© Sacred Hoop Magazine 2017

Please don’t distribute this ebook to other people who have not paid for it. We are a small magazine and we need sales to help us publish. If you are reading this because you found it online somewhere, please visit us at www.sacredhoop.org and take out one of our low cost subscriptions. Thank you

Nicholas Breeze Wood and the Sacred Hoop Team

This is a text only version of Sacred Hoop - the full version of the issue - with all the images - is available as a pdf and also as a printed paper magazine from our website www.sacredhoop.org

THE FOUNDING INSPIRATION FOR SACRED HOOP MAGAZINE IN 1993

“Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and around and about me was the whole hoop of the world... I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit and the shapes of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the Sacred Hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight and in the centre grew one almighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father, and I saw that it was holy.”

(From the vision of Nicholas Black Elk Lakota Holy Man: 1863 - 1950)

PUBLISHING POLICY:
SACRED HOOP seeks to network those wanting to learn the spiritual teachings of indigenous peoples as a living path of knowledge. Our contents cover the integration of both old and new ways, and insights that contribute to a balanced and sustainable lifestyle in today’s world.

We honour all paths and peoples and do not include material from, or give support to, any individual or group which seeks to oppress or discriminate on grounds of race, lineage, age, sex, class or belief. Nor do we knowingly publish any material that is inaccurate.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the editor.

ISSN 1364 - 2219

DISCLAIMER:
Whilst making every effort to be accurate, the editors will not be deemed responsible for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies appearing in Sacred Hoop Magazine.

© Sacred Hoop Magazine and-or individual contributors.
No part of this magazine, either written text or visual art, may be reproduced in any way whatsoever without the written permission of the Editor.

EDITOR, DESIGN AND PRODUCTION:
Nicholas Breeze Wood

DESIGN AND EDITORIAL CONSULTANT:
Faith Nolton

PROOF READING:
Linda Booth, Faith Nolton, Martin Wilford

CONTACT DETAILS:
Sacred Hoop Magazine
Anghorfa, Abercych, Boncath,
Pembrokeshire, SA37 0EZ, UK
Email: Nick@sacredhoop.org
Tel: (01239) 682 029
www.sacredhoop.org
EDITORIAL

Welcome to our largest ever issue of Sacred Hoop, eight pages larger than normal. I hope you enjoy the read. As you probably know, I never plan the issue; I make it up as an ‘invention test,’ using the articles which drop into my inbox. A theme normally emerges and I trust the process - after all this is issue #97. We seem to have two main themes in this issue, the spirits, and reconnecting to what really matters in life.

So, we move through the issue in and out of those two themes. We drop in on the psychic surgeons and women’s ancient shamanic traditions of the Philippines, through to the medicine ways of the Zuni people of New Mexico and their wonderful spirit fetishes, and on to reflect on the life of one of my own Native American medicine teachers, the Oglala medicine man Ed McGaa.

Ed passed into spirit the day before I wrote this editorial, I have good memories of working with him, and his teachings changed the way I live my life. We first published his article in Sacred Hoop twenty years ago, but reading them today - when I made the decision to include his article in this issue - they seem even more important and relevant than they did all those years ago.

But hey; ‘lights, camera, action!’ Life goes on - and what better for a change of subject than a freezing cold winter photoshoot for a new feature film, in a haunted location in Mongolia?

And yet movies - and all that goes with them in our digital, dis-connected, often urban life - is a cause of deep disconnection from the natural world. Why freeze our own butts off, when we can watch someone else do it for us, from the comfort of our warm sofas?

So we have two articles, two heartfelt calls, to reconnect, and stay connected, with reality and the natural world.

And we end the issue with a ceremony that you can do yourself, to bring balance and to feed the spirits. I was moved to offer this - a gift from my spirits - to help the people and spirits of North Korea. And I share the ceremony here, not only for that reason, but as a blueprint for many other occasions where you might feel moved to do a ceremony in order to strengthen the spirits.

It feels like a lot is going on globally at this time, we need to know where our connections are, and we need to feed and honour that connection. We are all connected and we forget that at our peril.

Blessings to all Beings
Nicholas Breeze Wood

THE IMPOSSIBLE TOUCH

Healing, Sorcery and Psychic Surgery in the Philippines
Howard G Charing

I My first visit to the Philippines was in 1998. I was intrigued by the phenomenon of psychic - or bare-hand surgery - after meeting a healer from the Philippines the previous year in England. I could not have guessed that this would be the beginning of an enthralling adventure into the enigmatic and capricious world of the Philippines spirit healer.

The Philippines is an archipelago of seven thousand islands with a myriad of cultures; it boasts 120 recognised languages. The country still bears the stamp of the former colonial powers, Spain and later the United States, following the Spanish-American War in 1898. The American occupation led to English being a lingua franca - side by side with Tagalog, one of the main local languages.

The ancestral traditions and strong folk culture of the Philippines have fostered a climate of tolerance and acceptance toward traditional healers, shamans, and psychic surgeons.

This tolerance had been taken up by government ministers, presidents, and, interestingly, the powerful Catholic Church. A sympathetic feature article entitled ‘Priest Heals through Power of Touch,’ featuring Father Fernando Saurez - a prominent Filipino Catholic priest - was printed in the national newspaper. Father Saurez came to national prominence, in part, because the husband of President Arroyo was healed by the priest in his celebrated ‘miraculous recovery.’ Father Saurez’s healing work is all approved and praised by the church hierarchy.

Filipino traditions have maintained an awareness and faith in the existence of anitos - the nature spirits that reside between the natural and supernatural worlds. Although the Filipino people broadly regard themselves as rationalists, they more readily embrace the more intangible, enigmatic, and metaphysical magical reality.

The situation is comparable to Peru. Since the Spanish conquest and colonisation there, five hundred years ago, the folk customs and spiritual practices have not been eradicated, despite the early Catholic missionaries holding the native...
practices in considerable contempt.

In the Philippines - as in Peru - there has been a syncretism of traditional lore and the Church. For instance, in Peru, the Andean ofrenda ceremony (providing an offering to the nature spirits, or apu) is incorporated in the liturgy.

In the Philippines, there is the ambition to move into a modern ‘shopping mall’ and ‘gated community’ society, and this is literally marketed as the ‘Philippines Dream,’ but this dream is only relevant in the modern cities. The vast majority of people live in a more rural environment.

There is also a vast gap in wealth between the urban middle class, and those in the provincial rural areas. The people who live in the remote rural settlements and outer provinces maintain their language and ethnic traditions. In rural settlements there is also an often considerable physical distance from modern medical facilities, and little money to pay for modern medical treatment and medication even if one could get to them. This means that there is still a lot of work for the traditional healers, such as the abulayros (shamans), herbolarios (herb doctors), and manghihilot (traditional bone setters).

I find it refreshing interesting that the Philippines enjoys a mercurial mixture of folk traditions and indigenous shamanism, side by side with the modern Western outlook.

I think that the bare-hand surgeons, or psychic surgeons, of the Philippines are one of the most enduring enigmas of modern times. Much controversy has surrounded these so-called ‘miracle healers.’ Their ability to open people’s bodies with their hands defies consensual reality. How can a human body open and close by touch? How can solid objects become permeable to allow a hand to move through them?

It really does require an incredible leap of the imagination to entertain the idea that this phenomenon exists. It is a challenge to our sensibilities and to our thinking. I can understand why this is dismissed as weird and superstitious nonsense, and that the bare-hand healers are seen as charlatans skilled in sleight of hand.

**A SORCERERS CURSE**

The journey for me started on the opposite side of the world, in Peru, and I had no inkling of the peculiar circumstances that would propel me into the extraordinary world of sorcery and psychic surgery in the Philippines.

In 1999, I was returning to Lima from the Amazon rainforest, where I had been working with ayahuasca. As I disembarked from the airplane, it felt as if I was hit by a bolt of lightning. The force of it was so strong that my knees buckled, the world spun around me, and the clamour of the airport became silent. I came close to fainting but managed to grip the rail of the stairs to prevent falling down on the tarmac.

I later flew back to England and returned to my house in Brighton, and there, day by day, my condition deteriorated. My left hand grew weak and numb, and it became difficult to do simple, everyday tasks, such as buttoning up my trousers. Paralysis gradually spread upward along my arm, and I became increasingly fatigued; it was difficult to walk up the hill to my house. I saw my doctor, who, when I described my symptoms, just shrugged his shoulders in bewilderment.

The situation continued to deteriorate, my left eye closed, and the left side of my mouth and tongue became numb. I had difficulty breathing. I did not know what to do, and I was at my wits’ end.

Then, one night I had a dream in which a Tibetan Lama appeared, and he very gently said, “Go to the Philippines. You will get help there.” I awoke, and without a shadow of doubt, I knew I would go.

I travelled to the Philippines with a friend and colleague, the holistic health practitioner Patrick Hamouy. There we visited a healer we had met in 1998, and although he gave encouraging words, it was clear that he could not help me. Later that evening, I met a man named John at the hotel where we were staying. He told me that he had come to the Philippines every few years to see Brother Roger, a healer living in Baguio.

John told me that he had been suffering from severe Parkinson’s disease. At times it was so bad that it was difficult to eat and drink because his arms would fling violently around and his head would uncontrollably jerk to and fro. However, for the past five years the problems had abated since he had been seeing the healer. I realised that Brother Roger was the man I needed to see.

The following morning we took a bus that drove up through the scenic Cordillera mountain range to Baguio to meet the healer. Brother Roger’s ‘office’ was a simple street-side café-come-shop, selling everything from shampoo sachets to the local boiled egg delicacy, which children buy in the dozens each week. The waiting room was the café itself, and his treatment room was a small curtained-off room at the back.

We went into the treatment room, and he studied me carefully, and then started to talk about Siquijor, an island in the Philippines archipelago. “This island has a fearsome reputation amongst ordinary Filipinos.” He told us; “This is the home to practitioners of sorcery and black magic.

The mangkukulam [sorcerers] are paid by people who hold grudges and animosities to make a kulum [curse or evil eye] to harm the other person.” I remember thinking, “What is this about? Why is he telling me this?” But I was soon to understand the reason. He said, “This is what has happened to you. A woman holds a deep resentment towards you, and she has paid a sorcerer to curse and destroy you.”

He started the healing right away, and said that in five days’ time we would identify the perpetrator - referring to the originator of the curse rather than the sorcerer. This would allow the dark force to be released and sent back to its source. When he ‘operated’ on me, his hand entered my body and removed an obnoxious mass of tissue from my wrist that had an uncanny resemblance to the tentacles of an octopus. When I returned to the hotel, I enthusiastically told Patrick about the session, and from then on he joined me on the daily trips to Brother Roger.

Over the next four days Brother Roger continued to open my body and extract loathsome things from my arm and my neck along the left side of my body. Each time the effect was immediate: I felt stronger, energised, and freer. He instructed me to prepare for a ritual by compiling a list of all the women I had met in the past twelve months. I finally managed to compile the list of names, sixty-five in total.

On Friday - when we arrived at his cafe - he told me to buy an egg. I returned a few minutes later carefully holding the egg I had just bought from a local store for three pesos.

In his treatment room, he had set up an altar on a large metal tray. On the altar stood an empty wine bottle, a bowl, plugs of local tobacco, and leaves of bacbichia (Dieffenbachia sp.).

He asked me to tear the list into individual strips, with each strip holding a single name, and to fold them, and place them into the bottle. While I was carrying out this task, he left the room. He returned a few minutes later, went to the altar, and murmured his prayers and blessings. He then told me to take the egg and hold it above the neck of the bottle.

He whispered an incantation and then lifted a bottle of gin, saying, “That was the only bottle of spirits that I have.” Then he poured the gin over my hand that was holding the egg. As soon as that was done, he indicated that I should break the egg open into the bowl and look for the folded strip of paper. I used a toothpick to poke around, and then to my astonishment
I saw a folded piece of paper inside the yolk. I carefully teased the yolky paper strip open with the toothpick, and in my own handwriting was the name of a woman with whom I had an affair in Peru.

Something had worried me about her and made me uncomfortable. She had also become extremely possessive, and I had to end the relationship. When I met her to tell her this, she replied, “If I can’t have you, then no one will.” She said this in such an intense way that I shivered, and I immediately got up and left, greatly relieved to be out of the relationship - or so I had thought at the time.

I realised that this could have been a perfect murder and speculated about the number of people who have become victims and inexplicably died due to this malevolent type of sorcery. My assumption that rational Westerners who do not believe in the power of the dark arts would not get entangled in sorcery was obviously naive.

The introspection and musing over, I felt like a new man and expressed my gratitude for his help. He said, “Do not thank me; thank the Holy Spirit. I am just a tool like a hammer, and it is the spirit who does all the healing.”

Some final thoughts on this episode: I had no idea what the consequences would be for the woman who instigated this. In the ritual, as Brother Roger explained, the dark force would be returned to its source.

A few years later, I was in Peru drinking a beer on a terrace, and I saw some distance away a woman walking in my direction. It was the peculiar way she was walking that grabbed my attention; her head was bowed down, and she was shielding the left side of her face with her arm.

When she was opposite to me, I got a clearer view, and I saw that it was the woman from my past. I was shocked to see that the left side of her face was disfigured and covered in dark red blotsches, and even in the tropical heat I shivered. I pondered a while on karma and on the ancient platitudes about not doing to others what you do not want done to yourself, and the message was clear: beware of messing with dark energy because it can come back to bite your ass.

There is an interesting connection regarding the patterned leaves of Dieffenbachia that Brother Roger placed on the altar.

In Peru this plant is known colloquially as patiquina and is used for protection against sorcery. If a shaman chants the ícaro [sacred song] of the plant, it then functions like a shield against hechiceria, a particularly malevolent form of sorcery that can kill a person.

The Peruvian artist Pablo Amaringo, in his paintings features patiquina in this context. The leaves of this plant are commonly used in floral baths to protect against sorcery.

**VISITS TO THE HEALER**

My friend Patrick had followed a strict macrobiotic and vegetarian food regime for many years, yet still he was plagued by intestinal pains (from his earlier eating habits).

His initial session with Brother Roger was incredible. I was standing close by as he made an opening in Patrick’s abdomen, and inside I could see a tube. It was his descending colon, neatly sliced open, and from the lower open end he pulled out what appeared to be a twelve-inch-long piece of mummified turd; as I glanced back at the opening, it closed just like a camera shutter.

A half hour later, as we were eating lunch, Patrick said that he had considered a conventional operation to remove the obstruction, but it would have required that the colon be stapled together, along with a three-month diet of liquid food, followed by another three months of baby food, and a further six months before eating what he wanted. Yet here we were half an hour later eating lunch.

I visited Brother Roger frequently over the next few years and organised groups to visit other Filipino healers and shamans. I asked him if there were any other healers in his family. He said “No,” and added, “In many generations I am the only one with this gift.”

I asked him how he discovered this gift. He replied;

“As a young child I was often told that I would be ‘special’ because I was a breech delivery, but I never knew or was told exactly what this special attribute was.

“I discovered the ability when I was thirteen, when a neighbouring boy the same age as me had swallowed a fishbone and became very ill. His neck became swollen and infected.

“He was unable to eat, and after two weeks his condition was getting very serious. Another neighbour brought me to the boy and asked me to heal him.

“I did not know what to do, so I just gently massaged the boy’s neck, when suddenly my fingers moved inside the boy’s throat. I was so shocked that I pulled away, and I found that I was holding the fishbone in my hand. I was so frightened, I thought I had killed the boy, so I run away and hid in the forest for three weeks.

“Later a friend found me and said that the boy was well and had recovered. I returned to my village, but I was no longer welcome because people thought I was a sorcerer and was “touched by the devil.” I had been expelled from school, and even my parents had turned their backs on me. So I had to leave home and travel.

“It was a lonely and difficult period in my life because I was denounced when people found out who I was, so I had to keep moving.”

Brother Roger then lifted his shirt and showed me the whip scars on his back.

“I was hounded and whipped with vines, which had thorns attached.” He indicated a vase in his room in which he still kept the very same vines as a reminder of those times.

“I survived by grafting, selling cigarettes, cleaning shoes, and sleeping rough, living as an outcast. Eventually I earned enough money to enrol in school, and I could then get a job. I lost everything in the 1990 earthquake that devastated the city [Baguio], and so I moved to Manila, where I found work and started to rebuild my life. About seven years ago I returned to Baguio, opened the bodega, and started healing again.”

**WORK WITH BROTHER ROGER**

I began to assist Brother Roger in his practice, and he showed me how to work with the healing spirit.

He said that the spirit would protect both the patient and me from any infection. He then demonstrated how it worked; grasping my hand he brought his hand above mine with his fingers extended above mine by a few inches.

He told me; “See, it is as if my hand is the spirit hand. The spirit hand moves first by making the opening, and my hand follows. The spirit hand takes the diseased tissue and places it in my hand, and as I withdraw my hand, the spirit hand also withdraws. As this happens, the opening in the body closes. You see, I told you that I am just the instrument, and the spirit does all the healing.”

To see a person’s body opening was one thing, but to actually place my hand in the person’s body was an entirely different experience, evoking enormous anxiety.

As I placed my fingers inside a man’s groin, Roger asked me if I could feel the lumpy tissue.

I said, “Yes,” and he said, “Pull it out.” I withdrew my hand and was looking at a piece of dead tissue, which had come from his patient’s prostate gland. The man had felt no pain or discomfort, and the opening in the groin had sealed. There were no markings or scars to indicate that a few moments previously it had been open.
He also showed me how to remove cataracts.
To do this, I gently rubbed my finger over the person’s eye for a few seconds. I never came into direct contact with the eye itself because a soft substance rested between my finger and the eye, which was the healing spirit.

The cataract was pushed to the edge, and then using a cotton swab I lifted it out and spread the membrane on a glass to show the patient.

Belief in the existence of incorporeal beings is predominant in religions, folk stories, and shamanism, but it is still surprising when you directly encounter these beings in our material world.

