ANCESTORS AND HUNGRY GHOSTS

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- Ancestors and the American Psyche
- Tibetan Ritual for Feeding the Dead
- Working with Ancestor Spirits

Q’ero Pilgrimage
Sacred Traditions of the High Andes

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Welcome to the 112th edition of Hoop. Sadly, you will have noticed we have password protected this, and in fact all our past digital issues. I didn’t like doing this, but it is a sign of the times, as we found that ‘bots’ - also called ‘crawlers’ - were putting their digital fingers into our files in a malicious way, which could have caused us costly problems. And so, reluctantly I had to place a small level of security on all our pdf files to slap away their digital fingers and stop them peeking. A simple password should be enough, so all our back and future issues will have the password dancer. This should stop the automated crawlers, and I hope it won’t present you with too much of a problem when you read the magazine. Just remember to keep being a dancer.

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And so to this issue. A big theme this time is the role of ancestors. We look at the role of ancestors and ‘roots’ in modern U.S. culture and how shamanism there has been affected by the displaced nature of a lot of that culture. With this in mind, we look at the nature of ancestors: blood ancestors, cultural or lineage ancestors and ancestors of place. We look at how to make fetish dolls in order to represent them on altars, and give a Tibetan ‘Hungry Ghost offering ceremony, done to pacify and feed ancestor spirits who are wandering and troubled.

We also look at personal empowerment and about how our culture can often infantilise us; and explore ways we can find authentic empowerment, through different methods of healing work that can deal with the past.

And we look at the sacred ways of two ancient cultures of the Americas, the Q’ero and the Hopi, who despite hardships in many forms, have held their sacred understanding of the cosmos and our connection to it.

May we all find strong roots and connection.

From the Editor

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Blessings to all Beings
Nicholas Breeze Wood
A Pilgrimage to Q’eros

A journey to the High Andes to work with Mountain Spirits and Mystics

Ali Rabjohns

The Q’ero nation and my teachers have offered me a pathway of learning open to everyone. These beautiful human beings have taught me an infinite wisdom that can give us a sustainable way to live, respecting ‘all that is’ as something sacred in the natural world.
High in the Peruvian Andes, the mountain Huaman Lipa rises around 4900 metres up into the clouds. The indigenous Q’ero nation of the area see this majestic peak as a male mountain spirit, which they call an Apu.

Huaman Lipa and its surrounding dramatic landscape, support the Q’ero community on every level. At the top, the pass is stunning, looking down upon a turquoise glacier lake. It’s like stepping into an unspoilt world here, with no electricity or running water, apart from freshwater streams. On the way down into Cocchamocho village, you can see llamas dressed in their colourful headgear on the sides of the mountain. Huacaya and suri alpaca are tended carefully, as wild puma are a real concern.

My teacher, Don Augustine Machacca Florez lives here with his wife Benita and their family.

I was originally introduced to him via a friend living in Cusco at the time. Don Augustine invited us to stay for a week in his village, one day’s horse ride from the nearest main road.

I had sowed the seed of an idea to travel to Peru with a small group of friends and fellow paqos, and our aim was to connect to the pure integrity of the Andean mystical teachings, and to learn from the pampamesayoq Don Augustine.

The word pampamesayoq means ‘earth keeper’ in Quechua.

This trip to the High Andes of Peru, was the singular most powerful event that I have experienced, and it opened my heart wide, helping me to step onto my path as a shamanic practitioner.

The Q’ero nation and my teachers have offered me a pathway of learning, which is open to everyone. Over time, these beautiful human beings have taught me an infinite wisdom, showing that the Andean cosmovision can give us a sustainable model of how to live, respecting ‘all that is’ as something sacred in the natural world. One of their fundamental principles is ayni, or universal reciprocity.

There are roughly 3,000 people in the Q’ero community. Their houses are stone with a thatched roof and no chimney; the smoke just goes out through a hole in the roof.

Everyone seemed to be drop spinning here - an ancient method of making thread using a simple spindle, which they drop and spin - turning the alpaca fleece into yarn. They carry and work their spindles even when they are working on the land.

