



SACRED HOOP MAGAZINE 101 TEXT ONLY PDF

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Nicholas Breeze Wood and the Sacred Hoop Team

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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)

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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, gender, class or belief. Nor do we knowingly publish any material that is inaccurate.

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The Maya people of Central America are custodians of an ancient tradition. **Geral Blanchard**, with Mayan 'Day Keeper' **Victoria Murcielago**, shares a little about them

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Some of the oldest items from our ancestors are effigies, and dolls and effigies are used all over the world in magical traditions. **Nicholas Breeze Wood** looks at the tradition.

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In Korean shamanism effigy dolls hold an important place. Traditional Korean shaman **Jennifer Kim** shares some of the ways of working with them in her tradition.

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Shamanism is full of stories that teach and inspire people. **David Kowalewski** looks at why the developing Western shamanism has need of them, and shares a few himself.

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One Native American proverb goes; 'fair weather never makes strong timber.' **Travis Bodick** looks at why we need to toughen up in our sacred practice and our lives.

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EDITORIAL

Issue 101. The term is often used for a beginner's guide - an introduction to something - and of course it's also the infamous torture chamber where Winston is finally taken in George Orwell's dystopian novel 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' - a place of ordeal.

I had crazy thoughts of making this a 101-style introduction issue to shamanism, but life (and the vagaries of what articles appear out of the ether) thought otherwise.

But all new experiences are a '101' of sorts, so we start with an account of one man's experience in the wilds of Northern Mongolia, and follow it with the 101 experiences of the late Ross Heaven, as he followed the path which led him to his life's work.

We have a 101 on the use of ritual dolls and effigies in healing work, and articles about the need for stories - which are always good 101 experience, as they often give people traveller's tales of adventures new.

And then we turn towards the other meaning of 101, the place of ordeal, with an article about how we need to face things and toughen up, because it is only through that, that we reach the centre - which of course brings us to the final article of this issue, the making of medicine wheels, in which the centre is essential.

On the medicine walk of our lives, our own serendipitous life journey of new experiences and ordeals, the centre of all things is the place all of life orbits.

To quote from Geral Blanchard's article about Mayan traditions in this issue, the centre of everything is the: '*axis mundi*, the Maya cosmic centre. From here, the ancestors are summoned, intentions are presented, petitions are offered, and a transformative fire is ignited for those who are in discomfort, and desiring of blessings, or a life renewal.'

So blessings on your individual lifewalk, our lives are always a 101 - in both senses of the word - and all we can do is travel down the road before us and seize the adventure.

Blessings to all Beings
Nicholas Breeze Wood

A JOURNEY TO DARKHAD

The Darkhad people of the North of Mongolia are the custodians of perhaps the purest form of Mongolian shamanism remaining.

Living in such a remote place, they were affected less than other Mongolian peoples, firstly by the influx of Tibetan Buddhism into the country in the C18th - which tried to eradicate shamanism - and then by the ravages of Communism in the C20th, which almost totally destroyed shamanism in the country

With his Darkhad udigan, his woman shaman teacher,

Eugene Johnson

travelled up to Darkhad Valley to work with elders of the Darkhad people, and receive sacred objects of shamanism they had prepared for him

Mongolia is not always an easy place to travel in, and when I arrived in Ulaanbaatar, a friend there said these words to me, which would eventually sum up my whole experience of the country and my time there: "If one can accept a certain amount of the unexpected, even chaos, things will usually work out in the end."

My trip to the country was to be centred around receiving my shaman's ritual tools - once they had been blessed by my udigan [woman shaman] teacher - and then for me to receive an initiation into 'full armour shamanism' by her own teacher, who lived in Darkhad valley, a remote valley in the north of Mongolia, some two long, hard days travel away from Ulaanbaatar, which everyone calls UB for short.

The shamanic tradition in the Darkhad has remained pure and resiliently vital and vibrant, despite the long period of Soviet domination in the earlier parts of the C20th, which did great damage to Mongolian shamanism and Mongolian culture in general.

The evening after my arrival in the city, after sunset - which is the time for 'full armour' shamanic ceremonies, according to tradition - I came to the home of my teacher, my udigan, and her assistants for my first ceremony.

They had prepared an altar, placing small bowls of milk, milk-tea and vodka onto it, as well as more offerings of tobacco, sweet biscuits and a bottle of vodka.

Her shaman's drum was placed in front of this altar, and her shaman's robe was draped around it, as if the drum was the body of a shaman; then her shaman's feathered and fringed headdress was placed on top of the drum, and her shaman's boots put in front on the tiled floor, as if the shaman's legs were crossed.

When it was all finished, it looked for all the world like there was a person, a shaman, sitting there - the drum had become alive.

The assistants then burnt small juniper branches - the Mongolian form of smudge - to purify everything, and started a small fire in a special round metal pot-like fire basket called a tulaga, which is a small portable shaman's fire place. Then they helped the udigan into her armour, dismantling the drum figure they had created.