When we went to see the Brother Roger, we would first chat and drink tea, and then he would abruptly stand up, go to the treatment room, and begin.

One day our initial tea drinking was taking longer than usual, and I asked him why we were waiting so long. He said, “The spirit has not arrived yet. I get a nudge from the spirit when he is here.”

At that moment, I was pushed in my shoulder, lifted into the air, and lowered back into the chair. I turned and looked behind, but it was empty and no one was there. He gave a great big smile and said, “Time to start.”

One time while working, an enormously bulky man came for healing. The man’s belly entered the room and led the way for the rest the body.

The man said that he was unable to lose weight. He had tried dozens of diets, but he could never lose the bulk around his stomach.

I stood by as Brother Roger opened him and began to extract thick masses of fat. The room smelled just like a butcher shop.

This fat had lodged in the man’s intestinal system, so it was understandable that no amount of dieting would have shifted it. During the operation, he placed the masses of fat into a plastic bucket, and after the man had left, by the way looking totally different, I lifted the bucket, and I estimated it weighed about eight to ten pounds. Astonishing!

A SHIFT OF PERCEPTION

Some of the conclusions I have drawn from observation and participation in Brother Roger’s work have had a profound effect on my worldview.

My first realisation was that many of the debilitating diseases and the general decline in physical health that we associate with old age are not inevitable.

They are the cumulative effects of decades of eating the wrong food, typically too much animal fat and red meat, with not enough fibre.

Also, unresolved emotional issues that ‘eat away’ at us, eventually affect our physical body and make it difficult for people to emotionally compensate for physical pains and discomfort.

Working with Roger, I started to understand that tumours are not just lifeless masses of tissue. They possess a primal survival instinct, a natural drive of some kind. They are parasites and unable to exist outside the host.

Tumours form in locations in the human organism where they are the most difficult to detect. From there they increasingly absorb nutrients from the body. Once they are sufficiently developed, they start to spread through the body and become detectable.

These intelligent organisms, primed for ‘survival,’ are aware when they are disturbed or detected through an intrusive method such as a biopsy, and they respond to this by accelerating their growth and expansion by invading other parts of the body. This migration throughout the body is called metastasis.

Many anecdotal narratives describe how tumours proliferate shortly after a biopsy. A tumour perfectly fits the shamanic definition regarding the cause of illness: an external intrusive force acts upon the human energy template and creates a dissonance in the bioenergy pattern, which manifests in physical matter as an illness.

Perhaps we could regard tumours in a different way than the viewpoint of conventional medicine. We might adopt a perspective that they are not inanimate forms, but are animate with distinct energy fields, and at that level they can be extracted or neutralised.

How do you rationally explain bare-hand surgery and the direct intervention of spirits? The nature of reality is a mystery.

Quantum physicists are at a loss to explain phenomena that have been verified experimentally, such as quantum entanglement. Quantum entanglement describes the changed state of a particle that is instantaneously transmitted to a paired particle, which could be billions of light years distant. Einstein had huge trouble in accepting this and famously called it ‘spooky action at a distance.’

Working with incorporeal spiritual forces is counterintuitive to our three-dimensional material reality. Objective reality becomes, in essence, a flawed concept, and consciousness is an instrument in the creation of reality.

Keeping this notion in mind, if we look at the basic purpose of a ritual, ceremony, or prayer, it is really to effect a change or influence the unfolding of reality. The desired change is usually to improve the circumstances for a person or group, typically healing or drawing in fortunate influences.

When we pray, are we indeed invoking the power of a discarnate supernatural force? Or are we applying the power of our consciousness to influence the transient probability waves that generate reality in time and space? From this perspective, the actions of healers and shamans are totally rational.

However, this means that shamanism and psychic surgery can be explained in terms of modern physics.

Psychic surgeons and shamans can effect change in local reality (e.g., their clients) through what is called ‘spiritual’ power operating at the quantum level.

The process of psychic surgery is explained by a former professor of physics and chemistry at the University of Dortmund, Dr. Alfred Stelter. He defines the process of painless, barehanded operation as thus:

‘The healers form strong etheric force or energy in their hands through intense concentration. This energy penetrates matter at the cellular, or even sub-atomic levels, where matter and energy are interchangeable.

After the accumulation of etheric forces, the magnetic cohesive energy (force that holds the cells of the bodies together) is separated through unpolarisation. And then after the operation, the cells go back to their former appearance.’

Our inability to rationally understand, define, or explain bare-hand surgery is not relevant. As the sages and wise ones say, ‘The proof of the pudding is in the eating,’ and in the years that I have been working and researching in the Philippines, I have come to understand it in that manner. The psychic surgeons and shamans certainly do not see their work in measurable scientific terms. Striving for rational explanations prevents us from entering this mysterious world.
CALL OF THE BABAYLAN

Women’s Shamanism from the Philippines

Shamanism and animism were traditional to the Philippines. When the Spanish first arrived there in 1521, they found traditional shamans that were known by various names, in the different languages found across the group of islands that make up the Philippines. Some of the more common names were babaylan, katalonan, diwatera and tambalan. In this article we will refer to them as babaylan, and give a brief introduction to their traditions.

As in many shamanic cultures across the world, the first signs of becoming a babaylan is a ‘shamanic sickness,’ often with symptoms such as fits, tremors, convulsion and insanity - to some degree or other. This, of course, very much fits the worldwide pattern of shaman sickness, although with the babaylan, temporary blindness was also considered a sign that an individual was selected by the diwatas [spirits].

Sometimes it is said the babaylan-to-be vanishes from the world and goes to the spirits for a time, before being returned, and when this happens the babaylan-to-be are said, when found again - to often be sitting beneath, or sometimes on top of, a balete tree, which is considered a sacred tree and a gateway for the spirits to come into this world. The balete is said to be the home of fearsome spirits, and there are many hair-raising folk tales about the trees, which is, in part, why many people refuse to cut them down, fearing the revenge of the spirits.

Once identified as a babaylan, the young person is then trained, having to memorise complex forms of ceremony, ancient oral epic stories and chants, and other aspects of the tradition. All this takes several years, and during this period there are a series of initiations to prepare the apprentice.

Upon entering the training, a elder babaylan woman pours sweet-scented oil on the head of the new student and presses special beads on the student’s forehead, blowing over them through her cupped hands. The spirit of the lineage is then transmitted from the elder to the student, and the apprenticeship begins.

The babaylan tradition is mostly a female one. There were, and are male babaylan, but they are much rarer than women ones. It is explained that a babaylan symbolises the Mother Goddess, represents nature, fertility, creation and destruction; the Mother Goddess being both the giver and the taker of life.

Traditionally, male babaylan, in order for them to be accepted into the tradition, have to undertake a symbolic gender transformation, so they can be accepted and viewed by the community as female, and thus eligible to be babaylans. This is still very much part of the tradition, and may be one of the reasons there are still relatively few male babaylan today.

When the Spanish first encountered the babaylan in the C16th the chronicler Friar Alcina described the male babaylan as: ‘...impotent men, and deficient for the practice of marriage, considered themselves more like women than men in their manner of living or going about, even in their occupations...’

Male babaylan were sometimes called asog, which is also the word for a sterile woman.

The training of a babaylan is seen as a series of seven stages:
I: Baratakan - the first level, where a young babaylan is connected to their own spirit helper, which acts as a guardian. The main job of the apprentice at this stage is to assist an elder babaylan perform rituals and ceremonies.
II: Sanguban - during this level the apprentice is taught different plant and herb lore, and given instruction in basic medical diagnosis.
III: Hangdugan - where the apprentice learns how to conduct ritual offerings to their own spirit helpers by sacrificing black chickens.
IV: Tagbungan - where the apprentice studies the rituals, ceremonies and dances that a babaylan must perform, but the babaylan is forbidden to actually perform these.
V: Hagbayan - this is where apprentices take on larger helping roles in ceremonies. They will be known as a merku, and will be given the responsibility to deal with minor cases in their community. The relationship with their spirit helpers is greatly strengthened during this period.
VI: Turupadan - where the babaylan is fully equipped with the knowledge of the ceremonies, medicines and magic they need, and the apprentice is given the authority to conduct rituals under the supervision of an elder babaylan. At this point the sacrifice rituals increase from a single black chicken to seven red chickens, which are given to their spirit helpers.
VII: Banawangon - this is the last level of apprenticeship, where the student is recognised as a full babaylan by an elder babaylan in front of the village menfolk. The
apprentice offers a black pig to their spirit helper, and the new babaylan is now given their piling, a collection of large sea shells, attached to a cord - a sort of ritual badge of office. This is ideally passed from a dead babaylan, and not newly made from fresh shells.

The fully initiated babaylan will be held in a mix of awe, fear and high regard, being seen as having great supernatural abilities, which although are generally used to heal and cure those in their community, can be used against people if the babaylan so wishes.

THE WORK OF THE BABAYLAN
Babaylan work with a variety of spirits, including ancestral spirits, nature spirits, lesser gods and a host of dangerous spirits who either accidentally, or intentionally, inflict pain, curses and injuries to humanity. These harmful spirits belong to three main groups, living in each of the three worlds of their cosmology. Each of these is responsible for a particular ailment. These spirit classes are the idabawnon, who are upper world beings, causing epidemics and plagues; the dutan-on, who are middle world spirits, dwelling invisibly among humans; and the idadalmonon, who live in the lower world. These are known as ‘the death bringers.’

One of the main jobs of a babaylan is to appease and communicate with these spirits, and give sacrifice to them, so that they will be more benevolent towards the human community. Two other main tasks of a babaylan are to exorcise harmful spirits from people or places, and seek lost souls, whom these harmful spirits have captured and made off with.

The offering of sacrifices plays a major part of all traditional babaylan ceremonies, and their nature varies, depending on the spirits being called. Pigs and chickens generally play a major role in these ceremonies, but rice wine - and more recently tobacco - cakes, flowers and many other things are also very traditional offerings. These are often given in groups of seven, which is a sacred number in this tradition, and during these ceremonies the spirits are called to and invited, using a secret language - glossolalia - known only to the babaylan. The babaylan are often taken over in trances, where the spirits enter thier bodies, and at those times the spirits speak the same glossolalic language.

Like most shamanic traditions world wide, the babaylans work with many forms of sacred objects. Their shamanic musical instruments include bells, drums, large metal gongs and bamboo trumpets, and they use a wide variety of charms, made both of metal and natural materials.

But one of the more interesting objects they work with are diamonds - both diamante (raw) and brilliant (refined) - as well as more regular quartz crystals.

They use these in ways quite different ancient to the crystal therapies of modern western new age culture, crystals and diamonds are gazed into, in order to see the spirits of illness, but as they are seen as magical power and protection objects, they are inserted under the skin, normally being pushed into the flesh of the arms, and sometimes they are also swallowed by the babaylan. This incorporation of crystals is said to give the babaylan more power, and also make them impervious to the work of harmful spirits and magicians.

Like all shamanic traditions around the world, those of the babaylan are changing fast. Accounts of ceremonies held in the 1950s show little difference from those recorded in the 1650s, but what state the traditions will be in when we reach the 2050s is anyones guess. Some people in the Philippines think the tradition has already been consigned to history and are fast. Accounts of ceremonies held in the world, those of the babaylan are changing.

The dream slowed down and stopped, as if it were holding its breath. The shrouded figure froze where he had floated above my right shoulder... and his hat and cloak simply fell off him.

What floated there in his place was a brilliant, pulsating pale green disc with a combination of horizontal and vertical lines that made it look like a stylised face. I had never seen anything like it before, but by happenstance, during an internship interview, I came across this image in an academic office, identified as the ‘Sun Face, Zuni.’

In the midst of my everyday life - right here, completely unexpectedly - there seemed to be a key to something incredibly important, a clue that linked the dream to my waking life. There was a kind of challenge in this Sun Face, Zuni. What would it demand of me? I wasn’t at all sure how I felt about it.

I was vaguely aware that the Zuni are a Pueblo Native American tribe in the Southwestern USA. However, I had never seen this Sun Face image before.

I casually asked the secretary in the office if she could possibly photocopy the Sun Face, and then I folded the copy up, stowed it in a pocket of my daypack, and made a conscious decision to act as if nothing had happened. I shelved the whole experience as kind of inconvenient.

I returned to my home in Washington County, Maine, to visit my old friends, David and Jane Brown, who had offered me a room in their house, overlooking the ocean. I was looking forward to playing music, hiking along the cliffs overlooking the water, and having great long talks. And it was during one of those great talks that the next door unexpectedly opened.

David had gone out to feed his goats, and Jane and I were sitting at the kitchen table having tea, talking about healthcare,
osteoopathic medicine and my first year of school. Jane happened to be a medium, and as I listened, she suddenly seemed to lurch, almost dropping her mug, as her eyes closed and she began to speak to me in a voice other than her own.

The voice forcefully implored: “Steven, do you understand what you are being shown? And what you are being asked to do? You must not ignore these signs! You must drop everything now, and go. Your dream; the Zuni Sun Face! You must go to Zuni! There is a reason why all this is happening to you now, and you must go there to find out what it is. It is important!”

When David came in from his chores, we told him what had happened, and together we pulled down road maps to look at routes to Zuni from Maine.

THE ROAD TO ZUNI
As I drove the long quiet highways, in the dense darkness, among the mountains and forests, I found myself in a meditative state.

Eventually I saw a dirt road on my right, heading north. Somehow it caught my attention and I slowed down some to get a closer look. The road even seemed to be lit up in some way, and my headlights illuminated a small hand-painted plywood sign that said ZUNI, with a small arrow pointing up the road to the north.

As I travelled, I surrendered to whatever it was that was bringing me to Zuni. The road was barely drivable: it went from gravel to paved; from paved to dirt; it got even smaller, and seemed like nothing more than a goat path through the rocks of the small mountains.

I crept along the road, through the night, alternating between naps and driving in a kind of timelessness. I dreamt strong, strange dreams that were not remembered when waking.

So the night continued to the end of the road, and, as the sun came up and I drove north, I realised that since the middle of the night - when I turned onto the goat-path road - I had already been driving on the southern end of the reservation. I was in Zuni, I had made it.

As I drove west into Zuni Pueblo, suddenly the reality of my situation hit me like a ton of bricks. Everything I had done since my lucid dream experience had orchestrated to bring me here, and yet, now that I was actually on the Zuni Reservation, I had absolutely no idea what I was supposed to do next. I had been so caught up in the journey that I had never thought about what would happen once my feet were on the red earth of the Pueblo.

I stopped my car outside the Zuni Tribal Office, got out, opened the door and walked into a front waiting area, with a couple of secretaries at their desks and with some chairs and couches scattered around.

I stood before one of the secretaries and said: “Good morning. I’ve driven to Zuni from Maine - several thousand miles away - hoping to meet with a medicine man, or perhaps a tribal elder.

“I have had a series of dreams where a Sun Face came to me and led me on this road to Zuni. I am hoping that someone can help figure out the dream and what I am supposed to do about it - maybe a tribal elder or a teacher?”

The native woman I had spoken to directed my questions to a non-native, sitting not far away, a tall, mustached man, with dusty western boots and a plaid shirt. He invited me to have a seat on a sofa and sat down next to me.

“I don’t know quite what to say,” he started. “First of all, the medicine people are still alive in Zuni; the old traditions are really alive here... and strong... and nearly all of the old medicine societies are intact too.

“The problem is that you are white... and a stranger. They’re not likely to talk to you. I’m sure your intentions are probably good. It’s just that we’ve betrayed them so much in the past. Sorry, son, but I don’t know any way around it.”

We sat for a moment and then he started talking again, suggesting to me that I should perhaps visit the old mission, which, he told me would be open in a couple of hours.

I thanked him, and I dragged myself back to my dusty old car. There was definitely less bounce to my step now, and for the first time since I had hit the road I felt lost and confused, alone and hungry.

This ‘following dreams’ business was hungry work, and it suddenly seemed like forever since I had eaten. So, with hunger grumbling, I saw a greasy-spoon across the road, and made my way there for some breakfast.

As I sat there, enjoying an excellent breakfast of huevos rancheros - ‘ranch eggs’, a classic Mexican breakfast - I reflected on my options.

While I was thinking, I had relaxed into a slow, rhythmic kind of breathing, and more and more drifted into a kind of contemplative state, and so it was only gradually that I began to notice the tribal police car parked across the road: somehow it seemed significant, perhaps the policeman could be of help.

I walked outside and up to the driver’s window of the police car. The policeman rolled down his window and quietly asked:

“Can I help you,” while staring at me.

“I think so,” I said, taking a deep cleansing breath. "It's kind of a long story."

“Go ahead. Let’s hear it,” came the policeman’s reply, rolling his window down all the way and turning to face me.

“Well!” I began; “I am a medical student from Maine, and a couple of months ago I started having dreams of Zuni Sun Faces. I have a sense I need to see a Zuni medicine man.

“After ten days on the road, I finally drove into Zuni this morning, and then I saw you. I just know that somehow you know the medicine man I've come to see... I know you’re the man to help me.”

I waited... and breathed... and prayed. Finally, after what seemed like forever, the policeman replied, “Well,” he said, “there is a man that I think will see you. Maybe he is the one you’ve come here to see, maybe not, but either way, he’ll know what to do.”

He gave me directions and a name to ask for. I drove deeper into Zuni Pueblo.

MEETING THE GRANDMOTHERS
I followed the policeman’s directions until I came to a bunch of cars and pickups parked around. I parked mine in between them, and went up some steps, onto an old rickety porch, and to a door at the end. I stood for a moment with my heart pounding, and knocked on the screen door.

I could hear voices inside. Then the door opened a little, and I found I was face to face with a large woman, with a protective, bear-like energy. “Who are you, and what are you doing here?” She demanded.

I began to tell her about the dream and the Sun Face, and she stopped me, and asked me about it.

