cancer and was receiving chemotherapy. She looked so ill that I took her in and she spent the next seven days with me, vomiting constantly. At the end she realised that her doctors were not helping her and decided to work with the plants instead. When she phoned her doctor to cancel her appointments, he was extremely angry and told her she couldn't do that, that she was stupid and would die as a result of her decision. This, incidentally, is a curse.

Anyway, she stuck to her decision and now she is healed. The plant showed her why she had cancer and suggested that she had a choice: she could die or change her mind and live the life she wanted. I know that sounds too easy, but it really is as simple as that. She decided not to have cancer anymore because she realised that life was precious, once she

had seen it through San Pedro's eyes.

I have also worked with women who have been sexually abused as young girls and carry the energy of the assault in their bodies together with the shame, as if it was somehow their fault. This energy is also a thought-form that is making them ill. They need to drink San Pedro three times. The first is terrible, even for me to watch; they just lie in a foetal position and scream. The second time, they are more relaxed but there is still a lot of crying. I usually drink San Pedro with them so I can connect to what they are going through and the plant can teach me what they need to heal. The third time, everything changes and they experience total joy. Afterwards they are so different that not even their friends recognise them. San Pedro reconnects them with the beauty of life.

Ross: That sounds like soul retrieval, but instead of the shaman performing it, the intelligence of the plant does it for them.

Lesley: That's right. It is soul retrieval or, rather, "life retrieval." We hold negative beliefs about ourselves as tensions in our bodies and if we don't recognize them they become hardened and manifest as physical or emotional problems. At the same time, our good energies are blocked so that the fullness of our souls is unexpressed. San Pedro removes negative beliefs so positive ones can shine through. It is a form of soul retrieval, one where we return ourselves from ourselves.

Ross: Can you say more about how negative beliefs affect us?

Lesley: In the Andes, shamans talk about good and bad ideas. These are what I mean by thought-forms. When someone says, for example, that you have "good ideas," they don't mean you are a creative genius. They mean you have good or spiritual thoughts, or that you are at one with the truth and goodness of the world. Sometimes people also talk about a good or bad wind. These "winds" are an accumulation of thoughts, or energies, which are attracted to each other and share a common affinity. The good energies of people with positive and uplifting thoughts can create a good wind but, by

the same token, negative thoughts can create a bad wind. In both cases they are a sentient force which circulates in the world.

Thoughts like these have physical effects. I recently rode a horse with a friend to visit the Q'ero of the high Andes. Some way into our journey, miles from medical help, my friend swooned and fell from her horse. She lay on the ground shaking. Luckily we had a shaman with us who knew what happened and he took out his coca leaves and blew through them into the crown of her head. She stopped shaking and began to come round. When I asked him what happened, he just shrugged and said "a bad wind." She had been hit by a thought-form which possessed her. He had blown a different energy into her to remove it and to fill her with light.

If stray thoughts can do this much damage, how much stronger are our own ideas? Our beliefs about ourselves, our sicknesses and our powers or weaknesses are not random, after all; they are personal to us and may have been with

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us for years. So it is literally true that our thoughts can kill or cure us. We must be careful, then, about what we think. San Pedro heals us by showing us how to think.

Ross: Is there anyone you wouldn't hold a ceremony for?

Lesley: I once thought so. A few years ago some young people who were travelling in South America asked for a ceremony. When I told them what it involved, they said not to worry, they'd taken a lot of drugs in the past and had heard about San Pedro and wanted to try "a new drug experience." I must admit I

thought they were trivialising San Pedro and saw it as "just another drug," which it is not. San Pedro told me to relax and reminded me that it can handle things for itself, make its own decisions about who can drink it, and to remember that I was the guide, not the healer.

So I didn't judge them and I gave them San Pedro. Afterwards, they came to speak to me and told me their encounter with San Pedro had been the most humbling of their lives. San Pedro had told them straight, they said, that: "I am not LSD. I am San Pedro." It changed their lives and they no longer take drugs. Now I am humble too because I know that San Pedro will always give people what they need—even if it is not what they thought they would get. I like the expression you use: "with plant work you should have intentions but not expectations." That seems a good approach. I trust San Pedro and I know it will act with integrity towards everyone, so now I no longer discriminate.

Ross: There is a diet that goes with San Pedro, just as there is for Ayahuasca. But with San Pedro it is easier. Can you say something about it?