When she was dressed in her ritual clothes, she stood in front of her altar, beating her drum and making special sounds and cries to call to the spirits. The ceremony to bless my shamanic tools began.

But, things did not go as planned; as shortly after she went into her shamanic trance, the metal plates, fixed to the outside of her shaman's robe, between her shoulder blades, broke in half and fell off. These metal plates, which protect the shaman's back, are considered the shaman's main protection against attacks from hostile spirits.

My udigan began shaking with convulsions, and was in obvious pain, crying out from time to time, while her assistants quickly placed burning juniper in her mouth to help expel a hostile spirit - which they were sure had come into her - and help to safely return her own spirit.

She slowly recovered, and spent a good while trying to figure out where this attack came from. It later came out that this surprise attack was from a wrathful lu (naga) spirit which was attached to me, and which had come with me to Mongolia. This was later dealt with so it wouldn't cause any more problems.

This initial setback was taken in our stride however, and the next 48 hours were

largely spent preparing for our trip to visit my udigan's teacher in the Darkhad Valley. I also took this time to becoming familiar with the tools which had been empowered for me, especially my khuur - my shaman's jaw-harp - which had been made especially for me by a special blacksmith shaman.

THE ROAD TO THE NORTH

We laid in food supplies, gifts for the elders and others in the shaman's camp, and even chains to pull our car out of difficulties in case we got stuck - which would soon prove to have been a good idea.

It was to be a two-day long trip, the first day's objective being to make the 500 mile drive on proper asphalt roads, up to a small town called Mörön, which is a provincial capital of the part of Northern Mongolia, where the Darkhad valley is. There we planned to spend the night, before setting out on the second day of the journey.

But once again, things did not quite go as we planned, due to an unexpected snow storm that hit us as we travelled North, making the journey long and hazardous. An 800 km road trip and all four seasons in one day, but eventually we arrived in Mörön safe and sound and retired for the night.

The next morning we left the snow-covered city - thick in a morning haze - and we also left the asphalt road, replacing it with a bone-jarring 300 km journey over rough terrain. This next dirt road had no paved roads, no sign-posts, and sometimes even the tracks left by previous travellers disappeared under the unexpected snowfall.

At first it seemed we were merely taking a short-cut across a field, in order to save us some time - or perhaps avoid a potentially dangerous spot in the rutted track - but it was to be like that the whole jaw-rattling day, and I'm sure the inside roof of the car we used still bears the imprint of my skull from the numerous impacts which, both it and I, suffered.

At key places along the way, and especially at the entrance to Darkhad Valley, we made offerings at ovoos - sacred piles of rocks with tree branches and poles in them, all covered with blue cloth khadag offering scarves. These mark sacred places, and we would get out of our car and circle them three times clockwise - the direction the sun travels across the sky - and throw rice into the air to show respect to the powerful guardian spirits, and to ask them for safe passage and blessings.

As we jarred further and further north, the crossing of the many small streams and innumerable boggy areas became a particularly delicate affair, the risk of

getting bogged down and stuck out in the wilds was very high, and the possibility of passers-by being there who could come to our aid if we did, was very low.

Despite the expertise of our two drivers, who shared the miles, the inevitable eventually happened, crossing a particularly boggy bit of ground our wheels got stuck. We were - it seemed - not likely to be going anywhere fast.

As we stood around wondering what we were going to do, we saw a herdsman, with a troop of horses, but in the end, even he was not able to be of much help to us and we felt forlorn in the empty expanse.

Then fortune smiled upon us, a passing mini-bus saw our predicament from a great distance away, and took the time and trouble to make its way across to us - for often people make their own roads across the vast openness, and their road was not our road. Our chains were attached, and with effort, the minibus pulled us out. It was a moment of great relief, and the unwritten code of mutual help was illustrated anew.

At sunset we finally made it to the elders camp, located next to a stunningly beautiful snow and ice-covered lake; but not before a flat tyre made it necessary to completely unload our car, in order to get at the spare one which, as it turned out, was also flat,

THE HOME OF THE SHAMANS

The next few days were mainly spent in and around the home of my udigan's teacher - whom I refer to as Elder One in this article to keep their actual name private.

Elder One has now sadly passed into spirit, but he was, I believe, one of the last shamans in Mongolia who made all the regalia and tools himself, and even hunted the animals whose skin are used for various ritual purposes. He hunted them himself, the better to honour them and ensure their blessings. He was also trained and recognised as a blacksmith shaman, and therefore - although rather advanced in age at the time I was with him - was always quite busy tanning hides, rolling sheep's wool into long cylindrical strips, and covering them with cloth to make manjig - the cloth snakes shamans have hanging on their ritual clothes.

His passing was greatly mourned by the Darkhad people and by others around the world who knew of him - he was a great shaman.