“You mean to tell me that a Sun Face came to you in your dreams, and that you’re here because of that?”

“Yes ma’am,” I replied.

“Well, you had better come on in and tell us your story.” With that she let me in through the door and directed me to sit.

Three older men were seated on a couch at the end of the room; and to my left a young man in his twenties, and to my right was a teenage girl. On another couch sat four young men, ranging from late teens to mid thirties, and the bear-woman sat back down in an easy chair across from me, next to a statue of the Virgin Mary.

After a moment of looking around and taking it all in, I noticed that everyone was looking at me as Flora (the bear-woman) spoke to them - apparently about me - in Zuni. The older men with the brightly-
coloured, elaborately knotted bandana headbands were awake and staring at me too, nodding and making affirmative noises, as were other folks seated around the room.

Flora then stopped talking and looked at me too. The extraordinary thing about her was her face and eyes. There was a depth and intensity in those coal black eyes which I had never seen before - power, focus, connection to Spirit and Earth, and her people.

In the silence that followed - with everyone still watching me - she trained her eyes upon me and asked; “Well, maybe you ought to try telling us why you’re here, but first I’ll introduce you to everybody.” She then proceeded around the room, identifying all of those gathered. One of the men was her husband Edward - the medicine man I was sent to meet - the other, much older, men accompanying him were members of the same medicine society. They held the same intensity and clarity and peace in their eyes as Flora.

Somewhere off in the hallway, where children had been playing, a door burst open, and three elderly Zuni women walked into the room.

These women were dressed in simple patterned calico cotton dresses, with embroidered cotton aprons, and each had pinned upon her apron a huge silver and turquoise traditional Zuni pin. Their faces were beautiful and powerful, with high cheekbones and the same clear dark eyes I had noted elsewhere in the room. They seemed to have the poise of goddesses, and I was in immediate awe of them.

One walked up to me and started talking in Zuni. She must know that I didn’t understand a word she was saying.

While I was concentrating on the sounds and the inflections of her speech, I suddenly realised with a start that she wasn’t actually talking to me, but rather at me, or to be exact, she was speaking to a space two or three feet above my head. As she held a conversation with something or someone in the space above my head, she asked questions and answered what were obviously questions directed at her.

I was both overwhelmed by this completely foreign setting, and at the same time strangely at home and comfortable. I felt a certain connection with this elderly Zuni woman, perhaps even a certain inexplicable familiarity and comfort.

Flora introduced me to the three other women: Lola and Florence (her aunts), and Bernice - the mysterious woman who had spoken Zuni at me - who was her mother, a senior member of one of the medicine societies, and the head auntie of the bear clan.

**TRADING MEDICINE**

Flora talked a little more in Zuni to everyone, and then leaned toward me, and asked me again to tell my story.

I took a deep breath, gathered my wits, and told them my story; starting with the dream of the Sun Face, about the road to Zuni, and what had happened to me since I had arrived here.

Many questions arose as I told my tale; one of the old medicine society men asked me to draw the Sun Face: the colours of it were important to him.

Edward, the medicine man whom the policeman had sent me to meet, asked; “Steven, why are you here?”

I admitted that I really didn’t know, and that I was hoping he could tell me that.

He continued; “I can’t teach you anything about our healing, and I can’t share our ceremonies with you. They are secret, and I have sworn a death-oath not to share them with anyone not initiated to my medicine society. People are always coming around wanting me to teach them or show them things. I can’t do that!”

I told him that I hadn’t come to take their secrets or to learn their ceremonies.

Meanwhile, Bernice (the woman who had been conversing with the space above my head) - Flora’s mother – unwrapped a massive book and placed it in my hands.

“Here, Steven” she said. “This is a real old book, if you want to learn our secrets, this is where you can read all about them, and how tribal life used to be here. You can borrow this book and read as much as you want.” She ceremoniously laid the big book into my lap.

I thanked her and told her I really appreciated her trusting me with the precious book, but I didn’t think that was why I had come all that way. I told her that I didn’t think the Sun Face brought me here.

Edward, the medicine man whom the policeman had sent me to meet, asked me; “Is that your green car out there?”

I told him it was and he continued; “Where did you get all of that stuff inside?”

“Steven, why are you here?”

I admitted that I really didn’t know, and that I was hoping he could tell me that.

He continued; “I can’t teach you anything about our healing, and I can’t share our ceremonies with you. They are secret, and I have sworn a death-oath not to share them with anyone not initiated to my medicine society. People are always coming around wanting me to teach them or show them things. I can’t do that!”

I told him that I hadn’t come to take their secrets or to learn their ceremonies.

Bernice led me to a place of honour at the table, and told them my story; starting with the dream of the Sun Face, about the road to Zuni, and looking at me every once in a while.

Edward, the medicine man, asked me; “Is that your green car out there?”

I told them it was and he continued; “Where did you get all of that stuff inside it?”

I realised that the two kids had seen some feathers, crystals, and a buffalo hide I had in my car.

Edward, the medicine man, asked me; “Is that your green car out there?”

I told them it was and he continued; “Where did you get all of that stuff inside it?”

I realised that the two kids had seen some feathers, crystals, and a buffalo hide I had in my car. Ed continued, saying; “Why don’t you bring them in and show us what you’ve got. These kids can help you.”

With some help I packed up the feathers of ducks, roadrunners, hawks, owls, flickers and bluejays; a bag of turkey vulture feathers, a box of Arkansas quartz points, and a buffalo hide, and carried them into the main room while everyone waited.

Nearly all of the things were of religious significance to the Zuni, each of the birds were the guardian of one of the six directions; the turkey vulture feathers were used in initiations of medicine elders; the bison hide was precious to them beyond all things, and the quartz crystals found them speechless and reverential.

Over the next hour or so I began to gift or trade things with the people in the room, and I really felt somehow that the Sun Face, and other beneficial forces, were looking out for me.

In exchange for crystals, wings, and a bison hide I received turquoise and silver jewelry, raw turquoise stones, leather and many other different kinds of feathers.

After all the trading and gifting was done, Bernice invited me to share lunch with everyone, saying; “I enjoyed meeting you. I’m going to be sad to see you go. However, right now it’s lunchtime, and our way is that anyone in the house is invited to share our food with us. At least you can say that you had a Zuni meal. Maybe you still ought to go and see the old mission afterward, before you leave town.”

Leave town? It seemed I was being sent away. I had never thought what I would do after going to Zuni.

Bernice led me to a place of honour between her and her husband - Curtis - who had joined us for lunch. I sat across from Flora and her husband, the medicine man, who was particularly glad for our exchanges of crystals and feathers.

The conversation was sweet and pleasant, with many questions asked about my car and my trip. There was talk about the Kachina dances, gardens, livestock, jewelry and relatives I did not know, all mixed with rich, deep laughter that seemed to come out of the earth, bubble over like lava, and then sweep along the table.

Some of my sweetest Zuni memories are of the nearly constant laughter.

I was loving this Zuni meal, and was even beginning to feel at home amongst these traditional people, when there was a crash in one of the adjacent rooms, and a burnt rubber smell.

One of the young men jumped up and ran into the room and yelled something out of breath. I ran into the room and yelled something out of breath. I had never thought what I would do after going to Zuni.
in the other room.

The fan belt of an old dryer had broken, and it was thought Ed and Bernice would have to drive to Gallup, some 45-50 minutes each way to buy a replacement, if one could be found. They had work to do, and prior commitments for that afternoon, so the trip was going to create a lot of problems for everyone.

As I stared at the broken fan belt in the hands of their young nephew, I had a sense that I could resolve this problem another way.

I asked to see the broken belt, and took it out to my car and looked in my trunk. My hunch was right, the broken belt was a perfect match with one of my car’s spare belts, with which I traveled as a replacement part.

Triumphant, I returned to the dining room and showed Bernice and everyone else my discovery. We all laughed for a long time, as if this white boy having a replacement for their broken fan belt in his car was the funniest thing in the universe.

When the laughing had quieted down - and we had dried the tears from our eyes - Bernice said to me; “I can’t just take that fan belt from you! What can I pay you for it?” She was adamant, she would not accept it as a gift. “I want to pay you for it, so that we’re even! If you won’t take money for it, what can we trade? I can offer you some jewelry, or some carvings.”

I stopped talking for a second, and reflected back onto the whole journey to Zuni, the dream, and the Sun Face, and I found myself responding: “So, I will take something for trade: I will trade you this fan belt, in exchange for your putting me up in your spare room for the next two weeks!”

In the next instant, I was taken aback by the inherent brashness of that proposal. There was a hush in the dining room, and everyone looked at Bernice to see how she would react or say. Bernice looked inward, and then suddenly brightened up, winked at me, and exclaimed; “That’s a really good trade, and a great idea. Yeah, I’ll do that.” Then she stood up and shook my hand to seal the deal. Everyone laughed and even clapped a little bit.

When Bernice sat back down, she added; “Besides, I was starting to get sad at your leaving. I don’t think that we’re ready to have you go yet!” Pretty much everyone at the table nodded or cheered or stated their agreement. I was moved beyond words by this sweet welcoming sign of affection.

Bernice reached over and held my hand - her eyes were a little misty too.

“This is your home.” She said; “You have had at least several past lives as a Zuni.

One of your spirit teachers, that guides you, is an old Zuni medicine elder. I was talking with him about you when you first came in. You probably thought it was weird, but he sits right over your head most of the time and it was easy for me to just talk with him.

“He told me a lot about you and your earthwalk, and how the Sun Face brought you here. Steven, you have been my son before, and you have come back to me.

“What you are doing in the skin of a white man is also a mystery, but I figure the Creator knows what he is doing. Just know that you always have a home here with us, and you can come anytime, and we want you to think of us as your family!”

At this time, there was a great clamor: everyone at the table began speaking to me at once. It was one of the happiest, most joyous moments of my life - and the beginning of a relationship with my family, the tribe, the Bear Clan that later adopted me, and with the religious and spiritual traditions of the Zuni people.

I learned to see the universe differently, and to perceive my relationship to it differently. I began to understand who I was, and what I was doing here. I was taught to pray in the first way that made sense to me and opened my heart!

I did not steal their secrets - nor did I ever get a clear, linear rational reason for why I was brought there. There were no big ceremonies or initiations. I have never been formally trained in the Zuni medicine society healing ceremonies or healing traditions, although I was blessed to sit at the feet of some of the most powerful healers I have ever known there.

However, something has soaked into my bones from the red earth of Zuni - the songs of the Koyemshi (Mudhead Kachinas), the rattles, drums and chants of the Kiva dancers. the smell of pinion and juniper smoke in the air, and memories.

Memories that reside deep in my cells, in the spaces between my tissues - perhaps connecting me to other times, to other lives, to deeper parts of my soul’s memory. I don’t know.

This connection - to the tribe, the Bear Clan, my family, and the Journey keeps unfolding, deepening and ascending.

Dr. Steven Weiss has devoted his professional career to pursuing those clinical approaches that could best support his patients’ healing; he has developed a unique system of diagnosis and treatment, ‘The Altar of Creation’ in which he trains others.

For over half of Dr. Weiss’ life he has been an adopted member of the Zuni Bear Clan and has a great love for The Red Path’s ways of prayer and ceremony. He is devoted to the natural world, Tai Chi Chuan, Qigong music, and meditation. www.altarofcreation.com

THE STONES ARE ALIVE

The Ancient Magic of Zuni Animal Fetishes

Every culture, worldwide, has seen a relevance to a naturally formed stone or piece of wood which resembled an animal or other form from nature. These have always been seen as sacred objects, albeit a bit of branch which looks like a bear, or a stone which resembles a big cat. Even today people delight in the face of Jesus in a doughnut, or when they unearth a carrot which resembles a person - or a specific part of a person.

THE ZUNI PEOPLE

Zuni Pueblo is in a valley, surrounded by the rocky mesas (hills with flat tops) about 150 miles west of Albuquerque in New Mexico, USA, although there are pockets of Zuni people scattered across the whole area.

Zuni is an ancient Native American settlement, and it first came into contact with Europeans in 1539, when Spanish soldiers came to the pueblo. It is estimated that the Zuni migrated to the region some 3 or 4,000 years ago, and construction of Zuni Pueblo was started around the C11th.

Like many other pueblo tribes who live close to them - such as the Hopi - the Zuni have a series of Katchina spirits, who are responsible for aspects of Creation, and their ceremonial cycle includes a complex series of katchina dances, where dancers wear costumes representing the katchinas, complete with masks. When the dancers dance the katchinas, the dancers are considered to actually be the katchinas; the spirits coming into and taking over the bodies of the dancers.

A Zuni creation myth describes how the first ancestors emerged into this world from four caves in the underworld; but once upon the surface they encountered a land covered with water and filled with dangerous wild animals where earthquakes were commonplace.

Then spirits, twin children of the Sun, dried up the water and hardened the muddy earth with arrows made from lightning, shot from bows made of rainbows. As they shot each of the dangerous wild animals, each one shrank and turned to stone - and these are the first naturally-formed fetishes. But some of the animals escaped the shots of the spirits, and those animals became the ancestors of today’s animals.
The Zuni believe that human beings are the most complete beings in creation, but that makes them the least able to survive in the natural world, because animals, with fangs, claws, sharper eyes, and other keen senses, are closer to nature.

The people believe these animals act as messengers to the spirits, and because of this, the Zuni developed ways to call upon the spirits of the animals, by first of all finding the animals turned to stone by the Children of the Sun, and then later making their own animal shaped fetishes.

HISTORY OF ZUNI FETISHES
The Zuni were not the only Native American people to make and use fetishes, but they are perhaps the most well known.

The Zuni, just like all animistic cultures, accept the idea that the world is made up of beings with spirits, who interact and communicate with one another. Natural forms resembling animals have a deep sacred significance because they are naturally empowered with the spirit of that animal - and for the Zuni they are actually that animal turned to stone by the Children of the Sun.

The Zuni call such natural formed stones ahlashiwe [stone ancients] and they have prized them for as long as archaeological records and tribal lore can say, almost certainly thousands of years. Ancient, naturally formed ahlashiwe often had holes drilled in them, suggesting that they were worn as amulets and that then, just as now, they were considered powerful medicine objects.

Gradually, these spirit-formed stones began to be copied, being carved from sacred materials, and when ‘blessed and awoken’ were imbued with the spirit of the animal they represented.

In this process, the animal’s spirit is invited to come and live inside the stone - which in essence is exactly the same as the use of orgon spirit-houses in Mongolian shamanism, or spirit figures carved from wood in African traditions. This was also probably part of the process of making prehistoric European cave paintings and carvings. It is what human beings do.

In the middle of the C20th, Zuni fetishes started to become commercially desired by non-Native Americans, and the designs of the fetishes started to become more and more elaborate, as collectors started to seek them out. The fetish carvers responded to the new demand by raising their game, and so started exhibiting more and more creativity in their designs.

Nowadays, Zuni fetishes have become quite easy to obtain, with many places selling them online. They range from extremely finely made works of art - from artists whose work is keenly sought after - to cheaper and simpler fetishes, and even mass-produced fetishes often not even made by the Zuni - or even by Native American artisans at all.

The materials which fetishes are crafted from were originally found in the area where Zuni people lived, the most important material being turquoise, which is considered a sacred stone by Zuni and many other peoples. Alongside turquoise, black jet, shell, coral, fishhook, jasper, pipestone, marble, and organic items such as bone and antler have been used for a long time.

Materials like shell, coral and pipestone would have been traded from lands to the South and North of the Zuni. It has been established that in pre-conquest days, the SW of North America was part of an important trade route, somewhat resembling the silk road of ancient Central Asia. Stones, colourful parrot feathers and many other items were traded north from Mexico, and other goods brought south, the trade routes passing through the Zuni lands.

Modern fetishes are carved from all kinds of materials - some having travelled from afar - such as lapiz-lazuli from Afghanistan, a stone the ancient Zuni would have never seen.

WORKING WITH FETISHES
Fetishes were, and still are, considered to be very important sacred objects. As a fetish is a house, the power rests in the spirit who lives within the fetish, not in the fetish itself.

The spirits they contain are asked for help in healing, to bring a good harvest, to look after domestic animals, for help with hunting, for fertility, to bring rain, for help with personal problems, or to bring protection from witchcraft or the actions of enemies. They bring good luck, protection, and play a role in initiations into the highly secretive Zuni medicine societies.

Fetishes can belong to an individual, a medicine society, a family or clan, or the whole tribe. Their spirits are mediators between humans, the animals and sacred powers. If the people support the fetish by giving them food offerings, ritual blessings and prayer, then the spirits inside will support the people, and help them get what they need and desire, be it food, rain, health, luck or general well being.

A fetish needs to be blessed and awoken for it to have a spirit within it. Before that happens a fetish is considered to be inert, and these are the types of ‘empty spirit houses’ sold to tourists; when you buy a new fetish it is just an empty piece of stone shaped like an animal.

When life has been breathed into the fetish in a ritual way, and a spirit has taken it as a home, that spirit needs to be ceremonially fed and treated with great respect, because not treating a fetish in a sacred manner will bring harm to you, your loved ones and your community.

Fetishes must be fed with corn flour, corn pollen, or ground turquoise dust. Some, especially hunting fetishes require other foods such as blood. Corn flour should always be kept close to them if you are working with them in a sacred way, whether they are on an altar or kept in a small pouch.

Fetishes are also ‘fed’ and have power added to them by attaching bundles to them. These power bundles are normally made from turquoise, coral or shell, and sometimes have an additional stone arrow head attached. Bundles are normally tied onto the back of a fetish, and are a bit like strapping on an extra battery to give the fetish greater sacred potency.

In addition to a power bundle, many fetishes have lines, called a ‘heart line’ set into them, often of a different, contrasting coloured stone. This represents a line of power running from the mouth of the fetish, going down to its heart, where it normally ends with an arowhead shape. This represents the animal breathing in power.