On the land, the whole family participates with tasks, such as planting potatoes, herding animals and spinning wool. Girls learn to weave in their early teens, and there are very high levels of weaving, spinning and knitting skills passed down through the generations.

These people are master weavers, and communicate their sacred union with Mother Earth, through the patterns and symbols in the cloth that they weave.

The Q’ero live among seven villages, one of which is Cochamocho - which is sometimes also spelt Qochamoqo. They mainly grow different varieties of potato, which can be literally freeze dried on the earth, and these villages range in elevation from the cloud forests of the Amazon jungle at around 3,000 metres to Huaman Lipa mountain at 4,800 metres.

Left: using a drop spindle to create thread for weaving

Below: a llama with its traditional colourful woolen trappings

Previous page: a Q’ero house high in the mountains
A lot of people outside of America cannot understand what it is like to be an American, perhaps unless they have visited and stayed a while, and ventured into the incredibly varied geographical areas - where the culture of each region can be as different as night and day from each another.

When trying to understand America, it’s important to connect where we are now with the complex story that has woven us into being.

In these particularly polarising times, it has never been more clear that we are a melting pot of people who are yet to be defined.

The United States was founded on many things, including the genocide of indigenous people and the slavery of African-Americans, who were kidnapped from their home lands and brutally forced to serve white European settlers – on a land where neither belonged. Americans must look at these truths and find a way to heal through the current systemic racism which rears its ugly head every single day in present day America.

So what does this have to do with shamanism?

Well, paying attention to the story of America will explain a lot about how shamanic practice - and spiritual practices in general - have developed here and continue to be formed. Some of this forming is in a coherent way, such as I would hazard to suggest Core Shamanism, and some in a less formal way, attaching crystals, reiki and other New Age ideas to shamanism, where really there is no place for them.

As an American, I think it’s important to acknowledge and understand why things happen here as they do, rather than falling into judgment about them.

Let’s look at the America that was formed by people who came from places where they were facing religious persecution, poverty, and other circumstances which restricted, or removed their freedoms.

Looking back into my own family history, I recently discovered ancestors who left England in the early 1600s because they were jailed and tortured for speaking out for religious freedom. Other ancestors of mine came from Poland in the late 1800s and early 1900s because of poverty and war. Poland was not the Poland we know today at that time, but instead a part of Russia.

It gets confusing, and I’m still in the process of learning about my ancestors, and I know there will be things that I find which I won’t like – of that, I am sure. For example, I have learned that some of my British ancestors - who settled in Connecticut - fought in the Pequot War in the 1630s. This means that they fought against the people who were native to this land, the Pequot people.

I have read a little about the Pequots, and about how warlike they were, even against other indigenous bands of people, making it difficult for peace to exist here even before the Europeans came. But that doesn’t make me feel any better about the actions of my ancestors, who were carving out territory for themselves and...
I organised a month-long expedition to Mongolia in the summer of 2019, to experience the land and culture, and to experience some of the country’s traditional shamanism. Three of us led the trip: Tim Cope - a wilderness guide who was familiar with Mongolia from many previous trips there; Petri Leinonen - also a wilderness guide and a co-leader with me on our many expeditions in Lapland over the years; and myself. During the first part of the expedition, we hiked over the steppe of northwestern Mongolia, and then spent a few days in the capital, Ulaanbaatar; and for the last part took to canoes on Mongolia’s longest river, the Orkhon.

Seven nomads, three cooks, three camp assistants, and two travel assistants - all Mongolian - as well as eleven pack camels and ten horses, strode across the northwestern steppes, accompanying and supporting our group of 12 Westerners on the expedition.

Once the group had gathered, and had settled, we asked everyone to hand over their watches; as one of our aims with this trip was to encourage westerners to get out of their minds and into their spirit: to be in touch with the ‘shamanic self,’ so to speak.

I didn’t want the travelling across the country to be about how many miles people had walked each day, and how many miles that was per hour, and what time was dinner going to be. Pastime questions like this - and many other similar things - are ways that the busy mind keeps our awareness under its control. Instead of this, I wanted the group to experience the freedom of their own spirit, and to enter a more natural way of being in the Mongolian wilderness.