The ritual clothes of a shaman are commonly called the shaman's armour because they protect the shaman - and some manjig snakes were being made for the armour which was being put together for me, as well as the finishing touches be

made for a shaman's drum which was being made for me.

Visitors from within the camp dropped in regularly - neighbours, and people seeking help from the shaman, as well as well-wishers.

The lack of a fixed, closeable or lockable door, and the spontaneous popping in of strangers - all speaking away in a language I did not understand - was, I must admit, a bit unsettling in the beginning, but I soon overcame my initial unease, and went with the flow.

In the afternoon of the first day of our visit, another highly respected and powerful shaman - whom I will call Elder Two - came to do a divination for me, using his *toli* - a bronze mirror.

The wrathful *lu - naga* - spirit, which apparently had come from the dwelling place of one of my ancestors, and which was a rather greedy spirit, had been following me around, and that, together with some unresolved issues from my past, were found to be blocking my progress and preventing the realisation of my potential.

Elder Two was able to trap the negative energy I carried - as well as the greedy *lu* spirit - inside a shaman's mirror, although to this day I do not know if, or how, he got rid of them again afterwards.

A thorough cleansing would have to be done on me the next day, using old horse manure, in a kind of fumigation technique, in order to chase away any remaining negative spirits and energy. This was to prepare me for my initiation ceremony.

I was told it was also important to 'feed' the big flightless birds which live in the land of my ancestors - and I could only imagine this to mean turkeys.

DONNING THE ARMOUR

The next day was a Saturday, which according to Darkhad tradition is a day of the week on which no shamanising is done; as it is instead devoted to purely 'human' activities.

So, it was not until the Sunday that we drove out - early in the morning, in brilliant sunshine, over non-existent roads, for what seemed like hours - up to a sacred hill, where my initiation ceremony was to take place.

But first the purification ritual I had been told about had to be done. Old, dry horse dung was placed in a special container by Elder One, who then lit it, and began praying and asking the spirits for blessings.

I was instructed to cleanse myself with the horse dung smudge smoke, using my hands to bring the smoke over my whole body.

During this time, Elder Two put on the armour which had been made for me by Elder One, which comprised of shaman's boots, a long blue deel coat with metal jingle cones, cloth snakes and a metal protective plate between the shoulder blades attached to it; as well as a headdress with feathers, and with more cloth snakes attached to that.

His putting on of my armour was to avoid the spirits from recognising me afterwards, it was to protect me, to stop the spirits coming to me uninvited.

After putting on my armour, Elder Two picked up the drum which had been made for me, and began singing, asking for blessings from the spirits. As he did this, a large eagle flew overhead, which everyone agreed was an auspicious sign. This apparently often happens when he performs rituals.

Elder One supported the ritual, and he too sang his shaman's song, while tossing spoonfuls of milk offerings into the air, and circling round me with the smoking dung.

And then Elder Two went into a deep trance still playing my new drum, until suddenly - as he played it - the drum's skin split open in two places. This of course was a dramatic thing to happen, and not really a good sign.

Elder Two was then very quickly undressed by others who were assisting, and the armour was immediately put on me, in order for the spirits to accept and bless me after having been called in by Elder Two during his ceremony. And yet the skin of the drum was irreparably split, and it was impossible to go further in the ceremony.

It was indeed an unfortunate setback, as this drum had been made by Elder Two over several weeks, during which time he has hunted the deer, cleaned and dried the skin, carved and formed the wood for the frame, and made all the protective metal work and other objects which had been attached to it.

So, we sat about talking, and figuring out the reason it had happened, and seeking the best solution to the problem. The interpretation given about the drum's splitting was that it had taken on all my difficulties, my past experiences, etc. It had, in effect sacrificed itself, in order to free me from my past, so I could go forward.

It so happened that my *udigan* was also to receive a new drum during this trip to the valley - made for her by Elder One - and it was therefore proposed that I inherit my *udigan*'s old drum, which I felt to be a great honour.

It took a good while for this new drum to be fetched, and for Elder One to attach the jingle cones, *manjig* snakes and other

items onto, what was to be my new drum, and then bless it. He drummed and chanted for a while, while Elder Two was again dressed in my armour, and the whole process began again.

At the end of his trance, the shaman's armour and drum were again quickly transferred onto me, and it was now up to me to ask the spirits for acceptance and blessings.

In all truth, I really don't remember much about this part of the ceremony, it is somewhat of a blur, and only snippets of images and sounds remain to me. I remember 'waking up,' lying on my back on the ground, my *udigan* and Elder One looking down at me smiling.

For hours afterwards it seemed like my sensory perceptions were heightened, and my impressions intensified. It also seemed as though I could register what was going on around me, but that it took longer for me to process these impressions inside myself. It was as if I was functioning at two speeds - one which connected me to the outside world, and an internal one, which took longer to integrate these impressions.

Needless to say, sleep and rest were the program for the rest of the day, along with offerings of rice to my drum.