Traditionally fetishes are kept in a fetish jar, a small pot decorated with crushed turquoise, feathers and other items, but they may be put into a small leather or cloth bag to go travelling with their human keeper.

Once a fetish is alive and awake, it can be worked with. Traditionally, when the fetish is being actively worked with, it is carried in its bag, which is often worn around the neck.

To interact with the spirit inside the fetish the breath of the fetish should be breathed in deeply by its human keeper. This is done by putting the nostrils of the fetish against your nostrils, and then breathing in and out slowly. This represents the sensory, is closer to nature.

To interact with the spirit inside the fetish the breath of the fetish should be breathed in deeply by its human keeper. This is done by putting the nostrils of the fetish against your nostrils, and then breathing in and out slowly. This represents the sensory, is closer to nature.

To interact with the spirit inside the fetish the breath of the fetish should be breathed in deeply by its human keeper. This is done by putting the nostrils of the fetish against your nostrils, and then breathing in and out slowly. This represents the sensory, is closer to nature.
the totem animals of the four directions and above and below, travelled on the Space Shuttle Endeavor.

The six Zuni animals of the directions are: south (red) - badger or bobcat; west (blue) - bear or coyote; north (yellow) - cougar; east (white) - wolf; below (black) - mole and above (multi-coloured) - eagle.

A set of these six fetishes, should be carved from stones of the appropriate coloured stones.

There are two major groupings of fetishes: the protective and hunting group and the domestic animal group.

The protective and hunting group includes: cougar (mountain lion); coyote; bobcat; wolf, eagle and mole. The domesticated animals include: sheep; cattle; horses and goats. Prey and domesticated animal fetishes are especially sought out by Diné (Navaho) herders, who work with the fetishes for the health and fertility of their herds.

There were also types of fetish, connected with the more magical powers and aspects of creation. These include such animals as: frogs, tadpoles, ducks and dragonflies, which are all associated with the rains; butterfly, which is associated with beauty and transformation; rabbit, which is associated with childbirth; and crow and raven, which are associated with mystery and the sacred.

In more recent times, many new types of animals have been carved, desired to appeal to collectors, and these have often been given rather New Age meanings.

Such animals are: armadillo - keeper of the home; dolphin - friendship; fish - the ability to hide your emotions; mouse - attention to detail; otter - play; raccoon - shyness; and seal - the family.

The nature of the fetishes has thus developed to meet a more mass-market, non-Native community, eager to find a collection of sacred aspects for themselves. Few of us would need to carry hunting fetishes around with us anymore to ensure our survival, but perhaps breathing in the spirit of otter, to encourage us to have a sense of play has its place in our stressful modern lives.

As true works of art, Zuni fetishes are beautiful, but also - if approached with a respectful attitude they can be worked with in a sacred manner too.

You will not have been initiated into one of the very secretive Zuni medicine societies, nor are you likely to know how to traditionally bring a spirit down into a stone fetish in the Zuni way; but the use of fetishes is the birth right of all humans, as all our ancestors have done it, in some form or another, for tens of thousands of years.

Those of you who can go and talk to your spirits by using shamanic methods, can ask them if you should consider using fetishes in this - either making your own, or buying off-the-shelf carvings.

If your spirits tell you it would be a good idea for you, you can ask them how you should go about bringing down the spirit into your fetish, and what you need to do to honour and feed that fetish once it is empowered.

You are not a Zuni, but you are a human being, and although it would be disrespectful to the Zuni people to try to ape their traditions, your spirits can help you establish new traditions of your own, traditions which are right for you. But whatever you do, if you are setting out to work with fetishes in a sacred manner, make your actions sacred, respectful and truthful, and honour the spirits.

The teachers I respect include some of my fellow Native Americans who have come forth to offer knowledge and their experiences. Over a half century ago, Nicholas Black Elk met with a white man to tell of his deep and powerful vision. Later, he sat with another non-Indian to tell of his deep and powerful vision. Many of you reading this have sought a teacher to learn more about the ‘Natural Way’. I think it is wise to let nature be the foremost teacher.

When choosing a two-legged teacher, I watch for someone who has courage and is willing to admit that they can be wrong or in error. One of the most profound abilities to be found in a fruitful teacher is their ability to admit that they do not know the answer to most of life’s mysteries. You must decide if the knowledge they carry will be beneficial to your path. Above all, allow your teachers to be human and grant them the freedom to make their share of human mistakes.

Once I identify a possible teacher, I must determine whether the teacher is authentic.

It is important for you to test the teacher. Ask yourself a few questions: Do they want to control you or things in general? Are they loaded up with superstitions or strange rules that restrict sincere prayer and ceremony. Are they purposefully making the teaching difficult so that you will have to keep coming back to them? Are they warning you to avoid other people’s ceremonies or other knowledge?

If their rules or procedures can be used in a practical way to restore harmony, then by all means respect them. I know a teacher who is fairly strict, but underneath he emanates a deep harmony along with some very worthwhile wisdom.

The teachers I respect include some of my fellow Native Americans who have come forth to offer knowledge and their experiences. Over a half century ago, Nicholas Black Elk met with a white man to tell of his deep and powerful vision. Later, he sat with another non-Indian to expand upon the seven sacred ceremonies. These men were writers’.

Black Elk intended that the knowledge of the Natural Way be preserved and passed on for the benefit of all two-leggeds, tribal and non-tribal.

Frank Fools Crow and Bill Eagle Feather, two venerable Sioux holy men who rebirthed the Sun Dance, followed...
Black Elk’s example. Their ceremonies did not exclude anyone because of gender, colour or bloodline. Both holy men spoke out for unity and cooperation among the races of the four colours. These men were known for holding ceremony for the healing of Indians and non-Indians who sought their wisdom and counsel.

I would also honour my spirit guide from the world beyond whom I have come to know as Charging Shield. I regard his force or mystery as having allowed me numerous adventures and experiences in the ‘Natural Way.’ Charging Shield’s spirit has also been a driving force behind my writing. I also remember Plato’s thought, “each of us has many teachers who alter the course of our lives. Some of these people may cross our lives for a moment and leave an indelible mark in our memories”.

I want to make it clear that I do not regard myself as a medicine man, it’s tough enough just being a writer, just having the courage to call a few spades, spades! I want to avoid living in a glass house and having people examine everything I do and I wouldn’t care to put up with the jealousy that is always dropped on a medicine man, especially the successful ones.

I am just a two-legged who has made my share of mistakes in life, and I don’t think that will change, I’ll make more yet. I don’t believe you have to be a holy man to acknowledge Great Spirit.

Many people these days place the patriarchal belief systems of the dominant culture into their interpretation of Mother Earth Spirituality. It is important to get back to basics and ask yourself daily, how can we keep a strong connection to the Earth and the sacred Four directions?

Setting your intention to getting back to nature is the key to living in harmony on the Mother Earth. The earliest Americans considered every day a spiritual association with nature, every step a connection to Great Spirit. The culmination of this association was ceremony. Ceremony is a beseechment, thanks-giving, or acknowledgment to a higher power, a higher force. If you are a traditional Sioux Indian, ceremony is directed toward Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, the Great Mystery, the Great Unending Circle, through the Six Powers of the universe, the six powers that Black Elk’s powerful vision describes.

The function of vision, ritual and perceiving intellect is to allow us to experience our spirituality here and now. We are a manifestation of the Six Powers physically, and they are clearly visible today and every day.

They are a direct manifestation of the Great Mystery and are contained in all life. Most Native Americans do not attempt to describe the Great Spirit. We believe it is rather foolish to attempt description of the Creator of time and space-things our two-legged mind cannot comprehend.

I practise the Mother Earth ceremonies as a natural part of my daily living. We use the sacred pipe in the seven sacred ceremonies 2.

Some of these ceremonies, including the Sun Dance and the Keeping of the Soul Ceremony, were banned by the U.S. government.

Unlike the ceremonies of the dominant culture in the Americas, Sioux ceremonies are very balanced. When a woman is present, it is she who will be the first to enter the Lodge.

A great deal of power and harmony manifest when a woman is allowed to take her equal place in ceremony. Probably more important, a great deal of wisdom is lost when a woman is not allowed her rightful voice in spiritual leadership.

We are seeing a significant rise in numbers of those who choose to participate in the international Sun Dance. This seems peculiar to me since the prayers we make are very old and require a deep commitment to the old ways.

I find it difficult to fault the respectful and well meaning use of objects for ceremonial purposes by a person who has a healthy respect for those objects and sincerely uses them to connect to the Great Spirit, and who is of course concerned about the health of our Mother Earth. I hope however that you will be respectful in the use of your ceremonial tools.

My teachers insist that to properly conduct ceremony, absolutely no alcohol or other chemicals were to be consumed, and this included the cactus bud called peyote. Bill Eagle Feather once told me, ‘We get our visions from our own juices.’ Both holy men I mentioned were total abstainers, and it is my strong recommendation that if you are considering taking a leadership role in ceremony, you abstain from all alcohol, drugs, or mind-altering substances.

For the novice wanting to bring the power of ceremony into your life, practise smudging yourself and making a simple beseechment to the four directions (or what some refer to as the Medicine Wheel).

Indian names, or natural names, are being sought after by many non-Indians. People are seeking a natural identity to become more aligned and related to the natural forces that flow in harmony. It is comforting to have a natural name. It is also a good feeling to have a stone, a stone that conveys a special meaning to you and has come to you in a special way.

Open your heart to the rising sun while holding your Wotai [sacred stone friend] stone and recognising that new knowledge can result from each new day is a form of ceremony. Your Wotai may be your teacher, protector and friend, a piece of our Mother Earth.

You may someday participate in a Sweat Lodge for purification, and in time a Vision Quest for one’s lone beseechment.

It is my belief that spiritually balanced people with good intentions should be welcomed to conduct ceremony, and that they should not be fearful. I think it is better for this ailing world that non-Indians have the opportunity to experience these ways since it will make them a better people. That is how powerful these ceremonies are and we do not have much environmental time to be arguing over who may participate in ceremony.

You must remember by living the Natural Way, the Native Americans lived in environmental tranquillity and in an intrinsic relationship with nature as dependent servants - not polluting, self-destructing masters.

Unchecked industrial growth has caused perilous pollution, massive over-population and has changed all of that for the inhabitants of Mother Earth. The red people had no need to consider changing their nature-based system. Their land was kept pure and clean. It was productive and had a balanced population.

History shows that my people were kind and generous peoples. We kept the Pilgrims alive and sheltered the runaway black slaves. We even taught the Pilgrims Thanksgiving and how to plant and fertilise the right way. These people did not place price tags on spiritual gifts and their expressions of gratitude could not be bought by the dominant culture.

The ‘Blue Man’ of Nicholas Black Elk’s vision 3 is seen as a symbol of those who have harmed Mother Earth and all her creatures.

The Blue Man, the great violator, symbolises greed, corruption, dishonesty and selfishness. Mother Earth, represented by the four directions, has fought back against the one who has made the grass and animals sick and the streams and air unclean.

I see the Blue Man as an untruthful, greedy and destructive being. Lying is a part of their customs. We don’t have to look very far in the modern world to see the
consequences of amoral leadership.

Although a person may be able to get away with his schemes and untruths, in the spirit world truth won’t be bought or sold and memory will be for an eternity. Natural justice will wreak its balance. It is said that in the very early days, lying was a capital offense among us. Believing that the deliberate liar is capable of committing any crime behind the scene of cowardly untruth and double dealing, the destroyer of mutual confidence was put to death.

We don’t have to look far to see the Blue Man in the tobacco industry, or the self-serving politicians who protected their secrets.

But we must not lose sight of those people who have integrity. Amongst those I have to come know are the rainbow people described in my book Rainbow Tribe.

The rainbow is a symbol of the Great Spirit and the many colours, ways, and races unifying. Nicholas Black Elk said the Rainbow people (Lakota: Wigmunke oyate) would become the spreading flames for a unifying force of good. The rainbow symbolises fresh spirit life, and from the rainbow little flames of knowledge fall. Where they land, flowers grow.

The rainbows are searching to bring forth that ancient tribal gene link that culminates an innate spiritual consciousness, a natural flowing guidance that led native peoples to personal and collective enjoyment for thousands of years. These enlightened ones are the Rainbow Tribe, a person who allows nature to touch into his or her own inner source of wisdom - one’s own heart. Their passion has led to an international resurgence of the Sun Dance.

There is a strong relationship between the ‘matriarchal’ Rainbow Tribe and the Celtic people. Some historians and archaeologists believe the Bering land bridge existed 200,000 years ago and suggest a nature-deity connection may have existed between the British Isles and the Western shores of the Atlantic. I have observed a deep respect for the Mother, (Lakota: Ina Maka), by the Rainbow people.

They are opening new freedoms for the female and are ahead of many of their modern Native American counterparts, who I suspect have been unconsciously influenced by the patriarchy of the missionaries.

Could the matriarchal respect being shown by the Rainbows be a reaching back to the best facets of the Druidic spirituality that obviously held a powerful connection to the Creator endowed extension of the natural entities?

My personal lineage continues to draw me back to the British Isles. A few years ago, I had dinner with Phillip Carr-Gomm, chief of the Order of Druids, Ovates and Druids. I discovered there were many startling similarities between Native American and Druid teachings and practice. The Spirit of the Circle, the Spirit of the Stones, and related stone circle (medicine wheel) ceremonies suggest a possible common past.

Like the Native Americans, both the Celts and the Druids practise teaching in the oral traditions. Bards keep the identity and history alive for their people, creating a communal imagination that weaves together threads of the past, present and future. Had the Celtic tribes endured the political tides, even if continued on some kind of reservation system as were the native North Americans, then a vast reservoir of natural, connecting knowledge would have been available in our time.

Unfortunately, the modern two-leggeds of European lineage, the Romans and the English Kings, the ‘anti-Mothers’, destroyed the truthful records of the Celtic Earth Knowledge. I am among the many who walk amongst the stone circles looking for clues of a people and way of life which is pure.

In part, my own interest in the Celtic traditions draws from my bloodline. I am part Scotch-Irish, almost as much as I am Native American. It certainly is a nature based combination. I am not a full-blood, nor do I claim a famous chief as an ancestor. There are many non-Indians with no traceable Native American lineage who declare all sorts of relationships with past tribes. Do not be untruthful to yourself. You are what you are and I am what I am.

People are people, and almost everyone in the world is a mixture. I understand it makes for healthier genes.

There are many Rainbows who believe they once lived as Native Americans. I cannot discredit their reincarnation theory, but neither can I substantiate it. This subject is definitely a mystery, but I have found little supportive evidence to verify such things.

The most important gift we have in life is ‘this day’ and the opportunity to be with those we love one more day. Relationship is at the heart of all ‘Mother Earth’ ceremonies and beseecmement.

After these pages, I hope you will keep your present vision and simply go your own path strengthened in a deeper respect and understanding for our Mother Earth. It is certain that Great Spirit is at work in all of this and I’m sure it’s all much larger than any of us are able to imagine.

This article was presented to answer the questions I am most asked when teaching.

I dedicate it to all my relations… Mitakuye Oyasin!

Ed McGaa, Eagle Man, was born on Pine Ridge Indian Reservation and was a Ogala Sioux lawyer, writer, and lecturer who introduced thousands to Native American spirituality, ceremonies and rituals. He served in the US Marines in Korea a fighter pilot, flying 110 combat missions, receiving eight Air Medals and two Crosses of Gallantry, and was recommended for a Distinguished Flying Cross. His two best known books are: ‘Mother Earth Spirituality, Native American Paths to Healing Ourselves and our World,’ Harper San Francisco, 1990. ‘Rainbow Tribe, Ordinary People Journeying on the Red Road,’ Harper San Francisco, 1992.

Ed McGaa passed into Spirit, aged 81, on August 25th 2017. This article - which first appeared in Sacred Hoop Issue 18 - is reprinted here again in memory of him.

NOTES:
2: The seven sacred ceremonies of the Sioux are the Sweat Lodge, the Vision Quest, the Sundance, the making of relatives, the keeping of the Soul, the womanhood ceremony, and the throwing of the ball. These ceremonies are described in detail in the Sacred Pipe by Joseph Epes Brown, and also are covered in Mother Earth Spirituality By Ed McGaa.
3: The ‘Blue Man’ was part of Black Elk’s vision and can be found in Black Elk Speaks by John Neihardt.
4: See the feature on the Sundance in Sacred Hoop issue 17.

SHOOTING THE SPIRITS

Two of the creators of ‘Lineage’ - a new, Mongolian short film about shamanic initiation - share the process of how the film was made

Amalia Rubin and Amargerel (Aminaa) Batmunkh

In March 2017, a team of three film makers with Zombie Orpheus Entertainment (ZOE) arrived in Ulaanbaatar.

The crew consisted of director Samara...
Lerman, director of photography Ben Dobyns, and Dave Richards, our sound mixer. They arrived in less than ideal circumstances, a thick cloud of pollution covered the city, and due to a recent crisis, there was no script for the proposed film. On the ground, the ZOE team met with producer, Tsegnel Davaaambu; and the two of us - Amargerel (Aminaa) Batmunkh, who is a Darhad shaman, and who was to act as our story writer and cultural consultant, and Amalia Rubin who was to act as a second producer.

We knew that we had less than three weeks to make a movie out of what was now nothing, and that all we knew was that it would involve shamans, and be as realistic as we could possibly make it. We had no idea what we were in for.

The film, whose working title is ‘Lineage’ tells the story of a thoroughly modern Mongolian medical student, eagerly awaiting her upcoming scholarship in Australia, when she starts experiencing odd visions and predictive dreams of a shamanic nature. She wants to ignore them, but history waits for no one, and the spirits have a plan of their own.

Strowlers-Mongolia, is part of a greater series, known as ‘Strowlers’, which was created by Ben Dobyns, a filmmaker based in Seattle, Washington USA and Vancouver Canada.