Lesley: All teacher plants require some ritual precautions prior to and during the ceremony. This is what we call the "diet." It refers not just to restrictions around food and drink but to other behaviours as well so we approach the plant with a pure intent. So when we talk about the diet, it is really more like the ancient Greek understanding of *dieta*, a change in lifestyle, not just in what we eat.

Ayahuasca demands preparation some days before, including food and behavioral taboos, sexual abstinence, fasting, and meditation; but San Pedro does not ask for such changes. Nevertheless, for a day before it is drunk, food and drink should be as bland as possible and contain no alcohol, meat, oils or fats, spices, citrus fruits or juices, and there should be no sex. For about twelve hours before the ceremony, there should be no food at all. This means a day of fasting if you are drinking San Pedro at night or no food from about 8 o'clock on the night before. For a few hours before the ritual I also suggest a period of quiet reflection so you can think about what you would

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like to heal or learn about yourself.

That is really all the diet requires, although there are some specific conditions where a consultation with your shaman and medical doctor is recommended in advance of drinking San Pedro. These include problems with the colon, high blood pressure, heart conditions, diabetes, or mental illness. None of these will necessarily prevent you from drinking since the condition itself may be the very thing that you want San Pedro to cure, but your shaman and doctor must know. A general rule with plant work is the purer your body and spirit, the more powerful the medicine and its teachings. The diet helps with this.

Ross: I've heard that the processes involved in ceremonies can contribute to the effects; that the shaman acts as a hypnotherapist, for example, and offers healing suggestions to the patient, while the ritual contains practices like medita-

tion which are relaxing and healing. What do you think of that?

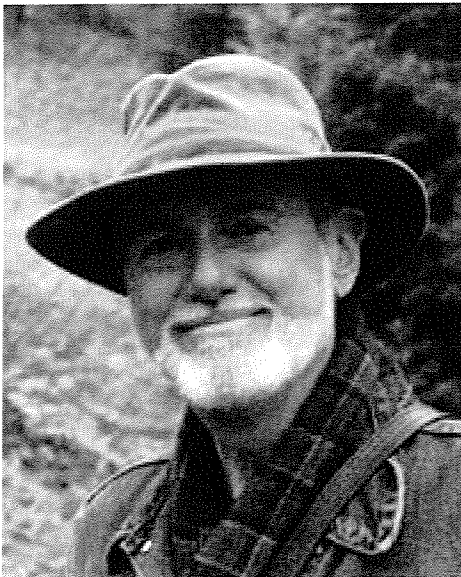
Lesley: I sometimes get asked things like that, mostly by scientists. They want to know what the "make up" of San Pedro is, what its "active ingredients" are, and "how it works." I tell them I don't know and don't care. For me, it is not San Pedro's mescaline content or properties that are important; it is a healing spirit which produces miracles that I have seen with my own eyes. So I really don't care how it works. I can't explain a miracle any more than those who ask me about it can. But I know this: if you needed a miracle and if by the grace of God and San Pedro you get one, you wouldn't care how it worked either.

Part of the disease is to want to understand the world in terms of its "mechanisms," when it doesn't matter at all. It is the beauty of the world that should attract, engage, and inspire us. When we

drink San Pedro that is one of the first things we learn and then our questions become irrelevant anyway. So the real answer, for those who want to know the hows and whys of San Pedro, is simple: drink it and then you will see.

Ross Heaven is a trained therapist, shamanic practitioner, and workshop leader based in England and Ireland. He has written more than ten books on shamanism and shamanic healing, including *Plant Spirit Shamanism: Traditional Techniques for Healing the Soul* (2006) and *Plant Spirit Wisdom: Celtic Healing and the Power of Nature* (2008). Through his organization, The Four Gates Foundation, he offers workshops in the UK and leads journeys to Peru to work with the shamans, healers, and plant spirit medicines of the Amazon and Andes.

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FATE OF THE LHAPA: A DOCUMENTARY

Produced, Written, and Directed by Sarah C. Sifers, PhD

with film score by William Susman

*Review by
Barbara Tedlock, PhD*

In Tibet, located high up in the snowy Himalayan Mountains, pubescent children sometimes experience visions of unusual animal or human composites, deformations, or transformations: sheep that change into wolves, wild yaks that fly like birds, and headless humans. These visions may transmute into *lhas*, or mild-mannered spirit beings dressed all in white, riding white horses or birds. The spirit beings are so alluring some children feel an irresistible urge to follow them into the wilderness, the classic "call" to a shamanic vocation. Whenever this occurs, initiated *lhas*, or "spirit mediums" are brought in to talk with the children who received shamanic calls. After interviewing them the spirit medium may decide to train and initiate one or more child into the shamanic vocation as a sucking doctor, spirit medium, practitioner of astrology, fortune-telling, or soul lifting.