THE ROAD OF RETURN

The next morning we drove about twelve miles over bumpy paths, and through stunning countryside, to reach a sacred mountain that is particularly important to Darkhad shamanism, because of the extremely powerful spirits who live there. The atmosphere indeed felt other-worldly and uncanny, and it was important to tread lightly, and in silence, in order to show due respect to these spirits.

Strips of white cotton cloth had been prepared beforehand, and we tied these to the branches of a pine sapling, which was to be used as a place for making offerings at the altar we set up for the spirits of the place and the ancestors spirits there - collectively called the *ongods*.

When cups of milk, milk-tea and vodka had been poured and a plate piled high with sweet biscuits had been set upon the altar, Elder Two sat down, holding the pine sapling in front of him, and, waving it back and forth, began to humbly call and to make offerings of purity to the spirits.

At one point another shaman stepped forth and - while whistling and making smacking sounds with his lips - made offerings of vodka as well. Then he removed the sapling, and Elder Two went into a deep trance, chanting and twirling around a *manjika* - a mirror with cloth snakes attached.

Afterwards I was given four strips of white cotton cloth to attach to a tree, while making a request of the spirits, and then, when this had been done, we all sat around drinking tea, consuming the offerings and partaking of vodka in a sort of post-ritual celebration.

Elder Two then did a divination about some health issues I have. He sat behind me, playing his *khuur*, in order to call to the spirits, and then did some kind of healing work on me. I couldn't see what he was doing because he was behind me, but I felt warm energy diffusing through my body.

Then, taking a pair of pine cones which had grown into one, he dipped them in vodka, had me break them apart, and throw one in the direction of my birth-place, and the other in the direction of the place I now live, thereby releasing me of all negative energy causing these health issues.

On our way back to the camp, we came across several motorcyclists who had stopped for lunch in a clearing. It was somehow very surprising to come across Westerners on a motorcycle trip in such a remote part of northern Mongolia, and it turned out they were French, and on their way to try to look up some *Durkha* herders who, by definition, move from place to place and are therefore not easy to locate.

The *Durkha* are another tribal group in Mongolia, often called the *Tsaatan*, which means 'Reindeer People, although they don't like this name. Mongolia is made up of many tribal groups, the *Darkhad* and the *Durkha* being just two of them.

It was quite strange and funny to meet up with these fellows and their support team - a couple of guides, and a very impressive van full of equipment, food and spare motorcycle parts. *Le monde est petit!*

That evening a ceremony was held in order to bless my *udigan's* new drum, made for her by Elder One. Elder Two put her armour and headdress on, as the drum was passed around to several shamans who had gathered for the ceremony, in what felt like it was a kind of welcoming gesture.

A make-shift altar was set up, with all the traditional offerings we had placed before on the altars, and Elder two began drumming and chanting. This went on for what seemed a very long time.

Elder One led the ceremony, chanting, spooning offerings of milk into the air, circling around with burning juniper smudge for purification - there was so much, the air of the small dark hut was thick with it.

At one point another shaman placed a cup of vodka to Elder Two's lips - who was

by now in a deep trance - making smacking and kissing noises all the while, to facilitate the possession by the spirits. And then all of a sudden, Elder Two went as completely stiff as a board. His body stretched out and his muscles tensed. Elder One then quickly used burning juniper to bring him back, blowing the smoke into Elder Two's nostrils and throat.

At this, the birthing of the new drum was considered successful, and the ceremony was then concluded by another small 'celebration.'

The major objectives of our trip to *Darkhad Valley* being fully achieved, we set out the next morning, after a warm round of good-byes, on the long journey back to *UB*.

Lake *Khövsgöl* was still partially frozen, and the melting snow and ice made the soil of the *taiga's* dirt roads treacherously muddy.

Despite the driving expertise of our colleagues, we ended up stuck in the mud for a good long while, sinking deeper and deeper, despite every renewed effort to pull the car out. We were saved by a brilliant flash of Mongolian ingenuity and good common sense.

The rest of the trip was done in brilliant sunshine and when we finally came back onto the blacktop highway, it felt as though we were driving on silk.

After sundown on the evening of my last day in Mongolia, my *udigan* performed a ritual to bless my shamanic tools and my binding to my spirits. The traditional offerings were made at the altar, and I was given my *khuur manjika*², made by the blacksmith shaman. This is used for daytime - or walking - shamanism, as well as 'light' interventions such as divination, prayers for blessings. In *Darkhad* traditions, full armour is reserved for 'heavy' work, involving negotiations, struggle, and even battle with the spirits, which is always done at night.

I was then instructed to shamanise at the altar of my *udigan*, in order to receive blessings from the spirits. I remember calling them for quite some time with my *khuur*, which I hadn't yet really mastered, and then feeling a kind of diaphanous presence hovering above and around me.