Strowlers tells - through a magical lens - the stories of people who don’t fit in with society. In the alternative reality of the Strowlers universe, magic is widely accepted as real, but also harshly regulated by the government. The Strowlers series of stories are an open world, in which anyone can write and create. It asks the question: If you had a magic that people feared, what would you do?

**CREATING THE STORY**

[Amalia] The process of coming up with the story was a challenging one. We had employed a script writer here in Mongolia and attempted to explain the Strowlers concept, but something didn’t make it through translation. When we received the script - over a week late, and one day before the crew was about to arrive - we realised that, although the writing was good, it absolutely didn’t work within the Strowlers universe.

It was into that stressful scenario that the crew landed, in the smog of late winter Ulaanbaatar. We had cameras, a three week window, a limited budget, and no script. Fortunately, if there is one thing I know about living in Mongolia, it’s that if you embrace chaos, everything will work out.

We held our first meeting at a famous local hot-pot restaurant, with three shamans, Tsege, and a few others present. It was there that we had to admit that we didn’t have a story.

So, when Aminaa approached me and asked to speak to me in private my stomach clenched. Was she about to drop out of the project? Fortunately, Aminaa is not one to give up easily. Instead, she came with me to my apartment and said; “This might be a stupid idea, but how about a story like my own and like the other Darhad shamans I know?”

We spent the next three hours hammering out a story, based on the lives of Darhad shamans that Aminaa had personally known, and adapting it to fit the silver screen. By the next morning, we had a solid outline, and with the help of our director, Samara, by the next day we had a complete script treatment. Two days later, with the help of a shaman, who is a film writer, a complete script.

Aminaa wanted to show what the reality of shamanism was like, including the non-glamorous parts.

While the story is a beautiful one, telling a story of magic, reconnecting to lost lineages, and healing, it also has some gritty and terrifying moments that reflect the life of a person who is bound to serve the spirits.

Fortunately, we had actors and actresses willing to really take one for the team. During one especially hard shoot, our lead actress had to lie on the dusty ground in one of the more dangerous ger districts of Ulaanbaatar, all the while completely underdressed for the weather. Samara and Ben offered to place a blanket under her, but she was so devoted to the shoot that she instead chose to endure the very uncomfortable and dirty situation for the sake of our story.

Some of the biggest challenges we faced were being as accurate as possible while keeping our actors safe and maintaining secrets.

[Aminaa] We wanted to portray the proper shamanic regalia, but we couldn’t make it perfect, because we had to make sure that shamanic secrets remain secret, because revealing them would be dangerous. So the first challenge was in preparing the Darhad-style regalia the actor, playing a shaman, would wear.

Shamanic regalia is for the protection of a shaman. When a shaman journeys, or gets possessed by one of their spirits, the regalia is their ‘armour’ against other, outsider spirits. This shamanic armour must be made in accordance with very specific rules and rituals, and only by blacksmith shamans, who are a member of a shamanic lineage.

In the movie, of course we didn’t have time to get a costume made for us, and we couldn’t use a real one. So, because of that, we tried to make the regalia as close as possible to genuine, ancient regalia - and we did, in the end, have to use a real drum and real shaman’s headdress.

When real regalia is made, there must be special ceremonies and binding rituals, which connect and bind the pieces of the regalia with certain spirits. Every single thing must be done very specifically; and in order to keep these sacred practices a secret, we couldn’t show them.

Certain items of regalia function as a sort of identity card for genuine shamans who can read a shaman’s regalia when they see it and understand things about that shaman. These secrets must be maintained in order to guarantee that only real shamans can signal to each other.

Using the complete real regalia would have been dangerous, because it is all owned by the spirits, so wearing a regalia means you are ready to get possessed by the spirits and ready to go to the spirit worlds. If someone wears real shamanic regalia, they could get easily effected, becoming dizzy and ungrounded at the very least. In a worst case scenario, their soul could get pushed out, and could get lost.

Another problem is an ordinary person’s body is ‘dirty,’ from a spiritual standpoint, and regalia is one of the purest things a shaman is supposed to have. If a shaman allowed an ordinary person to put on their regalia, it would taint the regalia, and when the shaman next put it on, it would bring that taint into them, which could harm their shamanic capabilities.

There are a lot of fakers out there, people who might copy a shaman’s regalia - which they had seen in a film - without understanding the proper meaning of it, or of the rituals they see.

So, because of all these concerns, we couldn’t use, or portray completely accurate regalia.

[Aminaa] This made a problem for me as well, as Aminaa and I only had two days in which to prepare the entire costume. So, for two days, I went over to her home, and helped sew and prepare.

For the maihavch (headdress) Aminaa volunteered one of her own genuine maihavch - one which she uses less frequently - but in order to make it ‘screen ready,’ we needed to adjust the tassels which hang down over the face, in such a way that we could still see the actor’s face when they wore it.
At one point, Aminaa told me to put on the maihavch, so she could see how it looked, but that crossed a bit of a spiritual line for me – putting on part of a shaman’s armor – and so eventually, we had to compromise, and I held it up to my head instead, but didn’t wear it.

OUT WHERE THE SPIRITS ROAM

[Aminaa] Another challenge was filming at spiritually charged locations.

Our second day of shooting was at a ‘shaman tree,’ a few kilometers outside of the city. The area around this tree is possibly haunted, and we had to do ceremonies before and after we had done the filming there.

We started by doing ceremonies at the tree. I had to give some offerings, and then seek permission from the spirit of the mountain, the nagas of that territory, and the shamanic tree itself. I had to inform them all about what we were going to do there before I could get permission.

All the members of the cast and the crew also made offerings, and since nothing bad happened during our times there, I think we can assume we that we were given the permission we needed from the presiding spirits.

[Amalia] I still think that our location was haunted. I was sitting, way off towards the side, next to an area of trees. It was very cold, and to try to keep warm I had the hood of my coat up. Several times, I would hear, or feel, a person walk by, just next to me. Every time I looked over, assuming it was one of the directors, there was no one there. And then later, a dog which had been wandering about started barking at nothing, barking at the exact same location where I had heard and felt those people.

[Aminaa] Filming wasn’t completely without spiritual difficulty though. Shaman trees are places where shamans not only go to honour the spirits and nagas, they are also places where shamans bring people to heal them and cleanse negative energy from them.

An ovoo (sacred cairn), near where we were filming, had a lot of offerings and other things on it, which people visiting it had left. That meant that people had also left a lot of their negativity on the ovoo too, because shamans have brought sick people there to cleanse them. Because of this, there was a lot of negative energy, and harmful spirits there, and if other people visiting were not careful it’s possible for them to pick some of that up.

So, at the end of the filming there, I told Amalia: “I think we might have picked up some bad energy. I’m going to have to thaw, the result of which was hard packed snow, over ice. A very dangerous combination.

The road went to within about 500 metres of the tree, but from there we either had to drive off-road, or hike. Normally, it would have been hiking without a question, but with all of our film gear, we wanted to take the van up. However, about halfway up the hill we skidded, sending the van careering (fortunately slowly) down until it crashed into a tree. Luckily no one was hurt and damage to the van was minimal as well.

The temperature was about -10°C in the direct sunlight, but we were located in woods - out of the direct sun - so it was much colder where we were. And now, with the van back at the bottom of the hill, we didn’t have anywhere for the cast and crew to warm themselves up.

I had brought a duffel bag with three heavy, wool-lined Mongolian and Tibetan robes, two blankets, and one down sleeping bag, but even that was barely enough to keep people warm. On more than one occasion, I had to sit on someone’s feet or let a member of the crew stick their hands under my armpits: and in the meantime I was attempting to hand embroider the backdrop of a shaman’s altar - while unable to feel my fingers.

We couldn’t build a fire without affecting the sound and lighting for a shot, so we were relying heavily on cuddling. While it all made for a difficult day, I must say it also really helped the cast and crew bond.

I must also give special thanks to Tsengel, who arranged for hot tea and dumpling soup; and also brought a bottle of vodka so that we could all have a nip to help keep us warm.

[Aminaa] We also did some filming in Darkhad shaman’s ger (yurt). This wasn’t a set, but an actual shaman’s ger, and there was a real altar in there which we worked in front of. However, good as that was, the ger was located in a very spiritually polluted area, with a lot of negative energy around, and because of this several people became dizzy, or sick.

[Amalia] I can vouch for that. During our first day’s shooting at the ger, I suffered severe vertigo, and Aminaa’s husband had to massage my head.

The second time I went to this ger, I got vertigo again, but this time it was so bad that I vomited.

[Aminaa] Things were really spiritually complicated there, with all the crowds and the cameras and the vibration we created, some of the spirits got a bit pissed off.

We were also using an actual shamanic ritual object, and accidentally the two actors made big mistakes with it.

Our lead actress dropped it, although nothing happened, but our major supporting actress bit a piece of string which was hanging off it, and as a result, breathed upon it. Breath is really important when it comes to shamans tools; no one else but the shaman should breath on a shaman’s items.

Moments after this, she was physically pushed off her chair. We all saw it. She fell as if she had been pushed. She was the first to say; “I think the spirits are angry, they got angry at me and threw me off.” We had to appease the spirits after that.

Using real shamanic items, such as a mouth harp, and the shaman’s altar felt a bit weird, because they are shamanic tools, not toys, or props. A shaman’s ritual objects are not something we can play with. I was worried what if people treat them in the wrong way, they might get hurt. But we had to use these actual items, because we didn’t have the time to make imitation ones.

TAKING THE CARE NEEDED

[Aminaa] The directors and crew really understood what the point of the film and the story was about. They also seemed to understand how it is supposed to be, and how a new shaman feels the night before they actually become a shaman. They got every single point.

We also were lucky with our lead actress too. She is good because she was raised in a shamanic family. Although she is not a shaman herself, she knows about the rituals, and knows about the sufferings of a shaman. She was raised to know this, even though she hasn’t experienced it herself.

While shooting one flash-back scene, we went to the countryside, but all we could get for a location was a modern nomad home, belonging to a ‘last minute’ volunteer family. We really couldn’t move certain things, so, all in all, this was a bit of a challenge for us, as the flashback scene was set in the 1970s and the modern house was out of era.
We had a child actress, a three-year-old little girl, who was super co-operative, even though she didn’t know what she was doing. The only time she got upset was when she was put onto a horse. At that point she started bawling - which actually was perfect for the scene.

As for our main rider - riding a horse with a child on it too? Well, even though horse riding is very much part of Mongolian culture, we’re quite a long way away from that now in many ways, because most people live in cities. So every single member of the crew was scared for that child, when the actor - who was experienced around horses - picked her up and rode away.

The horse was a pretty wild one, because it was the only horse belonging to the family we were able to catch.

We were all thinking “Oh my God, Oh my God” and worrying, because our actor had to pick up the little girl and control the crazy horse at the same time.

He was a moody horse, sometimes he wouldn’t stop when commanded, and at one point he tried to run off with the little girl alone on his back. As soon as the horse turned back we grabbed the girl, but it was very frightening.

But karmically, somehow, it all seemed beautiful. We feel the story of the film is important and truthful, and what it portrays happened, not only to me - Aminaa - but to most of the other shamanic families and lineages as well. We have high hopes that the film will do good things for the perception of shamanism in the world, and in Mongolia too.

Shamanism is not everyone’s game. Karmically and spiritually, one has to be chosen by the spirits to be a shaman. Everyone wishes to help other people, and it’s good to know things to do to help - and it’s nice to hear that there are so many people in the world willing to help each other. But in reality, it is not everyone’s job to be a shaman - it is not everyone’s life.

Shamanism is based on tradition and lineage. It is a knowledge which is passed down mouth to mouth, human to human; you don’t learn it through a book. The ability is born within the shaman, and then knowledge is passed through elders and tradition. Shamanic tradition - it’s all in tradition.

Mongolian tradition is all taught through ritual. For example, a milk spraying offering, which is done by all Mongolians, is actually a shamanic ritual.

Shamanism is always based on tradition and lineage, so if you want to become initiated with a Mongolian shaman, you can, but you have to understand and adopt the tradition as well.

Amargerel (Aminaa) Batmunkh lives in Ulaanbaatar with her family. She is a full time traditional shaman, often visiting her elders in the Darhad Valley of Northern Mongolia. She aims to help educate Mongolians and foreigners alike in the history and traditions of ancient Darhad Mongolian shamanism through writing, speaking, and tourism.

Amalia Rubin is a teacher and researcher, originally from Upstate NY, now based in Ulaanbaatar. Amalia has been researching Shamanism in Ulaanbaatar since 2013 and completed a Masters Degree in International Studies from the University of Washington in 2015. She is currently writing a book on living shamanic traditions in Mongolia. ahanarubin@gmail.com

A PRIMAL HOMECOMING

Geral T. Blanchard

In the ebb and flow of human development, there are current trends by which we are distancing ourselves from our basic instincts, perceptual skills, and the very planet that spawned our lives.

Burgeoning technologies which can think for us, pharmaceuticals that alter how we feel, and indoor creature comforts which confine us, have disconnected us from our past, and from the Mother. As a result, there is an emotional disquiet - at least in the West - which furtively harkens back to a partially forgotten time preceding our break with the land. This so-called progress, I contend, has actually given rise to a temporary form of devolution.

While thoughts and feelings can be governed by technological and media-driven distractions - as well as the pills we swallow - there remains an ancient wisdom which cannot be stilled. It is a primal knowing that is indelibly imprinted in our physical being, and in a vague, but distant unconscious memory which refuses - by the will of Nature - to be extinguished.

Currently, there is an overvaluation of the conscious mind and, with it, an atrophy of dozens of senses and abilities.

A sojourn in the Amazon, or the Serengeti, reminds me of the many skills that indigenous people have not forgotten, abilities that guide them safely through life’s inevitable challenges. I have met shamans who can look into another person’s body with their mind’s eye to diagnose an illness, Hadzabe Bushmen who can ‘wire’ messages long distances without the use of a cellphone or a letter, and Native Americans who can smell approaching changes in the weather.

It is in the quiet of Nature that shamans hear with their minds, their skin, sight, smell, and touch – talents which today are largely disbeliefed, or simply unknown outside of indigenous cultures.

Traditional healers consciously merge with the people they are charged with healing. This can be a tedious and time-consuming process. Meanwhile, Western doctors and psychologists search for new discoveries - innovative gadgets and apps, as well as the latest drugs - to expeditiously think and diagnose for us. All of this transpires while a treasure trove of untapped wisdom remains quiescent within us, awaiting rediscovery.
Our urbanisation and technological ‘advances’ have, I think, partially - but only temporarily - severed our awareness of our deepest biological roots, and the result of this has been a growing psychological and spiritual unease.

And yet, an instinctual yearning for a return to Mother Earth tenaciously tugs at us. We subconsciously detect an attraction, a primal hankering, resulting from the deep grooves etched in our psyche over the millions of years of human development which occurred while standing, sleeping and healing on Mother Earth.

Our species longs for the connection which we once enjoyed, and this ‘urge’ is, I believe, the enduring remnant of a ‘racial memory,’ momentarily concealed in our collective unconscious. This ‘connected memory’ remains very much alive in a few, very remote, and exclusive cultures, such as the Hadzabe Bushmen of Tanzania, or the Mayoruna of the Amazon Basin.

When I talk about this connected memory, I am referring to a storehouse of knowledge, held in the human body, below conscious levels. This knowledge seeks expression when the angst of our minds are troubled by contemporary stressors.

The archaic man - ‘the two million year old Self,’ as Jung described him - resides in subterranean levels of the human psyche, and when our modern lives depart too far from our original patterns of survival, this in-built ‘old man’s compass’ can instigate a course correction in our lives. This is what I believe is happening in today in many parts of the world.

Having had our lives nurtured in the embrace of Nature, the current disconnect can’t, in a mere few hundred years, erase our ancient inner knowing. Vague remembrances live on in our prordial soul and persistently seek expression - much like bubbles of air rising from the depths of a pond, which are compelled by unseen forces to rise to the surface.

The resurgence of interest in indigenous wisdom and shamanic healing practices are two ways in which this ancient part of our being seeks expression.

Spiritual tourism can be another circuitous route home, and even fishing and hunting can restore this tie, to a world removed from the office, and away from computers, artificial light and noise, noise, noise.

Psychoanalyst Anthony Stevens, who was profoundly influenced by Carl Jung, wrote about the collective history of our species, explaining how it is biologically encoded in human consciousness. The code owes its existence to origins, which are long forgotten at the cognitive level, but still guide us, even though they are mysteriously shrouded in the primordial mists of evolutionary time. Call it an archetype if you prefer.

Today’s spiritual and psychological meanderings reflect our long-standing and basic human needs. We appear to be seeking a consoling relationship with the ultimate Mother.

Another way of envisioning our current angst is to apply the psychological term, ‘attachment disorder.’

When a comforting, or life sustaining bond with the parent is abruptly severed, children instinctively set out in search of a substitute calming force. The child - and subsequent adult - may move from person to person, relationship to relationship, only to experience a series of unrewarding insecure attachments.

In adulthood the suffering may be expressed as a drug dependency, sexual addiction, or an eating disorder, through which we attempt to fill our emptiness with momentary pleasures and excitement - our new ‘best friends.’ But always the search, on an unconscious level, is for the original source of security and nurturance, a search for the natural mother who, we thought, disappeared from our lives.

Considering the span of human evolution this detachment from Mother Earth - which has only actually lasted for a mere 200 years or so - has been sudden and traumatic.

Nature is a sanctuary for the human soul. Our souls can be healed by the wilderness, which we infrequently visit. Wild places are permeated with a maternal understanding of our species relationships with all life forms.

Our bodies and minds are sustained by the elemental forces of Nature, and some of its tonic comes to us when we settle into her ancient rhythms. As our minds become uncluttered in wilderness settings - with their loud silences - Nature consolers and refuels our primitive spirit.

Being outdoors and directly on the land, I believe, fosters spiritual renewal. It is only with an experiential understanding of Nature that we can genuinely offer the reverence she merits and, as a result, personally develop in her embrace.