Due to the continuous Chinese occupation of Tibet since the late 1950s, there are today only a handful of spirit mediums and sucking doctors practicing among the Tibetan refugees living in exile in India and Nepal. In the fall of 2000 Sarah Sifers, a licensed psychotherapist and shamanic practitioner, met a well-known Tibetan *lhapa* who was practicing as a healer in a refugee camp near Pokhara, Nepal. During her initial interview with Pau Karma Wangchuk



she learned that his son (and apprentice) had died suddenly the previous summer. Since Wangchuk was already 84 years old and knew of no other children or grandchildren in his lineage who had received the shamanic call, he feared that his spiritual healing knowledge might disappear with his own death. He expressed the wish that someone record his knowledge and practice for the benefit of future generations. And although Sarah Sifers knew very little about Tibetan shamanism or documentary filmmaking, she stepped forward and offered to record his precious knowledge for future generations.

After promising to record Wangchuk's life story and healing practice, she

realized that she would have to teach herself documentary filmmaking, buy equipment, and return to the refugee camp in Nepal for shooting. Despite the high cost and logistical problems, she trained as a documentary filmmaker and returned to Nepal within the year. There she met two other elderly Tibetan shamans—Pau Pasang Rhichoe and Pau Nyima Dhondup—who were also concerned about the possible extinction of their healing traditions. Over the course of six more visits (2001-2006), Sifers filmed these three remarkable spirit mediums. The film portrays the lives of these spiritual healers, includes

tales of their nomadic childhoods, shamanic callings and apprenticeships, cosmologies of illness and treatment, the plight of Tibetans during Chinese occupation of their nation, and glimpses of the harsh present-day realities of ongoing life in a refugee camp.

The film captures rare footage of a shamanic séance that includes the creation of an altar on which the spirit medium places three polished-brass mirrors which enable him to see the gods arrive on their mounts, dismount, and place themselves in rank order with the head deity in the middle. At this moment the spirit medium ties a piece of red cloth around his head, then puts on his headdress which marks his change of status: the god has entered his body and

from this point on until the end of the séance, it is the deity, not the spirit medium, who speaks and acts through him. The headdress is a five-lobed crown which is fastened to the medium's head with strings. In front of the outermost lobe at each side are two rainbow colored fan-shaped "wings," also attached to the strings. As the deities leave and the séance comes to an end, the spirit medium shivers and his headdress collapses indicating that he has returned to his ordinary everyday consciousness.

Sifers formed Indigenous Lenses, a 501(3) non-profit production company, in Salt Lake City, Utah, to apply for funding to edit and produce the film. She received a grant from The International Documentary Association which paid for hiring a local Tibetan man to translate and transcribe the more than 300 hours of filmed interviews and ceremonies. She then wrote a script, created a sequence for editing, found a professional editor, and hired William Susman, an award-winning composer, to write and produce the film score. He worked with the chanting, prayer vigil, gongs, bells, drumming, and dance sequences that Sifers had captured on film and mixed in Western melodies from an award-winning cellist and vocal keening provided by a Tibetan refugee connected to the Institute for Performing Arts in Dharmasala, India. Fusing Asian with Western melodies produces a mesmerizing and deeply mournful quality which contributes greatly to the documentary's emotional resonance.

I absolutely love this beautiful, melancholy portrayal of a vibrant, an-

cient shamanic spiritual healing tradition and hope that Sarah Sifer's non-profit organization Indigenous Lenses will convert her NTSC "DVD" into the more universal VHS format known as "PAL." This would make it readily available worldwide so that people living in places other than the United States—including Tibet, Nepal, and India—could view this documentary without having to send away the DVD tape to a lab in Germany for an expensive conversion. This is crucial so that Tibetan boys and girls (both genders are taught and initiated as lhapas) who want to follow in this ancient tradition will be able to view, wherever they happen to reside, the remarkable visual and auditory filmic record these three elderly lhapas so lovingly provided for their future spiritual use. In this way Indigenous Lenses will complete its important work of both preservation and access across cultures and nations.