The life-long journey into traditional Mongolian Shamanism had indeed begun. Eugene Johnson has lived most of his adult years abroad, mainly in France and China. Cross-cultural ties have always been central, both professionally and personally, to his life. A follower of Buddhism, then core shamanism, for many years, he is fortunate to have found a traditional Mongolian shamanic teacher. This article was written to honour the path he is on, and to share his

experience with readers interested in the power and truth of Mongolian shamanism.

Sacred Hoop is grateful to Kate Smith for her permission to use the photo of the *ovoo* at the entrance to *Darkhad valley*.

NOTES:

1: The armour of a shaman is their ritual clothing and the metal work fixed to it. Armour includes a coat, boots and a feathered crown with fringed face mask. A shaman's armour is considered to be alive and a house in which the shamans *ongods* (helper spirits) live.

2: *Khuur Manjig* are important *Darkhad* ritual objects. They consist of a jaw harp (*khuur*) with a bundle of cloth snakes attached. These are stuffed with wool from a special sheep, chosen because of certain markings on the sheep's fleece.

The *manjig* has other objects attached to it too, such as an arrow head which has taken a life, a dried wolf's paw, a bear claw, a weasel's skin and other objects. The *khuur* has to be made by a special shaman blacksmith with metal taken from a horse's bit - the part which goes into its mouth.

When completed the *khuur manjig* it is blessed and awakened, and the *lu* spirits and the shaman's spirit are bound together. Shamans use them during the day in 'walking shamanism,' because it is easy to travel with a *khuur manjig* - than a full set of ritual clothes, which generally do not leave the shaman's home and which are only worn for big night time ceremonies.

A *khuur manjig* gives the shaman as much protection as their full armour.

A LIFE WITH THE MEDICINE

An interview with the late Ross Heaven by Brett Lothian

How did you discover shamanic plant medicine?

I learned about it as a child. I lived in the countryside, so I grew up with plants and my first medicine was mushrooms, which I picked myself. But then I got distracted for a while with jobs, and making money, so it wasn't until 1998 that I first went to Peru to drink ayahuasca. This, in turn, led me to San Pedro, which led me to Salvia [divinorum], which led me back to mushrooms.

What qualities must one have to be a shaman?

What is a 'shaman'? Well, my personal opinion is it's a job - like any other job. It's like being a plumber, and just like any job, you get on with it. It's no great mystery.

I'm sure you're as bored as me with all those ego-stuffed Western buffoons who write new age books called 'The Shaman's Last Apprentice' or 'The Chosen One in High Heels,' documenting their wild adventure, which apparently qualifies them to be the next chief shaman of some tribe or another. Why do they need to be the last or chosen anything? Are they so dull and uninspiring in themselves?

Just look at what they're asking you to believe about them - or about shamanism - and how special they are. The effect wouldn't be quite the same would it if they'd called it 'The Plumber's Last Blocked Drain' or 'I Was the Chosen Toilet Cleaner'?

But the thing is - if they actually had any idea what a shaman really is - they might as well have given their books titles like that because shamanism is just a job, no different from plumbing, cleaning toilets or shovelling shit in a factory.

The job I had - marketing pharmaceuticals - was literally killing me, as well as my customers, so I went to Peru and drank ayahuasca to find out what I should be doing instead. Then I began training in shamanism, including a four year apprenticeship with San Pedro in Peru and Spain, running an ayahuasca healing centre in Iquitos, and travelling to Mexico for Salvia and mushroom ceremonies with a disciple

of the Mazatec curandera Maria Sabina, who lived in the Sierra Mazateca of southern Mexico

I suppose I worked at it because I cared about shamanism - the job I'd chosen for myself - not just about having a 'shaman trophy' I could hang next to my Michael Harner books, Sandy Ingerman relaxation tapes, my Simon Buxton Bee Maiden diploma and my Munay Ki - or, as I call it 'Money Key' - 'Master of the Universe' certificate.

As for what a shaman is and the qualities you need to do it: I think shamanism is everything that Harner, Ingerman, Buxton and their like are not.

Shamanism is a way of being, a worldview, a belief system which is the antithesis to the exploitative, misleading, money-grabbing capitalism, which many in the modern western new age shamanic scene stand for. It has integrity, authenticity and honesty in a way they don't.

How has following the shamanic path improved your life?

For the most part it hasn't. As many people discover when they wake up to the truth of this world, the new awareness and awareness they find can be far more painful and frustrating than liberating.

But it's also the only honest thing to do if you want a life of integrity so you can be real and face the world you're living in and find your own solutions to it.

But don't come looking for quick fixes and improvements from shamanism, because you won't find them here - or if you do it's a good indicator that you haven't found true shamanism, but have wandered by mistake into a new age, weekend warrior seminar instead.

Do you have a personal favourite shamanic plant medicine to work with and if so, why?

If I do, I suppose it would have to be San Pedro. In a way, my four-year apprenticeship to San Pedro never truly ended, because every plant I work with somehow falls under the umbrella of San Pedro, so that the cactus dieta surrounds it too.