We all awoke very early every morning, as the nomads would knock on each person’s tent and give them a tub of warm water for washing. Once dressed, people would walk over to a breakfast table, where Mongolian women had prepared a delicious and substantial first meal of the day. The nomads would then take down their tents and move on, while we would head out for the day. Life was simple and focused on the present moment.

Experiences of an expedition in Mongolia

Chris Lüttichau

Above: a campite in the mountains of Northern Mongolia

Left: walking in the wilderness
NBW: Could you tell me a bit about yourselves; what are your backgrounds with horses and ‘the sacred’?

DAWN MORGAN: Anything spiritual or religious was taboo in my family. My father lived in reaction to the abuse of being at a school run by the Christian Brothers. So, subsequently I grew up full of fear of this unknown mysterious thing. Although, even though it was not named, or honoured at all within my family, my sense of the sacred was strong as a child.

The gift of that family denial however, was that I didn’t have any dogma I had to follow. Much later I understood that the sacred is everywhere, with the horses and in all the spiritual traditions.

As a child, my place of mystery, dreaming and gratitude was with animals and in nature. I grew up in Lancashire, in the north of England - surrounded by wild woodland, moors, rivers and streams - and it was a blessing I’m very grateful for. It shaped my sense of the sacred.

I had special places I’d visit; a small waterfall I’d place wild flowers, and I remember once, under a bush, beside what I called my ‘witch flower,’ I laid the iridescent body of a lizard. I’d be still for ages, and gently sing to the animals I encountered, hares, deers, buzzards and crows. I loved to be with the pet animals we had as a family too.

There was a quality of dreaming, reverence and one-ness... a sense of connection to something bigger, and I realised pretty quickly that I had a need for that. Perhaps the chaotic unboundaried and wounding nature of my family led me to seek sanctuary in those sorts of places.

Later, when I began to emerge from the rollercoaster world of addiction I’d come to, it was through the embodied memory of those wild places - and the wild nature within me - that I rediscovered myself; through dance and movement practices too.

I think, this is the way that I continue to find my way back to myself, and into a grounded connection with the sacred.

DAWN OAKLEY-SMITH: I think I’ve been aware of a connection to what we could call ‘God’ from a very
One thing we all have in common are ancestors. When we think of ancestors, we might think of our Great Grandmother, and maybe we have photos of her, or perhaps of a distant Uncle, or a Great Grandfather. If we are really lucky we may have especially old photos, I have some dating back to the 1870s or 80s, showing some of my ancestors.

But of course our ancestors go much further back than that, back through the Medieval and Dark Ages, back through the Iron and Stone Ages, back through the age of dinosaurs, back to the first life on earth, billions of years ago... and they lived, through mass extinctions, continental drift and species migration, plagues, famines and wars, passing on their offspring, until the line came eventually down to you and I.

Ancestors are important in shamanism and animism, although of course, we don’t tend to think about our pre-human ancestors very much, if at all, but our human ancestors are closer to us, and those from the recent past closest of all.

So, many cultures revere their ancestors, even ancestors so far back that their names are lost. But for lots of cultures, the maintenance of a known family tree, a list of named ancestors, is considered important, and it will not be uncommon for people to have a mental list of who they were, going back ten or more generations.

This is not the case very much in the West. Western society is heavily fractured because of the industrial revolution and the other technological and social changes which came with and after it.

If your ancestral roots are from Europe, the chances are that deep in the past, your ancestors would have lived close to the land for centuries, really not changing in the way they lived that much for several thousand years. Because of this, they would have known their ancestral line fairly intimately.

Then, as society changed a great deal a few centuries ago, they would quite likely have moved to the growing cities, or perhaps even moved abroad, to America or Australia; and because of this, fractures would have happened, and roots - and with them sacred folk traditions and folk memories and stories of the land - were slowly erased.

We see this happening in Mongolia and China, and other ‘developing’ countries right now.

In Mongolia it was considered essential to know one’s ancestral line back for many generations, but Communism destroyed that connection to the past in a systematic manner, and now family lines there have been lost.