My psychotherapy practice has, I think, been the most effective when I have journeyed to the remote regions of Montana, Wyoming, and Guatemala to support patients in their healing process.

Without the availability of cell phone or internet service, and with no television or radio stations to distract us, the focus moves inward. After a predictable period of technological withdrawal, the imagined intrusions of gadgetry almost feel profane. In the sacred folds of mountains, patients sensuously soak up Nature’s healing balm. Bear, raven, snake, wind, water, and stones become teachers. A wholeness and harmony develops - and the essential spiritual start to any healing process.

Patients begin to listen with inward ears and see with inward eyes, becoming aware with their whole beings, rather than being limited by the customary five (of many) senses.

Nature is an unlicensed psychotherapist - thank goodness - her presence alone heals the agitated mind. This was the repeated observation of Minnesota naturalist and author Sigurd Olson, who wrote: ‘The outdoors has a way of healing and solving problems and works best where no conscious attempt is made, where no interpretation of any of its moods is even thought of at the time. Somehow, and sooner or later, we begin to discover that unconsciously during the time we were out, problems [were] being solved for us.’

Like the Native Ojibwa people, who lived in the far north of North America - with its many forests and lakes - Olson fell in love with Minnesota’s vast network of rivers and lakes, exploring them endlessly in his canoe.

He wondered if the indigenous Ojibwa found similar peace floating on the heaving and subsiding belly of the Mother, and he said of the canoe: ‘It is an antidote to insecurity. It provides a door to waterways of the past and a way of life with profound and abiding satisfactions. When a man is part of his canoe, he is part of all that canoes and men have ever known.’

Olson also reminded his readers that the preservation of wilderness must now be regarded as a humanitarian effort. His conclusion was based on the knowledge that humans have lived in a natural environment for far more than 99 percent of their history, and that their physiological and psychic needs arise from it, and are healed by it. A land ethic is, in fact, a human ethic. That too is the wisdom of traditional healers. While humans dance to the music of the present day, we still move, sway, heal, and are guided by ancient rhythms. We are still pregnant with the Earth’s teachings, and are only in the early stages of our gestation period - albeit momentarily derailed by this thing called ‘progress.’

Yet, our prognosis remains hopeful, as the resurgence in shamanic healing portends.

Dr. Richard Gerber, M.D., a Michigan internist and student of indigenous healing has said, ‘The discoveries we are making today are, in fact, reincarnational
NATURE CONNECTION

Damh McTavish

I’m of the mind that our connection with nature is all about relationships. We each have a personal and unique relationship with everything we encounter through our journey in life.

All things within the realms of land, sea and sky hold energy connections with us, and once an animistic connection to these is awakened within us, it will not easily be switched off.

How we manage this connection to all around us in nature is done moment to moment. Shall I smite that spider crawling on my bathroom floor, or shall I get a glass and piece of cardboard and relocate it? Do you take our drinking water for granted, or do we honour its qualities? Do we consider our technological toys each year, like a new mobile phone, as a hefty fee - sorry, I mean ‘exchange,’ as that seems to be the popular word for fee these days.

I believe that a huge portion of nature based spirituality, shamanism and paganism is taught by people we could almost call academics, who over-think the simplicity of the earth-based nature of these spiritual paths. They may be incredibly knowledgeable, and well read about every branch of study, but they seem to lack a surrender; an immersion, within nature. This seems to be a modern issue, I think people on the whole are too sanitised, and too fearful of things which they cannot individually control.

IN RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

Nature encompasses the entire physical universe, and everything within it, without exception - it’s everything that isn’t man made.

In the modern industrial world, the natural world grows smaller as time moves on; urban sprawl, roads, deforestation, mining, and the results of global warming, caused by the over use of fossil fuel. All these have catastrophically damaged the fragile balance of the natural world - humans, it would seem, have been singularly the most detrimental creature in the history of Earth; and so, what we have left of the natural world, must be kept untouched.

My own connection with nature is constantly evolving, and pulling me in directions which I never thought I would explore.

I’m of the mind that our connection with nature is all about about relationships. We each have a personal and unique relationship with everything we encounter through our journey in life.

All things within the realms of land, sea and sky hold energy connections with us, and once an animistic connection to these is awakened within us, it will not easily be switched off.

How we manage this connection to all around us in nature is done moment to moment. Shall I smite that spider crawling on my bathroom floor, or shall I get a glass and piece of cardboard and relocate it? Do you take our drinking water for granted, or do we honour its qualities? Do we consider the impact from our purchases, are we aware of the item’s origin? Does it bother us if that expensive quartz stone around our neck was mined by slaves?

CONNECTING IN THE BUSH

Thinking back, I cannot remember a time when I didn’t have a strong relationship with nature.

My father had an amazing connection with the natural world, which started in the forests and wild lands of Britain, and finished up in the wild lands of Australia. He was a lifelong ‘twitcher,’ and lover of all things that grow from the ground. As a moody toddler, I have been told that he would take me into our bush garden if I was crying uncontrollably. There he would fill my hands with beetles, and point out the birds and critters around in order to soothe my moods. I now do the same with my own two children, and it works.

As a boy, and into my teenage years, my best friend lived very close to me in the Perth hills in Western Australia. I could jump my back fence, run down a fire-break between the trees, and be at his house in under five minutes. Then often, we would both venture off into the bush of the Kalamunda National Park, and spend all day out there.

Together we climbed trees, explored rocky outcrops and splashed in the streams and brooks. There, we would find amazing polished stones under the water, or we would dig for quartz rocks at a secret spot we knew about. At other times we would search under rocks and fallen timber for lizards, scorpions and geckos.

We never harmed a thing, it never entered our heads to do so, we were there just for the love of the natural world.

We would explore, carrying no water bottles, or food, no mobile phones or devices - and we carried no stress either - just our connection to the place.

To be honest, I have no idea how we survived without a snake bite or a water-borne infection. I remember drinking from
the brook or the run-off streams countless times, and we would encounter snakes regularly; we had more than a few close encounters, and as I write this I have a smile on my face remembering it all.

Above all, our greatest quest, was to find what we called a rainbow gecko (thick tailed barking gecko). We only found these beautiful creatures rarely, the search for them was half the fun.

In my late teens and early twenties, I became a traveller, keen hiker and mountain biker. I used to work to pay for my travels, and when, aged twenty, I moved to Tasmania, I found this stunning isle to be like a heaven on earth - it is such a diverse and untouched place, with all its ancient woodland and raging rivers, snow covered mountains and perfect beaches. I would have stayed more than the two years I did, but having no paid work for over a year of my stay there changed my plans.

I remember being in the south western region of the island, near a place called Cockle Creek. I was hiking through a houn pine forest, where some of the old specimens can be as much as two thousand years old. I saw some huge trees there, and was left in complete awe at the vibration of the forest. I also remember skimming stones on a river there, I had never seen the perfect skimming stone until that day. Once, I recall being caught in a blizzard on Mount Field, in central Tassie. I was snowed in for days, and it was both exciting and alarming at the same time, although I did get a lot of reading done I remember.

In my mid twenties I lost myself spiritually, due to falling victim to a serious relationship, and dodging a marriage. I found myself being pulled from the things I am, and shaped into a creature I didn’t recognise.

And so - marriage bullet dodged - I went backpacking in Canada for a few months, where I hiked, and camped, and immersed myself in the beauty of the natural world once again.

Several moments stand out to me from that trip, such as camping in Jasper national park, in Alberta, for a few days and having a grizzly bear ripping my tent open; and I recall nights when grey wolves howled, their calls echoing through the valleys. I shall never forget that sacred call of nature, or the huge skies, the dry woodland, and the Athabasca river flowing, and always those wolves. Perfect.

Whilst in Canada, I heard the heartbeat of that land, I was at one with the elements. I remember floating down the Kicking Horse river in British Columbia. I had met a local man in a pub the night before, and he offered to take me down the rapids.

The salmon were running as I recall, I remember seeing dozens and dozens of bald eagles fishing where the water slowed in the wide stretches of the river; these magical sacred beings in all their glory and splendour.

On the same day, as we rounded a corner on the river, a huge grizzly bear was tearing chunks off a salmon, and as we moved past it, it gazed at us with not a care in the world; the wonder of the encounter, seeing this massive creature and having a special moment, staring into its eyes, while it remained perfectly still as we floated by.

I started getting serious about indigenous spiritual studies and practice when I was around the age of 26. I loved the ancient teachings, the wisdom and the outlook on life and the natural world that they advised. Because of this, I began to connect with nature on a different level.

I was very book taught at that time, I couldn’t afford the hefty prices ‘local shamans’ charged for their time, and after speaking with most of them, I just wasn’t feeling drawn to anyone’s teachings.

Eventually I made my way to druidry, and I was hooked from day one. My first teacher was a man of the highest integrity and connection, I owe him much for his wisdom and guidance. He taught me that experience is the greatest teacher, and so, as you can imagine, my training, trials and initiations were fully immersed in nature, and my relationship and connection with it.

As the father of two children, I am constantly immersing them in nature play, and the natural world. My wife is a passionate advocate for nature studies and forest schooling, and we love taking our kids on short ‘bushwalks,’ letting their senses open to the beauty of it all, while they climb trees, walk on old logs and splash in steams. We let them get filthy, and encourage their relationship with nature.

LOSING CONNECTION

It seems a shame to me, that I have to write about what I see as a loss of connection with nature, which many people have. It seems shocking to me that so many people have lost this personal connection, and this especially includes many modern children, removed from the natural world around them because of the fears and safety concerns of their parents.

As individuals, parents and guardians, we seem to live in such a sterile world now, where we often instil fear into both the current, and next generation.

I know people who only seem to leave their homes through their integral garage; rarely even having the windows on the car down. And then, they arrive at their destination - be it where they work or where they shop - and step out once again onto more paving, concrete or tarmac. Concrete to car to concrete again. And then, spending their time in the artificial environment of air-conditioning, or heating, they go about doing what they need to do before finally reversing the process, and finish up at home, in another concrete and masonry construction of artificial air and electromagnetic pollution. Familiar to anyone?

Our modern society attempts to defeat the environment - and if we are honest about it, it does a pretty good job of it on the whole. Don’t get me wrong, I have air-con too, but I don’t turn it on much, maybe on those unbearable warm Western Australian nights when sleep is reluctant to come close due to the heat.

So, why have we lost our connection with nature? Well, I think our previous generation began to lose their connection, and this current generation are feeding, and adding to, the effects of that. I think it started with television, and now our new media - such as computers and tablets - add to the disconnection, coupled with that growing fear and ‘education’ into the dangers out there. There is a negative fixation toward ‘bad nature'; killer sharks, another snake bite, a bear attack or swooping magpies. You never hear about the peaceful gecko, who lived and died without incident.

The media scares people, and as a result people seem more and more reluctant to step out of their comfort zone. A parent who instills this in their children will start a chain of fear, because, as a generational issue, it will only get worse as the years roll on.

Many children - and adults - don’t seem to make up simple outdoor games these days, I suspect many would say they were boring; ask how can playing ‘poo-sticks’ at a local stream compare with a video game?

Being entertained by video games or television has its place, but surely not at the cost of our connection with nature. In this world of Net-flix, tablets and the web, many are all fully immersed into this virtual world. How often do you see people seemingly ‘not present’ in the real world, and totally focussed on the device they hold in front of their eyes.

Nature is peaceful, slow and enduring, and yet people seem to want choices which are fast pace. I’m guilty of being on social media too much too, like most of us, but its a habit I am attempting to restrict; I
My daughter goes to kindergarten three days a week, and as I write this, it's winter in Western Australia, and so it's colder and wet - we have had a week of rain on and off.

During this current wet period, my wife asked her if she had played out in the playground each day, and we discovered that she had only spent short periods out in the elements. We spoke to her teacher about that, and the teacher explained it is a liability issue, as illness and accident can occur in wet and cold conditions; and many parents don’t want their children getting their clothes dirty with sand, scuffs and grass stains.

I truly fear what the next generation will be like in regards to the natural world.

SAFE IN THE COMFORT ZONE
Ask yourself a question. Out in nature what gets your pulse racing?

Would you consider ‘bushwalking’ by yourself out in the middle of nowhere? Would you spend a night out in the darkness of a forest? Is it the spiders and creepy crawlies that make you cringe, or the (real or imagined) deadly snakes, wolves, bears, spirits, or humans in the rocks nearby. Sudden noises in the dark initially make me jump too - I’ll admit that. But overcoming fear is a major step in our personal growth and spiritual advancement.

The dictionary describes a ‘comfort zone’ is ‘being in a situation were one feels safe and at ease.’ I know it's not everyone's cup of tea to be tested, and especially tested in nature. I understand that being alone in a wild place may be emotionally taxing and possibly traumatising.

But others - such as my wife and I - love being tested, and feel the progression through the trial in nature to be thoroughly beneficial.

I may sound like a man who laughs in the face of fear, and tweaks the noses of all the creatures who cross my path; but that is far from the truth. But what I have done, is to try to constantly face what has made me anxious.

As far as nature is concerned, strongly influenced by my spiritual path, I aim not to be fearful of anything which crosses my way, or makes sudden noises in the pitch blackness.

As an animist, I know that each thing which surrounds me, and shares space with me, has energy and a soul. Communication is the key in overcoming nature's dangers of mind, although this communication is not through words, but by our unseen selves, our natural and energetic selves.

Perhaps it's time to suggest a small exercise, or 'trial of the self' to you - a chance to move out of your own comfort zone a little. It's good to make an effort to advance oneself, and step out of the comfort zone. Throughout my whole life, I have climbed trees, scaled rock faces and interacted with wild nature - but you don’t need to start with such an extreme sounding adventure.

So, put yourself in a place that challenges you, physically and emotionally, and do what you have to do. But don’t venture ‘too far’ at first - and of course, ‘too far’ depends on where the edges of your own personal comfort zone are. Maybe experiencing the pitch blackness of a car park in a forest at night is enough for your first step. Car parks like that can be awesome places for nature spotting, just go a few steps from your car and open your ears, your eyes and your senses, the world is waiting to communicate with you.

NATURE'S UNSEEN ESSENCE
As an animist, my spiritual practice is animistic at the core. The definition of that is the knowing that all plants, animals, elements and natural objects have an unseen energy, about and within themselves, which is equal with all, universally. In my experience, everything within the entire natural world has unique and individual energies, and once we realise that, we are honour bound to respect that as second nature, for the rest of our days.

I recently talked with a man I met at a protest rally in Perth. We got talking about nature's souls and spirits, and of course animism.

I let him lead the conversation, as he confessed to me that he was an animist too, and could perceive the trees crying and giving out 'distressed vibes.'

I asked his profession, and he explained to me that he was a shot firer (an explosives expert) for a huge Australian mining company.

I thought about that as we talked, about his profession and animism, because, as I understood it, an animist would never willingly set off the explosives and destroy the fabric of nature. So, I asked him how his job sat with his animistic beliefs. His reply was blunt and pragmatic; “You have to pay the bills” he told me.

After we had gone our separate ways, I thought long about what he had said. It seems to me that an animist has no choice, but the one that protects, honours and respects our natural world, whatever the personal sacrifice.

When one is connected, I think one perceives that there is an unseen essence which brings union and balance,
throughout the natural world.

I can feel it when I am immersed in nature, but I cannot, when humans dominate one of Earth’s inhabitants; be it stones, trees, rivers, clays, fauna, flora, the elements, the core, the planet, or even a single grain of sand.

A new friend entered my life recently, a Lakota Sioux medicine person, who was visiting Perth.

We planned a half day excursion to an ancient Aboriginal sacred site in nearby hills, and when we arrived, we felt the presence there. It had been heavily raining for three days, and it was no more than 15° C, very unusually cool weather for a Perth January. I know this site well and visit it as often as I can, and I brought offerings of spiced rum and home made spelt bread. Even walking in proximity to the stones there brings a wave of vibration that hits me like a strong sea breeze.

It continued to rain for our entire visit, and I know that was the cost of bringing a new person here.

Huge natural monoliths are dotted about this place, which have stood there for millions of years, and we sheltered under one, and lit some herbs in order to smudge ourselves. I felt compelled to place my hand on the stone we were sheltering under, and it was very warm to the touch, although the rock beneath us was cold to touch.

My friend did the same around the other side of this huge stone, and there, it too, was warm to the touch.

Now, I am sure some would say, that was a result of storing heat within, the thermal mass of the stone taken on by the ambient temperature, but the sun had not been seen in two days, and the hills had received 15cm of rain, so in my understanding, it couldn’t have been thermal energy release.

My intuition, and the feeling information I received, was it was an energetic vibration from the core of the stone, this stone being’s core energy, core essence.

REGAINING CONNECTION

Being immersed within the natural world can have the most wonderful, and unexpected effects on your mind, body and soul.

Taking time for short walks in nature can be a perfect way to begin to connect, or re-connect yourself to the bigger world that is all around you.

Be aware when you walk, use all your senses and be aware of your breath. Step with care, step with purpose, and step using your feet as the sensory tools they are.

Open your ears, and be aware of the noises of nature all around you - both close by and distant. Acknowledge human made noises as having no purpose, and let them fade into insignificance; hear instead the wind through the leaves, the bird call near and far, the insects calling unseen, and the animals in your location.

Have no expectations, but hear their messages. Be aware too of the natural aromas and perfumes within nature, and let their qualities fill your layers. Smell the wetness of the pine, smell the dry heat, or humidity, and its differing effects on your physical self.

Touch that which you feel drawn to, and that which is out of your comfort zone.

Close your eyes and just be, having no care if others are about. Take pride in your earth reverence; observe through your eyes like you would do if you were a wondrous and inquisitive child. Forget all you have learned through education, and trust in nature’s magnificence.

Sometimes I am stressed, or feel I have the world on my shoulders; but for me, nature rids me off those feelings and I leave the natural world lighter, taking small pieces of its calm essence within my inner being.