San Pedro is the plant of the Earth - it teaches us how to be 'the true human' - so I guess that's the lesson I most need now. I do, however, very much enjoy mushrooms - los ninos - and they still have a great deal to teach me, which is always fun: to find a new teacher with plenty to teach, not just the same old lessons to be learned again, over and over.

Are all shamanic plant medicines

equal and able to be used in the same ways?

Every plant has its own unique personality and ways of teaching, but what they teach is in many ways similar. They very quickly show us the lies we have been fed and accepted, including those we've fed ourselves, and the true nature of human life.

If this is what you mean when you talk about 'enlightenment,' then this is what all teacher plants also provide us with.

Of course 'enlightenment' is not a process of addition or multiplication - not a way to add more happiness four lives, or sound cleverer at dinner parties - it's a process of subtraction. It is the shredding off of all you know, while having your armour ripped off. So, whether enlightenment turns out to be 'all you ever hoped for' is a whole other matter.

Working with teacher plants is like joining an academy of advanced learning and - like the professors in any academy - each plant has particular skills, talents and areas of expertise.

Salvia shows us the nature of existence, for example, while ayahuasca teaches us about the creative possibilities of the universe, and San Pedro educates us in how to be human.

But that is not all that plants do. They belong to the plant kingdom as well - just as every professor - no matter what their speciality, is also a human being and shares characteristics in common with everyone else through his humanity.

Plants are the same, so everyone knows something about all the others, and can teach us about them as well as itself.

Finally, all plants are aware - as much as some humans, and even some professors may be - that they are ultimately part of the 'mind of God' - or, in quantum language, one expression of the same energy that makes up the entire universe - so they can all open doorways for us into a wider understanding of life.

Can you explain how shamanic plant medicine works?

Sure. There are basically four levels of healing with every plant:

The first one is: the plant as a 'medicine.' It can be used in the same way that any herbalist might use a plant. Salvia, for example, can treat stomach problems, rheumatism and depression, among other conditions. Pharmaceutical drugs, derived from the plant, could also be used to combat diseases including Alzheimer's, AIDS, leukaemia and diabetes. In this way Salvia addresses the 'nuts and bolts' of the body; the material stuff that modern

medicine and medical herbalism also concerns itself with.

Modern medical treatments, however, are based on rather primitive ideas of causality and cure - i.e. that 'A leads to B,' or that giving a patient 'Medicine X' will clear up a disease in 96.4 percent of cases.

But this is different to shamanism, as shamanism also pays attention to the attitude, motivation and psychology of the patient, and to the spirit of the plant. The notion of magical illness and cure is an example of this, and raises, again, questions about the nature of reality and disease.

For example, *panzón de Borrego* is a blockage in the stomach. It is seen as a stone, put there magically by a rival, and it may arise because of *mal d'ojo* - giving someone the 'evil eye' because you are jealous of them in some way.

The person who receives such an attack is, of course, a victim of sorcery - but that does not mean that they are entirely innocent, since they might in fact have provoked their misfortune by bragging about their wealth or success to others, and making the other person feel bad. Even though they are on the receiving end of negative energy, therefore, they may also be part of its cause.

Orthodox medicine or herbalism might well be able to cure the symptom of the disease, but by ignoring the 'magical' component of the illness, it would leave the cause untreated, and so invite a recurrence.

Nor would it offer suggestions for the patient's continuing good health by recommending - for example - that they act in a more dignified manner in future, so as not to provoke the ill-will of others.

Used shamanically, however, *Salvia* can divine the cause of a problem, and find an ongoing solution to it, as well as an immediate cure.

Even from a purely herbal perspective, then, the medicinal use of *Salvia* is more far-reaching and holistic than orthodox treatments, and includes aspects of psychology, counselling and pastoral spirituality.

The idea of magical illnesses and cures - even from this more psychological perspective - is often met with cynicism by Western doctors and sceptics.

But 'magic' itself is used extensively in modern medicine, they just have a more scientific -and, therefore, more seemingly valid - name for it: the placebo effect. In modern usage, the placebo, which is Latin for 'I will please', is a medically ineffectual treatment, given to patients to deliberately

deceive them into wellness.

Common placebos include inert tablets, sham surgery or false procedures, based on what the medical profession calls 'controlled deception.'

In a typical case, a patient is given a sugar pill, and told that it will improve their condition, and because they believes this, there is often a real improvement, despite - or, rather, because of - the lie they have been told.

The researchers Wampold, Minami, et al, in their paper, 'The Placebo is Powerful' [Journal of Clinical Psychology, 2005] conclude that placebos - the power of belief alone - can, in fact, exceed the effectiveness of 'real' treatments by 20 percent in some cases.

The use of placebos by general practitioners is widespread, in fact. A study of Danish doctors found that 48 percent of them had prescribed a placebo at least ten times in the past year. One American survey of more than 10,000 physicians showed that 24 percent would, or did, prescribe placebos, while a 2004 study of physicians in Israel found that 60 percent used placebos.