Also, people there moved from living a rural life in small bands, out on the steppes, to living in Ulaanbaatar and other urban centres. Ulaanbaatar did not exist, as what we would think of as a city, until a hundred years or so ago,
Above: contemporary Japanese image of a hungry ghost

The offering of food to guests - be they in physical or in spirit form - is ancient, no doubt as ancient as humanity itself. Food offerings to the spirits occur in all cultures, even within the Christian West, the idea - much changed over time - still exists in the Harvest Festival.

All over Asia there is an understanding about spirit beings called Hungry Ghosts, (known as preta in Sanskrit, yi dags in Tibetan, jikininki in Japanese and japgwı in Korean). These are beings who were once humans, but are thought to have died desperate and unhappy deaths.

They may have died through accident or tragic illness and be unsettled, and it is very often the case that they died with a great desire, a greed, a hunger for something, and now wander the world, seeking to feed upon what they craved for in life, with an insatiable appetite, suffering greatly because of their attachment to what they cannot have.

In some cultures they are seen as dangerous, but in most cultures they are seen as pitiful, miserable beings, worthy of our compassion. All of the cultures who acknowledge them have rituals and ceremonies, in which offerings - mostly of food, but which sometimes include other things - are made to them. These offerings are a means of helping the ghosts, and also seen as a deed of charity, which increases the purity and ‘merit’ of the person who makes the offering.

Hungry Ghosts are often depicted in images as human shaped spirits with long thin necks, making it impossible for them to swallow food. In Chinese lore they are described sometimes as having a mouth no bigger than the eye of a needle, through which they cannot pass food.

But, as said above, it is not always food which they crave, it can be any substance or material object, and all of the teachings about these ghosts have meaning for the lives of living people; for we are - in our way - are Hungry Ghosts, right here and now, with a desire, or greed, for something which drives us on to want to consume more and more.

In many ways modern Western consumerist culture is a whole society of Hungry Ghosts, always after the next thing to consume.

In Tibetan traditions there is a ceremony, no doubt with its actual roots far older than Buddhism. It is called a sur ritual, and it is performed as a compassionate offering to and placatement of these every hungry spirits.

It is also performed for the dead in general, and especially those who are newly departed, as it is said those who have newly died, and who are in the bardo state between lives, still experience hunger and thirst, but can only take nourishment in though their sense of smell.

Traditionally, in Tibet food is offered in a sur ritual for forty-nine days after the death of loved one, as an act of love and compassion for those who are departed, and of course as an act of ritualised mourning.

A sur offering does not require any special empowerments, and you do not need to be a Buddhist to perform it. It is given here in both a simplified, not very Buddhist form, and feel free to adapt it to suit yourself as, so long as you keep to the basic formula and intent, it will have the desired effect.

In its Buddhist form it calls upon the help of the Boddhisattva of compassion, Chenrezı, who is one of the few Tibetan beings a formal empowerment is not required for, as it is said that his help is offered to all beings, freely.

Chenrezı is the Tibetan name for Avalokiteshvara, whose famous
In visits with the Hopi people, I have been impressed and baffled by their concept of a spirit world and its relation to the physical world; impressed because their beliefs are so continuously a part of their daily activities; baffled because to a white man their concepts, in some of their aspects, are difficult to grasp.

A poet may speak of the spirit of a flower, but this is a metaphor; a traveller may tell of the fury of a storm, but he uses the word to convey emphasis.

However, to a Hopi these matters are real, not figures of speech; the flower does have a spirit; the storm is animated by a genuine fury. Everything that he sees, or touches, or feels has its counterpart in an ever present world, which he cannot see, but which is real and potent. To think of it another way, the spirit world, which exists always and everywhere, is manifest in all that he sees and feels, including in human beings. Also in the Hopi view, there is much of the spirit world that exists without any concrete manifestation.

All this is rather easily understood, but the implications that follow from it are more difficult, and to attempt to grasp them, a white man needs to empty his mind of all his customary thoughts and to start all over from the beginning.