So, for your own growth, as a spiritual warrior, get yourself out there, and embrace the gift of nature.

Damh McTavish is an amateur writer, earth-based practitioner and crafter of spiritual tools. He calls himself an animistic druid, with an evolving relationship wherever he hangs his hat. British and Australian primal energies and landscapes keep him busy with their diversity and ever-changing cycles.

damhanimist@gmail.com

BRINGING BALANCE- FEEDING THE SPIRITS

A Shamanic Offering and Drumming Ceremony for the North Korean Crisis

Nicholas Breeze Wood

With the present crisis around North Korea, the spirits have been whispering in my ears for many days about doing something ceremonial for the situation.

Here, I am offering a ‘Bringing Strength to the Spirits Offering Ceremony,’ and a ‘Bringing Balance Ceremony’ using a drum.

I will lay out the form of both ceremonies - you can either copy them, or ask your own spirits for your own ceremonies. The important thing is you do something, if you feel moved to.

As I go, I will explain how my ceremonies can be adapted, if you don’t have the same ritual equipment I do.

SOME BACKGROUND

About five years ago I had a ‘big dream.’ In this dream I was working with a group of Mongolian shamans - a group I have worked with many times in my dreams. We were gathering together in Mongolia to do a ceremony and some healings, as we have before, when all of a sudden, a very ragged figure walked across the grassy steppe to us.

When he reached us, he told us he was a shaman from North Korea, and he had walked across China to come to us to ask us for our help. We talked to him and he explained the spirits of the Korean people were in trouble, and so we went with him, in a group, to North Korea, and there met Generals in the Korean government.

The Generals were very distressed, because they knew - on a very deep level - that they were on a road to nowhere with their regime, and they also knew they had separated themselves from the spirits of the land and their ancestors, and their sacred ways. They were desperate to be helped, and asked us to do shamanic work for them.

We stayed talking to the Generals for a long time - the dream seemed to go on all night - and then eventually we made our way back to Mongolia.

On the way back to Mongolia, while we

www.sacredhoop.org
were in Inner Mongolia - which is part of Northern China - I met a shaman of the Khorchin people, a Mongolian group who live in North Eastern China, between Mongolia and North Korea. This shaman told me that I needed to make an iron framed drum, a type of drum the Khorchin use, and then added that I also needed to make an iron shaman's antler crown.

I was told the drum was to be used to bring balance, and that I was to play it in a specific way.

The next day, I checked in with my spirits, and they agreed with all that I had dreamed, and told me I should also do a ceremony to strengthen the spirits of the Korean shamans, and the ancestors, and the land spirits of Korea, which I did. It is this ceremony I will share here.

I arranged with my human blacksmith teacher to spend two days in his forge, and he worked with me and helped me make both the drum and an iron antler crown. When I do the Bringing Balance Ceremony I wear the crown and play the drum.

You can do this drum ceremony too if you wish, as a part of the whole ceremony. You won’t have an iron framed drum, or an iron antler crown, but you don’t need one, you can use your own drum - if you have one - and you don’t need an iron antler crown at all.

FEEDING THE SPIRITS

The main part of this ceremony is making offerings to the spirits. Ideally you will also sing improvised praise songs, or make prayers to them, encouraging them, as well.

You are making offerings to feed the ancestors (especially the spirits of the ancestral shamans), the mountain spirits, the nagas (lu) and the land spirit protectors.

Remember - not all spirits love you, so it is important that when you address the spirits - especially powerful ones like this - you say out loud, “those who love me (or us)” when you address them. This is a safeguard, a check on the door to the party, intended to stop undesirable gatecrashers. Whenever you call to a spirit like this, remember to say that phrase.

For the offerings I suggest you get a table and lay a nice cloth on it - this is a banquet you are offering, so make it look splendid. You could also use the floor if you wish, but lay a nice cloth down first.

You will need cloths of five colours, red, green, yellow, white and blue. If you don’t have cloths of those, coloured paper could be used instead. These five colours represent the four directions and the sacred centre, and also the five elements. The Tibetan meanings for these colours are:

- Red - West - Fire
- Green - North - Water
- White - East - Air
- Yellow - South - Earth
- Blue - Centre - Space

The Korean meanings are different to the Tibetan meanings, and my Korean shaman friend, Jennifer Kim, has shared these meanings with me, which are:

- Red - South (This has a phoenix as a symbol, and it represents summer)
- Green - East (This has a green coloured dragon as a symbol, and it represents spring)
- White - West (This has a white tiger as a symbol, and it represents autumn)
- Blue (or Black) - North (This has a tortoise or snake as a symbol, and it represents winter)
- Yellow - Centre (This represents the divine ruler and Grandmother Earth)

It is not important to remember which colour is in which direction, the important thing is to realise the five colours includes the four directions and the centre and the five elements. The five colours are part of the sacred invitation - the spirits will know what is what, you don’t need to know them yourself in order to do the ceremony. If you have a set of teachings about the directions you normally use, bear those in mind as you set up the sacred space.

For the offerings you will need:
- White foods. These can be bowls of cooked rice, yogurt and milk.
- Small sweet cakes or biscuits. Arrange these beautifully, with care, stacking them in tidy neat piles if possible.
- Incense or fragment smudge.
- A bowl of water (for the nagas)
- One, or several small candles, which will burn out in a few hours.
- A bowl of vodka or other spirits (optional)

If you want to make offerings to the protectors - who are wrathful beings - you need to make a special kind of cone shaped dough offering, which is called a torma in Tibetan.

These can be made from flour and water. They should also contain blood - only a single drop is needed, and your own blood is perfect. You are making a wrathful offering, so it is wrathful in nature.

If you are dead set against using blood, you can still make a torma using a substitute for blood - red wine is an easy one.

Declare to the spirit world that the wine is blood, and this will set your intent firmly that it is indeed blood. Don’t drink any - unless you normally drink blood - the wine you buy for this ceremony will not be wine any more once you have set your intention - you need to treat it like the blood it is.

The torma needs to be coloured bright red. You can either do this by adding food dye, or you can let it dry a little and paint it bright red - but remember, when you dispose of the offerings in nature, after the ceremony, creatures will eat it, so only use a paint that won’t harm them - such as a natural pigment mixed in milk or butter of egg yoke - rather than a plastic acrylic paint etc.

It is also good if you make an offering of a bowl of very strong, hot black tea - or good quality beer - for the protectors too.

When you have all your offerings, you lay out the altar like the banquet it is, in a neat and attractive way. Then you call your own spirit helpers, and then you call and make praise - by spoken words or song - to the spirits whom the feast is for - remembering only to invite the ones who love you.

Speak your prayers for peace, for all conflict to be avoided, for reason and compassion to spread, for the empowerment of all those beings who wish to generate peace, for blessings and open hearted dialogue between North Korea and the rest of the world, so that conflict can be avoided, so all beings can avoid harm, and so healing can happen.

Sing and make prayers for as long as you feel it is needed, keep your attention on it, be heartful and simple - instead of clever worded. Then, when you have finished singing and praying, you leave the offerings and the altar, and allow the candle to burn out naturally.

If you do this ceremony in the morning, remove the offerings before it gets dark. If you do this ceremony in the evening, remove the offerings in the morning.

The offerings all need to be given to the earth outside, so that creatures where you live can eat them. If you live in a very urban environment, and have no garden, find a local place near by, where you can tidily leave the remains of the offerings. Don’t leave a mess, be respectful of others.

If you have used a bowl of vodka, or other spirits, this can be either be left to evaporate on your own domestic altar, or taken outside and thrown into the sky.
The above describes a basic offering ceremony, and you can do one for many reasons. This example has the intent for peace with Korea, but feel free to adapt it for your own needs on other occasions. It is a good ceremony to do for your own, personal helper spirits from time to time.

If you do it for other reasons the five colours will probably not be required.

**BRINGING BALANCE CEREMONY**

This is an additional, separate, optional ceremony, but it can be done in conjunction with a Making Offerings Ceremony at this time if you wish, although it can be done on a separate occasion too.

Ideally, however, on this occasion, it is probably best to do it after you have made the offerings and performed the improvised praise songs or made prayers, and while the offerings are still on your altar and the candle is still alight.

The Bringing Balance Ceremony requires a drum, but if you don’t have a drum, and some other form of ceremony occurs to you, or your spirits give you a non-drum way of doing it, go ahead and do what you need to do.

The ceremony is fairly simple. You begin by calling to your personal helper spirits, and do anything you normally do before you do any shamanic work.

Then you ‘put’ the idea, person, place, situation, in the centre of your drum’s skin, in your mind’s eye (in this case the Korean situation), and visualise a shape - called a ‘bowen knot’ - around it [see illustration], with moving energy travelling around the knot in a sunwise manner a little like a model train on a bowen knot shaped track.

It is a very good idea to sing while you drum. I sing a lot when I work - singing spirit songs, in spirit language.

I ‘improvise’, singing ‘in tongues’, and I never know what I am going to sing next, although I generally know what the song is about. I don’t think about what I am singing - what sounds I make - I just open my mouth and it pours out.

As you visualise this wave of energy going around the ‘bowen knot’, you gradually bring that knot shape onto the ground around you, and drum within it - the energy travelling around the knot - as it was before - in a sun-wise direction, with you inside it. Picture this like you standing in the middle of a bowen knot shaped four directions or ‘medicine wheel’ - you are standing right in the very centre.

This is about being in the ‘centre of the world’ - the sacred centre of all the things, with the four directions all around.

This sacred centre is where all things are created, it is the place of the yin and yang - the duality - which makes all things - the two terminals of the cosmic electrical socket. It is emptiness - out of which all form emerges - before all form dissolves back into emptiness again. Things done from the sacred centre are done in power, and in a sacred way.

The iron antler crown my spirits told me to make, and wear, when I do this ceremony represent this too - for me, the reindeer is the centre’s spirit animal - the sacred animal of the centre - the spirit animal which teaches about the Mystery, the spirit helper which can bend and manipulate reality.

My drum, beater and antlers are each decorated with the five colours - red - yellow - green - white - blue - which you used on the offering altar. If you have fabric in those colours and wish to tie strips of them to your drum, that is good - but if you don’t wish to, or don’t have the fabric, that is fine.

My spirits taught me about the chaos in an unpleasant way - showing me how awful it felt - and that warned me that it was not a thing to mess with.

I was told to put a little vodka on the ‘spirit door’ of my drum after I have finished using it each time. This is to keep the chaos I have been balancing from creeping through, and into my own space. This work needs great tidiness, and attention to detail.

The ‘spirit door’ on these iron framed drums is the gap in the skin above the handle of the drum.

When you use your regular drum for this ceremony, it is a good idea to give it a good smudge when you have finished - or you can rub a little vodka all around the wooden edge of the rim at the back of your drum. Doing this seals the circle.

Balance is simply that - balance. This is not sorcery. Drumming for balance is not manipulating reality. This ‘model train’ is like a pulse of energy, it replenishes and remakes the shape each time it does a circuit.

Visualising is often hard for people - if you feel you are struggling to do it, just pretend you are visualising, and gradually over the years you will find that are really are doing it.

When it feels like you have finished the ceremony, thank your spirits, and especially thank the spirit of your drum and beater; then seal your drum and beater with the vodka or smudge. You can, if you wish, ask your helper spirits how to do this - ask them what is your best way to seal your drum. But do practise it, the very last thing you want, or need, is the spirit of chaos leeching through into your own life.

If this feels too much, don’t do it - this is not about gung-ho shamanism - some people are not going to be ready for this - they won’t have the personal power, or intent to hold it - and that is perfectly fine.

For all my relations.

With gratitude to Jennifer Kim, Aminaa Batmunkh and Mantrik Khyung for their help and reflections with this ceremony.
MUSIC AND BOOK REVIEWS

TARG
Bargou 08
CD or Download: 42.49 mins.
Glitterbeat Records: GBCD 045
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

You want earthy? I’ll give you earthy, this is kind of down and dirty Tunisian drum and bass, done in a North African style with a lot of farty reed and woodwind instruments, heaps of drums, loutar (a type of Moroccan lute) pumping synth bass line, swirls and drones, vocals and a pounding infectious beat - high energy or what! Extraordinary gutsy North African folk rock - put it on - turn it up and blow your windows out.

Available from Amazon and iTunes etc.
On Spotify
YouTube: www.bit.ly/Bargou08-YouTube
Four Feathers

LASA:
Hanitra Ranaivo
CD or Download: 45.00 mins.
Arc Music: EUCD 2688
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Hanitra is a Madagascan singer-songwriter, fusing traditional sounds and western rock in a very delightful way. Instrumentally it is Western - guitars, bass, drums and keyboards - with just a few traditional instruments, but stylistically it’s traditional and the combination works beautifully. I especially like the studio work on the album. The production is beautiful, powerful bass guitar and crisp tight drums. Her voice is lovely throughout.

The album is dedicated to women and features eleven songs, covering such subjects as deforestation, same-sex love, the maltreatment of women and a call for a rebellion of women under the yoke of men. All sung in her native language with great sensitivity. All in all, a beautiful, haunting, mesmeric, delicate, powerful, rich gutsy album.

Available from Amazon and iTunes etc.
On Spotify
www.bendigedig.org
www.mwldan.co.uk
www.arcmusic.co.uk
Four and Half Feathers - Album of the Issue

KRISHNA IN SPRING
Various Artists
CD or Download: 69.01 mins.
Arc Music: EUCD 2745
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

There was a time when, if you wanted to do field recordings, you had to lug monstrous reel-to-reel tape recorders around using teams of ox (or yak) to drag them. Now, with digital recording one could almost get by with a mobile phone, and general the sound quality of the phone recordings is better too. This album is made up of both kinds of recording, although the sound quality throughout is lovely. It’s an album of eight recordings of traditional music and songs devoted to the Hindu God Krishna, recorded by the late Indian musicologist Deben Bhattacharya (1920-2001), and the title of the album comes from his quote ‘to surrender oneself to the spirit of life…is the message of Krishna in Spring’.

A lovely gentle album of traditional Indian sacred music.

Available from Amazon and iTunes etc.
On Spotify
www.arcmusic.co.uk
Three and Half Feathers

THE WAY OF THE SHAMAN: The Work of Michael and Sandra Harner
Director: Coleen LeDrew Elgin
Foundation for Shamanic Studies
Online Streaming: 68mins
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

You know, probably, if it wasn’t for the work of Michael Harner you wouldn’t be reading Sacred Hoop Magazine, in fact you probably wouldn’t even know the word ‘shamanism’, or what it means, and might not have idea that the spirits exist and interact with humanity.

Born in 1929, Michael was actively studying shamanism back in 1957 - the year I was born in - making you and I Johnny-come-latelies, and mere infants. He has devoted his life to bringing shamanism to the West, and created the concept of core shamanism. If you have ever learned to do a shamanic drum journey, or read a new-age book about shamanism, you have to thank Michael, he is the root of everything we - in the shamanic community - do today, whether you have worked with him, or the Foundation for Shamanic Studies, or not.

This is a lovely film, chronicling his life and work, from the 1950s, when he was an anthropology researcher in the Amazon, working with the Jívaro (Shuar) people, through his first tentative steps teaching people in the West, and on to the establishing of his organisation, the Foundation with his wife Sandra

Made up of a series of interviews with Michael and Sandra, along with friends and colleagues - and interspersed with film clips of workshops being taught, and
truly connected. It seems impossible - that both humans and wolves are connected.

Chen, the young student from urban Beijing, is sent to work with nomadic shepherds on the isolated steppes. He comes to realise that without the wolves of the steppes, and, listening to the relationship between the people and the landscape making it true eye-candy. The scenes featuring the wolves are shot in a majestic, stunning way - the wide open steppe being a character in the film in its own right - helping to create a visual delight to watch. Well worth your while making an effort to watch this.

Movie Trailer: www.bit.ly/Wolf-Totem-Trailer

Streaming on Netflix

CROSSROADS OF CONTINENTS:
Cultures of Siberia and Alaska
William W. Fitzhugh and Aron Crowell
Smithsonian Books

This is a large book, rich with wonderful images of artifacts from the natives of Siberia and Alaska, looking at the comparisons between these two cultures. The book contains information and examples of ritual objects - including masks, fetishes, ritual clothing, ritual musical instruments - ordinary clothing, domestic equipment, boats, houses, hunting equipment and much more. Most of the illustrations are in colour and there is clear information about them all. As a book for crafts people or artists - seeking inspiration for sacred craft projects - it's invaluable; the number of spirit fetish dolls and masks alone in it make it worth buying.

A most interesting book, with an in-depth text, although it is delightful merely to flip through it, taking in the images. Don’t let the price put you off, Amazon seems to have several second-hand copies, I bought mine for £5, and it was a fiver well spent.

Available from Amazon etc.

THE HISTORY OF CENTRAL ASIA:
Part Three - The Age of Islam and the Mongols
Christoph Baumer

This is the third book in a mighty series of sumptuously illustrated books about Central Asia and the Silk roads. Each book in the series takes us slightly further forward in time and looks at the region at that specific time. We have reviewed each book in the series as they have been published, at a rate of around one every eighteen months or so.

This volume covers periods between the C9th and C15th - focusing on both the rise of Islam and the Mongol empire under Chiggis (Genghis) Khan and his descendants. It looks at the influence the Mongol empire had on Islamic thought and art and how this reached its zenith in Persia and India during this time. It also includes a long section of Buddhism in Western China and the barbaric reign of Timur-e Lang.

All of the books in the series - which are large heavy tomes - are very richly illustrated in full colour, with many exquisite maps, photos of archaeological discoveries, sacred and secular objects, artwork and sculpture, and cities and other locations. They are all truly books to delight in and devour.

Available from Amazon etc.