The point is that they work. We are capable of magically curing ourselves.

Brain imaging shows that placebos have real organic effects too, causing changes to the brain in the anterior cingulate, prefrontal, orbitofrontal and insular cortices, amygdala, brainstem and spinal cord, among other areas - which is another way of saying that belief - a non-material 'substance' - has an effect on our material selves. In terms that a shaman might use, the condition of the body depends on the condition of the soul.

The second level of healing a plant medicine gives is the role the plant has as a spirit ally.

Beyond their purely medicinal uses, plants can teach us about ourselves, reality, existence, and the wider patterns of our lives.

To some extent this comes down to what shamans call 'intention,' or 'focus,' or 'having a good concentration': entering into a committed partnership with the plant, with the express intent that it will reveal certain information to us or pass on certain powers.

For our part, we need to pay close attention to the signs that the plant sends us - and the changes it makes to our bodies - in order to receive its messages and gain mastery of the new abilities it gives us.

In Amazonian traditions the *dieta*, the shamanic diet, is likely to be part of this arrangement. The shamanic diet involves certain actions and inactions, including restrictions on the behaviour of the dieter,

so they can learn from their plant spirit ally.

Foods such as pork, fats, salt, sugar, spices, condiments and alcohol are prohibited, leaving the apprentice with a bland menu, so the apprentice is not overwhelmed with flavour, and can more finely sense the plant.

It also weakens the apprentice's attachments to routines, some of which revolve around meal times and foods. For the same reason there is a prohibition on sexual activity, since sex is another worldly distraction, and during orgasm we can also give away the power that has been building within us during the diet - which would be a pointless waste.

Breaking these taboos can lead the plant to turn against us, so that it takes from us not only the power it has given, but any similar power we may already have had.

In the case of *Salvia*, for example, since the plant's intention is to teach us about the nature of true reality, breaking the diet before it is complete can lead to the opposite of expanded awareness and a clear perspective on life - that is, to madness, according to warnings from Mazatec shamans.

The third way a plant works with us is as a guide to the spirits of other plants.

Once it is a part of them, the plant ally begins to teach the shaman about itself, about other plants, and about how to heal. As I said, since all plants are part of the same plant kingdom, they have an affinity with all other plants, and know something about the specific powers of each one.

San Pedro as an ally, for example, is more than just a healer in its own right, it becomes, for the shaman, a guide to the spirit world in general, and an ambassador which will act on his behalf and introduce him to other plants.

In one of my books, I talk about a long shamanic diet I did with San Pedro, and how, during an ayahuasca ceremony to meet its spirit, it introduced me to a number of other plants that it wanted me to diet, including tobacco, rose, and the Amazonian plants *jergon sacha* and *chanca piedra*.

In this way the shaman becomes knowledgeable about a range of plants and their healing uses, and has a guide that they can call upon, to lead them to those they might need, in order to heal any patient who comes to them - even if the shaman is unfamiliar themselves with the patient's illness, or the plants they might need to help in the healing.

And the last level of working with plants is that the plant is a 'gateway to the void.'

We can learn the deepest secrets through working with them.

Perhaps the greatest teaching of these plants is that there is nothing to the universe except what we make of it. In this sense, we are God ourselves.

Healing then often comes back to the same message: that there is no absolute reality, that our life stories are exactly that - stories - and that the first essential for positive change is to make new choices, based on greater awareness, and a decision to embrace love, rather than fear. None of which is impossible for a God.

Do you think that modern psychedelic drugs like LSD, MDMA etc, can have a place in modern shamanism?

The Mazatec curandera Maria Sabina tried some of Albert Hofmann's synthetic Psilocybin once, and declared that there was no difference between it and her mushrooms; and the American biochemist and pharmacologist Alexander Shulgin did a lot of good therapeutic work using MDMA, which is effectively synthetic Peyote or San Pedro.

Personally however, I think there is a difference between synthetic drugs and natural plants, but useful results can still come from using synthetic drugs.

What is of no use to anyone in this work however, is science. Science is our favourite new religion which - perversely and paradoxically - asks us to accept its findings as a matter of faith, and treat it and its ministers - the research-funded white-coated priests of our age - as almost little dictator-gods themselves. The entire history of science is one of arrogant know-it-all dabblers, and dangerous interferers in nature, being proven wrong, wrong, and wrong, over and over again.

When science enters, soul leaves, and no effect of value results.

The psychiatrist Rick Strassman wrote in his book 'The Spirit Molecule' how he became disillusioned with DMT a substance he was doing research into, because despite people's reports of major insights, they never did anything to actually change their lives.