Really, to think of the matter as a Hopi thinks, he ought to have been brought up as a Hopi, acquiring his concepts in early childhood, and extending them through the teachings and experiences that come to him as the years pass.

To give an example of Hopi thought, a certain part of the spirit world may, at present, be embodied in some creature, such as a bear. It may at some future time be manifested as a different creature, perhaps as a human being. At some time in the past, it may have been embodied in still another form of this same spirit world. Now a bear, it is simply a segment of the great indefinable spirit realm, to which it returns on the death of the bear, and with which it is in constant communion, even while the bear is alive.

Therefore, if I’m a Hopi and I kill a bear because I need food, it is logical for me to address the spirit of the bear, either before or after I have killed it, in order to explain my act, and to pray that the bear spirit may feel kindly towards me. The words that I addressed to the bear will not be understood by the animal itself, but the corresponding utterance of my spirit will be fully comprehended by the bear’s spirit.

**SNAKES AND WATER SPIRITS**

All snakes of every kind are associated with rain, the most vital necessity in Hopi existence. Their spirits are able to reach the unseen powers that can bring, or withhold...
Human brains are constantly active. The ‘conscious mind’ comprises the brain’s activities we are aware of; and the ‘unconscious mind’ consists of the brain’s activities that we are not aware of.

We can be aware of thoughts, feelings, and memories - for example the thought; ‘I have to go to the store today,’ can be accompanied by the memory of the last time I went shopping a week ago, and by the feeling of anxiety, nervousness we might experience about getting the chore done. That’s the operation of the conscious mind.

Psychology studies human behaviour. It attempts to understand how human behaviour develops and what the forces are that influence its development from prenatal to early childhood through adolescence and early adulthood.

Psychology identifies stages of development and what the effects are in later life, if there are challenges in an early stage.

For example, parental neglect in childhood, whether maternal or paternal, imposes patterns of dysfunction on that child in adolescence and in later life. Psychology studies the effect of trauma on a child’s development.

One useful evaluation tool, the Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale (ACE) 1, is a survey of childhood maltreatment that assesses emotional, psychological, sexual, and physical abuse.

Psychology has developed skills and tools - protocols - for treating and resolving the adolescent and adult dysfunctions that result from trauma or developmental challenges. Psychology is concerned with the emotional, physical, mental, and behavioural dimensions of human experience.

Shamanism, on the other hand, orients a person toward the numinous dimension of their experience, and as everything is alive and interrelated, it teaches openness to our oneness with everything, and it provides techniques for communicating with the entirety of all things.

Shamanism shows how to bring the enormous power of the non-ordinary world to bear on human, ordinary-world challenges, and so can be an adjunct to psychology, helping us understand and heal the personal problems that we humans often encounter; in this case my own challenges with depression and the negative thoughts that caused it.

Attitudes and judgments that affect decision-making are often held in the unconscious. If a shopper hates shopping because they were punished in childhood by a parent, while on a shopping trip, those memories are often held in the unconscious, out of awareness.

From their position in the unconscious those experiences affect current behaviour. The adult resists doing the chore without knowing why. The adult feels uncomfortable about going shopping and resists taking care of the chore because of the discomfort.

The brain begins recording experiences from before birth onward. In infancy and early childhood the part of the brain that forms narratives has not yet formed, and so experiences before the age of about five are not recorded conciously.

Nonetheless the experiences exist and affect current behaviour. The adult is unable to recall or remember what happened in early childhood that gave rise to a particular adult behaviour.

To continue with the example of the person who dislikes shopping, they may not be able to recall being shamed in a crowded store in front of others when they were three, but that childhood experience influences their adult behaviour. And so they resist doing the chore of shopping because of
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Citipati - The Glorious Lord and Lady of the Charnel Ground
Painted Terracotta, Tibet, C18th

Despite their gruesome appearance, these are popular protector spirits, especially against burglary and theft. They are shown as two dancing - and sometimes copulating - skeletons, one male and one female. Their legend is that they were ascetics, meditating in a charnel ground, who did not notice a thief sneaked up on them. The thief beheaded them and, infuriated by this, the couple swore vengeance on thieves and other criminals.