SCYTHIANS:
Warriors of Ancient Siberia

I’ve appreciated Scythian art since I first encountered it many years ago. The Scythians were a culture that ranged across the steppes of Central Asia, from Mongolia and Tuva, right across to Hungary and the edge of Europe. They were a nomadic war-like culture, but their incredible zoomorphic art is outstanding, consisting of many images of deer and wolves and bears and tigers - oh my!

This quite extraordinary book is the exhibition catalogue to a major exhibition of Scythian art, held in the British Museum, London, between September 14th 2017, to January 14th 2018.

The book is absolutely sumptuous, profusely illustrated as it is with many, many, dazzling photographs of ritual and domestic objects, gold work, textiles, carvings in wood and stone, persevered clothes and domestic equipment, weapons, horse equipment, items for the afterlife, beads, bronze mirrors, rugs and carpets (the world’s oldest carpet was excavated from a frozen Scythian tomb in Tuva), and much more besides. Most of the items come from excavated frozen tombs, time capsules in the permafrost - which is now rapidly thawing due to global warming. Through out the book the text is interesting
and relevant and each photograph has a full description so you always know what you are looking at.

I have several books about Scythian art on my own shelves as I am personally very drawn to it, but this is by far the best book on the subject I have ever seen. As a craftsman I think this book is an absolute design godsend, full of amazing things from a people who, apparently rode the winds of the sacred with everything they made. Absolutely Glorious.

Available from Amazon etc.

THE ART OF A WAKENING:
Konchog Lhadrepa and Charlotte Davis
Snow Lion Books
PB: 496 pages. £26.00/$19.95
ISBN: 978 1 61180 387 7
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is an in-depth sacred manual for Tibetan Buddhist thangka painters, but it’s not a book about Tibetan art from a Western perspective, instead it is a book about the making of sacred art from a Tibetan perspective. It is full of Tibetan Buddhist visualisation and other practices, to be employed from the start of the painting process, right up to the end of the process, when the completed painting is blessed and awakened. I have never seen a book like it before, a total manual about the spirituality underpinning Tibetan sacred art. Unique and, although not for everyone, essential reading if you truly want to understand the ‘magical’ structure beneath the paint.

Available from Amazon etc.

WOMEN IN THE ANCIENT WORLD
Jenifer Neils
British Museum Press
PB: 216 pages. £18.99/$23.95
ISBN: 978 0 7141 5077 2
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is a book about what it says on the tin. It doesn’t cover the whole world, but focuses on the depictions of women in art from Ancient Egypt, through Rome and Greece to the Near East.

The book is divided up into several sections, each focusing on different roles women fulfilled in the ancient world, including mothers, mourners, working women, priestesses and royalty. Through its pages, it is filled with colourful images of art depicting women in each of these roles, as well objects used in those roles, all held together with a captivating text.

Not really a book about the sacred per se, but in this age of patriarchy it does redress the balance - even if it’s only a tiny bit, and I think many would appreciate looking to see how our ancestors portrayed half of the population.

Available from Amazon etc.

SEIDR 5.0
by Jurgen I. Eriksson
Norrshaman Books
PB: 96 pages. €25/$30.00
ISBN: 978 91 97833 8 3
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This little book, written in clear English, is about Nordic shamanism and the ancient practice of Seidr, a form of shamanic divination, which is first recorded in the Viking Edda.

The book has a very nordic feel, with many mentions of the shamanic traditions of the Sami people of Northern Norway and Finland, including some interesting discussion on various types of spirits and their importance.

One section of the book contains a list of 154 tenets of shamanism, most of which I wholeheartedly agree with, although a few I would refute, and some feel well out of place, as they get more and more Marxist and literally Communist as the list gets towards its close, and they have very little to do with any form of shamanism as i know it, and seem to say much more about the authors political leanings. I think this list could - and should - have been largely omitted.

After this, the style of the book settles down again and we have sections on utiseta (an ancient Nordic vision quest practice), the use of the drum, shamanic journeying, the practice of seidr, the use of sacred yoiks (songs), runes and sacred dance, ritual objects, ceremony and other topics.

It’s not the most comprehensive book, but it’s solid, and for those who feel the need to explore shamanism from a more European basis it will, I am sure, give much food for thought and trigger further explorations.

Available from Amazon etc.

ANCESTRAL MEDICINE:
Rituals for Personal and Family Healing
Daniel Foor
Bear and Co Books
PB: 336 pages. £13.99/$16.95
ISBN: 978 1 59143 269 2
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

We all have ancestors, and in many societies across the planet they are considered to be important spirits.

This is a really beautiful book all about the role of ancestors, and about ways for us to make preparations to join them - because we will be ancestors ourselves, soon enough.

Filled with good, sacred sense, wise teachings, practical ceremonial and other things which we can do ourselves to connect and pay homage to the ancestors, the book offers us something which so lacking in our current dis-connected culture.

This work outlined in this book is both for the sake of the living and the dead, the ancestors are not just here for our benefit, as we too are are here for theirs - we are hand in hand in an interconnected dance across the ages.

A timely, important and invaluable book.

Available from Amazon etc.
PEOPLE ON THE PATH - EVENTS DIARY

SEPT  2017

SEPT 3: SHAMANIC SUNDAYS (FOREST OF DEAN) Monthly journeying group on the first Sunday of each month.
With Mandy Pullen. Suitable for beginners and those more experienced. Contact (01594) 541 850 www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk

SEP 3-6: MIDWIFING THE SOUL (SOMERSET) Residential course teaches shamanic methods of soul-retrieval, extraction of spiritual intrusions and practical ways to guard the three souls.
Explore the Celtic concept of the soul and its re-enchantment, through the profound medium of soul-singing. Caitlin Matthews and Angela Cotter. Contact Jane May (01865) 407 680 janedmay@btinternet.com www.hallowquest.org.uk

SEP 9-17: PICTURES FROM OTHERWHERE (CEREDIGION) Shamanic art exhibition and events - a sacred (temples) art space. Throughout each day there will be moments of drumming, silent listening, celebratory ritual, blessing, live music, and sacred clowning which you are welcome to take part in or watch. Not open every day, visit the website for details. With Faith Nolton, Jane Verney and Nicholas Breeze Wood. www.EarthStars.land

SEP 9: REVISITING THE SHAMANIC JOURNEY (ABERGAVENNY) ‘Wild in the Woods’ day of review and re-wilding your shamanic methodology. Unlearning bad habits that prevent you from deepening and expanding your connection to Spirit. We will explore journeying to self, your community and our Earth in the sanctuary of a beautiful woodland. Maxine Smillie shamaniclife.co.uk (01973) 858 391

SEP 9: PLANT ECO SHAMANISM (SOMERSET) Working with plant perception and resonance. With Mandy Pullen and Freya Davies in the Forest of Dean. Contact (01594) 541 850 or (07805) 800 313 www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk

SEP 10: REVISITING THE SHAMANIC JOURNEY (MONTMOUTHSHIRE) Wild In The Woods. A day of review and re-wilding shamanic methodology. Unlearning bad habits that prevent you from deepening and expanding your connection to Spirit in beautiful welsh woodland. Maxine Smillie (07845) 933 860 connect@shamaniclife.co.uk www.shamaniclife.co.uk

SEP 10: 3 RIVERS SHAMANIC GROUP (N.E. ESSEX) To the woods, to the water, or in a building. Journey and socialise. For details contact Julia, via www.3riversshamanicgroup.co.uk

SEP 23: AUTUMN EQUINOX OPEN RITUAL (ORKNEY) Celebrate the Autumn Equinox, inclusive, family friendly, free event. A Scottish Pagan Federation event. With: Helen and Mark Woodsford-Dean. Contact: info@spiritualorkney.co.uk www.spiritualorkney.co.uk

SEP 23-24: THE STONE PEOPLE (CONWAY). Weekend 1: exploring grounding, protection, and connecting to Mother Earth. Contact Paul Francis (01492) 873 739 paulfran@gmail.com www.therapeutic-shamanism.co.uk

SEP 24: PIPE CIRCLE (NORTH PEMBROKESHIRE) A chance to sit with the sacred pipe, a traditional Native American prayer ceremony. With Nick Breeze Wood. Nick@sacredhoop.org

SEP 30: INTRODUCTION TO SHAMANISM (MANCHESTER). One-day experiential workshop. No prior experience needed. Contact Paul Francis (01492) 873 739 paulfran@gmail.com www.therapeutic-shamanism.co.uk

SEP 30: JOURNEYS OF DISCOVERY (NORTH CORNWALL) Drumming, healing and journey circle. All welcome, novice and experienced who would like to explore the world of the shaman. Warm, friendly and open circle. Contact Derek (07788) 432 380 www.healingtree.org.uk

SEP 30-OCT 1: THE SHAMAN’S MIRROR (NORTH PEMBROKESHIRE) Weekend of teachings on the use of the bronze shamans mirror. With Nick Breeze Wood. Nick@sacredhoop.org

OCT  2017

OCT 7: ECO SHAMANISM INTRODUCTION (GLOUCESTERSHIRE & BRISTOL) Experience a marriage of shamanism and deep ecology - a taster day for a year long course in Eco Shamanism starting February 2018. With Mandy Pullen. Contact (01594) 541 850 www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk

OCT 8: 3 RIVERS SHAMANIC GROUP (N.E. ESSEX) To the woods, to the water, or in a building. Journey and socialise. Julia www.3riversshamanicgroup.co.uk

OCT 12-22: NATIVE SPIRIT FILM FESTIVAL (LONDON) 11th Annual Festival of Indigenous Peoples Contact: nativespiritfilms@gmail.com (07779) 529 589 www.nativespiritfoundation.org

OCT 21: JOURNEYS OF DISCOVERY (NORTH CORNWALL) Drumming, healing and journey circle. All welcome, novice and experienced who would like to explore the world of the shaman. Warm, friendly and open circle. Contact Derek (07788) 432 380 www.healingtree.org.uk

OCT 22: PIPE CIRCLE (NORTH PEMBROKESHIRE) A chance to sit with the sacred pipe, a traditional Native American prayer ceremony. With Nick Breeze Wood. Nick@sacredhoop.org

OCT 28: A WAKENING THE AWENYDD (MONMOUTHSHIRE) Mabinogion: Intro Day. We will work with the stories from the Mabinogion, the Welsh ‘creation’ story. The mysteries of Welsh Shamanic practices have not been lost, they are alive and vibrant. The time is now. Maxine Smillie (07845) 933 860 connect@shamaniclife.co.uk www.shamaniclife.co.uk

OCT 28 : ECO SHAMANISM INTRODUCTION (GLOUCESTERSHIRE & BRISTOL) Experience a marriage of shamanism and deep ecology - a taster day for a year long course in Eco Shamanism starting February 2018. With Mandy Pullen. Contact (01594) 541 850 www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk

NOV  2017

NOV 4-5: INTRODUCTION TO SHAMANISM (EBBW VALE) For many the Shamanic journey brings about a sense of joy and offers practical methods which enable us to connect with and express our own spirit. Rediscover your spiritual authority through communing with spirit teachers. Maxine Smillie (07845) 933 860 connect@shamaniclife.co.uk www.shamaniclife.co.uk

NOV 11: LEARN THE SHAMAN’S JOURNEY (GLOUCESTERSHIRE) Learn the shaman’s journey technique, explore the shaman’s map and more. With Mandy Pullen in the Forest of Dean. Contact (01594) 541 850 www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk

NOV 12: 3 RIVERS SHAMANIC GROUP (N.E. ESSEX) To the woods, to the water, or in a building. Journey and socialise. Julia www.3riversshamanicgroup.co.uk

NOV 12-15: VOYAGES OF THE SOUL (SOMERSET) Shamanic wisdom of death. Advanced course explores how we help the dying, and the healing around bereavement, hauntings, unfinished
business and ancestral bequests. The Soul Friends Moon Boat Ritual offers consecration as an Anam-Cara or Soul Friend, a soul-midwife to the dying. Caitlin Matthews and Angela Cotter. Jane May (01865) 407 680 janedmay@btinternet.com

NOV 19: PIPE CIRCLE (NORTH PEMBROKESHIRE) A chance to sit with the sacred pipe, a traditional Native American prayer ceremony. With Nick Breeze Wood. Nick@sacredhoop.org

NOV 25: JOURNEYS OF DISCOVERY (NORTH CORNWALL) Drumming, healing and journey circle. All welcome, novice and experienced who would like to explore the world of the shaman. Warm, friendly and open circle. Contact Derek (07788) 432 380 www.healingtree.org.uk

NOV 25-26: SHAMANIC DREAMING (ABERGAVENNY) The times we live in are demanding we let go of our old stories, fears and dreams which no longer serve us. For us to wake to new dreaming potentials we must dismember old structures to form new enlightened ways of living. Maxine Smillie shamaniclife.co.uk (01873) 858 391

DEC 2017

DEC 1–3: VOICES OF THE GODDESS (GLOUCESTERSHIRE) Poetry and prophecy from the deep lands. The Goddesses of Britain and Ireland inspire and guide us: Cailleach, Queen of the Wood, Scotia, Britannia. Her poets address us prophetically from their communion with the land: transcending national and political divides, through the poetry of David Jones, Charles Williams and W.B.Yeats, we open to the deep lands through myth, meditation, and ritual with John and Caitlin Matthews, Dwina Murphy Gibb and Ian Rees. info@hawkwoodcollege.co.uk, (01453) 759 034

DEC 10: 3 RIVERS SHAMANIC GROUP (N.E. ESSEX) To the woods, to the water, or in a building. Journey and socialise. Julia www.3riversshamanicgroup.co.uk

DEC 17: PIPE CIRCLE (NORTH PEMBROKESHIRE) A chance to sit with the sacred pipe, a traditional Native American prayer ceremony. With Nick Breeze Wood. Nick@sacredhoop.org

Practitioner Profile....

Amalia Rubin

location: Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia and New York, USA

www.patreon.com/withfeetovermyhead

Where did you first meet shamanism?

I’m not really sure. I grew up around Tibet Buddhism, which includes many Shamanic aspects such as lhapas (shamans) and oracles, and interactions with spirits and worldly deities.

I also lived with a family in Thailand when I was 17, where one respected elder practices a form of shamanic Shavite Hinduism, which is still practised on the fringes of Thai society. But my strongest introduction was when I came to Mongolia for a conference and was brought to a shamanic ceremony by a friend who was concerned about a chronic health issue from which I suffer.

Which teachers and teachings have influenced you the most?

I primarily consider myself Buddhist, so HH Karmapa, HE Garchen Rinpoche and HH Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok. I am not a shamanic practitioner per se, so much as I am ‘shaman adjacent.’ But within the shamanic world, it’s the indigenous shamans who I work with all the time who I consider my greatest teachers and influences.

What makes your heart sing?

I passionately love discussing ideas with someone. Ideas so exciting, that all parties can barely hold in their next words. For me, these are usually about social projects to benefit indigenous communities through locally created businesses and educational projects.

What is the most bizarre situation that you have found yourself in on your shamanic path?

Where to start? Because of my research, I’ve met over 60 shamans in Mongolia alone, and this has led to more than my share of bizarre scenarios.

But I think the most bizarre was when I was 17 in Thailand. A member of my host family told me that were were going to a - ‘something I couldn’t understand in Thai’ - ceremony. I asked again, and she said the same word. I still couldn’t understand. This was well before google translate or smart phones, so I brought over my Thai-English dictionary. My host flipped through until she reached the word ‘exorcism.’ I thought for a minute, flipped to the word ‘possession’, and asked if this was what she meant. She smiled, said “yes” and then pointed to me and said “possession, YOU!”

Apparently, the expectation was for me to get possessed at this ceremony. I’m not sure why they wanted it to be me instead of any of the other (local) participants, but I think it’s probably the most bizarre situation!

Where on earth do you feel most at home?

Yushu, Kham in Eastern Tibet (South Qinghai Province). For some reason, that is the place where I am absolutely happiest and finally able to relax.

What do you do for fun?

I love watching documentaries, cross stitching, singing and playing music, and playing with my cat. I also adore going out into nature with my friends and shooting archery.

What is your favourite food?

Depends on the weather! But my favorites are Sichuan Hot Pot, bantshtai tsai (Mongolian dumplings in milk tea), Sushi, and (don’t get too grossed out) frozen raw meat. It’s a Tibetan delicacy. I adore it.

What music do you like?

I’m a singer, musician, and composer, so I have eclectic tastes. Classic rock, traditional Mongolian music, Mongolian throat singing Hip Hop, eastern Tibetan Pop Music, Tibetan Hip Hop, Turkish Jewish club music, Yiddish Jewish music…. should I keep going? Oh, and New Orleans Zydeco. My iPhone on shuffle is an adventure.

Best book and film?

My mind will change on this every five minutes, depending on my mood, but I really love the novels of Terry Pratchett, especially ‘Good Omens’ and ‘Small Gods.’ As for film, one movie I can watch again and again is ‘Labyrinth.’ For a more grown-up film: ‘Leon, the Professional.’ At first glance, it appears to be an action film, saturated with violence, but it is actually very deep.

What message would you give to your 12-year-old self?

Don’t be afraid to ask for help, and forget about the people who put you down. Find the community that loves you for you and that you can love back! And invest in Apple Computers.

A wish for the future?

It’s hard to put in words. I suppose, I want people to understand each other. I think that’s the simplest way to say it. Understand, not love. Because if you can truly understand each other, you can have compassion for each other. One can love another and still have a sense of superiority. In the world of international development, I see that all the time, and it does more harm than good. Love without understanding has the potential to be as dangerous as hate. I wouldn’t dare to claim...
that I have achieved this goal, but I'm trying. I don't know if I can ever reach that, with the innate preferences that we all, myself very much included, are raised with. But I just wish we could understand each other. Maybe then we would stop hurting each other.

But I must add - and this is very important - that understanding does not mean standing idly by.

I am a Jew, I've been the target of hate since I was in the second grade and uninvited from a birthday party for being a 'Christ Killer.' I beg all of humankind: work towards this.