"Fate of the Lhapa" has so far won two prizes in filmmaking: the Seahorse Award at the Moondance International Film Festival for the film score given to William Susman (composer), and the Gold Medal for Excellence at the Park City Film Music Festival for the "Best impact of music in a documentary" given jointly to Sarah Sifers (director) and William Susman (composer). A DVD is available from Documentary Educational Resources in Watertown, Massachusetts at: <http://www.der.org/films/fate-of-the-lhapa.html>.



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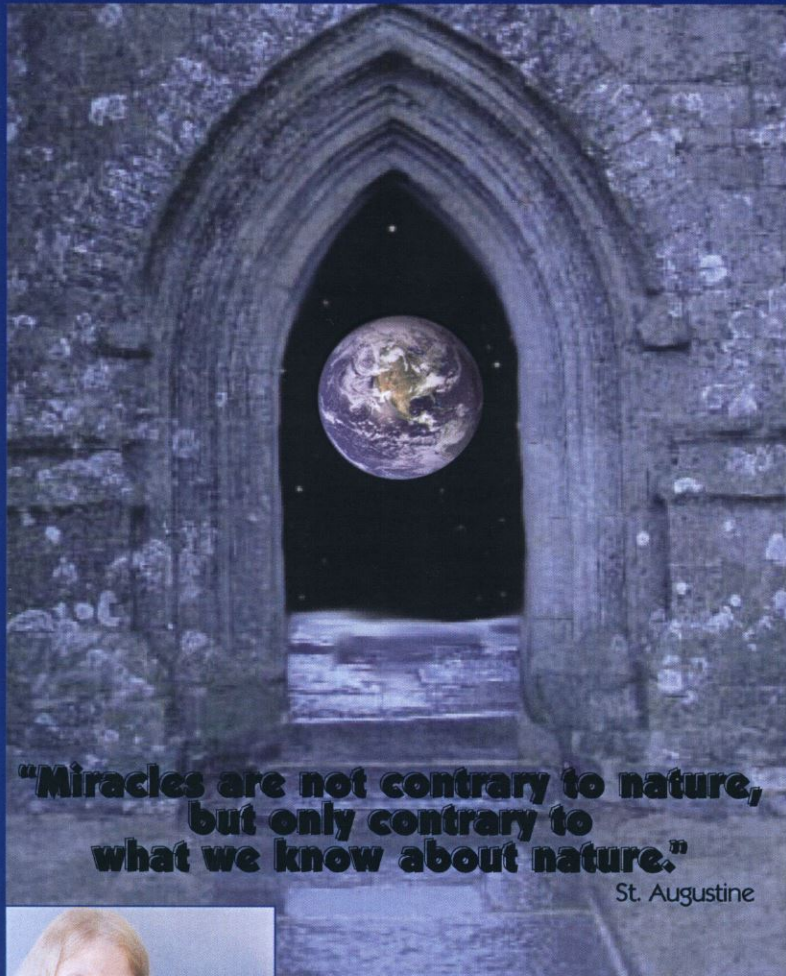
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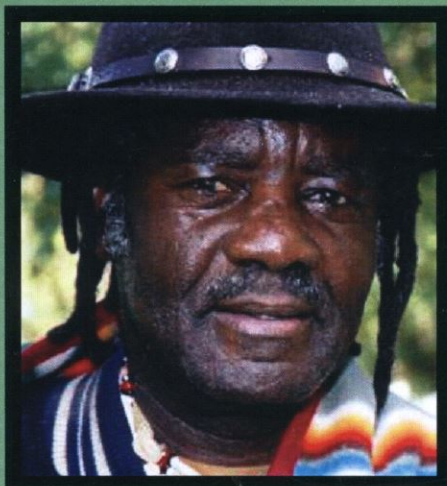
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of Zimbabwe

ALSO FEATURING
Pamela Albee,
David Beck, Jane Burns,
Elaine Egidio,
Leontine Hartzell,
Dara Harvey,
Sarah MacDougal,
Sharynne MacLeod
NicMhacha,
Mark Perkins
and Linda Secord

June 18-21, 2009
Menla Mountain Retreat
Catskill Mountains, New York

visit

www.shamansociety.org
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The Society for Shamanic Practitioners
2300 Eighth Street
Olivenhain, CA 92024
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