But then, when you look at the setting for their experience, is it any surprise that they got so little from it. A clinical, emotionless injection of drugs in a sterile hospital setting, administered by soulless automata-humans, who did nothing to guide or support their 'subjects.' I can tell you that people who come to my ayahuasca ceremonies - unlike Strassman's DMT experiments - go on to make all sorts of positive changes to their lives - they write books, open healing

centres, give up crappy jobs and sad relationships. And I'm not unique in that.

Precisely because shamans are not scientists, their participants benefit. So modern psychedelics, yes, maybe they can have a role in healing and therapy, but science can't - ever under any circumstance.

Can shamanic practice coexist, and or compliment, modern western medicine and vice versa or are they mutually exclusive?

Western medicine certainly has a lot to learn from shamanic plant medicine, but the reverse isn't true because Western medicine has next-to-nothing of value to teach.

For example, around 80% of Western pharmaceutical medicines are derived from rainforest plants, yet we have so far only investigated about 3% of plant species which live in the forest.

One thing modern science could do then, to advance our knowledge, is to stop applying itself to the destruction of the forest, and instead make an inventory of plants that can heal.

That's about the limit of what I'd ask it to do. Every time pharmaceutical science gets involved with plants - developing a new pill from a jungle species for example - it ends up with a watered-down version, which exists not to cure anything, but to create a steady flow of still-suffering customers. That is the fundamental proposition of Western medical science - create customers not cures. There is nothing useful that it can possibly add to the curing knowledge of a real healer like a shaman.

Are there limits to what a shaman and shamanic plant medicine can heal?

I don't think so. Or, rather, since all healing - even modern hospital medicine - ultimately comes down to faith healing, exactly what can be achieved depends on how much belief, passion and intention you are prepared to invest in the medicine and your own recovery from illness.

But, for example, I have seen people cured of cancer from drinking San Pedro, as well as diabetes, paralysis, MS, ME, Parkinson's... pretty much you name it.

Then there are stories like this one... I decided to go from Mexico to Peru between December 2014 to January 2015, but just before I got onto the plane I heard that one of my co-workers - Fernanda, a 23 year woman - needed emergency heart surgery within the next four months, or she would die. But the

surgery would cost \$350,000 US, which neither her, or her family could afford. And on top of this, the Mexican peso had just had a big depression, compared to the US dollar, so for Mexicans that was a really big sum of money. And yet, it was a matter of life or death.

I was really concerned, but I wasn't sure if I could do anything. I knew I had to help, but I didn't know how. So I took my plane to Cusco and I drank San Pedro, and I literally talked to God.

I felt an immense kind of joy, an orgasmic one, during our conversation. God told me that I had to make a fundraiser for Fernanda, that this situation would also be an exceptional gift for me, and that all the joy I was feeling in that moment would remain with me during the whole process of fundraising.

I got pretty scared, I felt overwhelmed and very dizzy, but then God told me to have faith in myself.

But He also told me that I had free will and could say "No" to His proposal, and I was about to, but then He told me "For this cause I will put an Army of Angels at your service; many people will embrace the cause because of you, and the army of angels who are about to come into your heart, if you open it now and say "Yes."

I ran to Mark - the shaman at the ceremony where I drank the San Pedro - and told him what had happened, and that I just couldn't do what San Pedro and God were asking of me. He just said; "Well, sorry, but if San Pedro tells you to do something you must do it!"

Then I looked up, and I saw an army of angels commanded by four big archangels. They were dancing in the sky and flying towards me. So I said "Yes." Then I began to panic at my commitment to God, and I asked myself a lot of questions, like how should I start? What should I do? Because I had never raised money for any cause before.

Through San Pedro, God answered me. He told me to keep my eyes and heart open, and that ideas would pop into my head, amazing people would enter my life and help make it happen, and the army of angels would remain with me until March 20; and on that day I would have all the money that Fernanda needed.

So I got back to Mexico, excited but still with no idea how to start.

I told some friends - Michelle, Georgina, Macarena and Rosy - what had happened, and invited them to help me, and without blinking an eye, or asking any questions they all said "Yes." I understood then that they were the four archangels I had seen on San Pedro day, and they were leading other angels. Yet out the four of them, only

Macarena knew about fundraising.

The first days were difficult, we didn't know how to start; no one in the campaign knew how to do it. So on January 22, I went and saw Fernanda, and I took a piece of paper and wrote a prayer on it. I wrote: 'I want her heart to keep beating. Please help us.'

I asked a girl from our office to take our picture with the sign, and the girl was really moved, so after taking our picture, she said she also wanted a picture with Fernanda, and that sign to put on her Facebook page.

So that's how everything began, suddenly all the office was taking pictures with my sign and Fernanda and uploading them on their Facebook pages to help us raise money. That was the first time I saw the army of angels in action.

Then, one day, we got a phone call from an important guy in Mexico who must have seen this. He promised us a big donation, but he wasn't able to meet us for days, and I became so disappointed and tired after going every day to his home to try to see him.

We were already in February, and God had told me in the San Pedro ceremony that the army of angels would only remain with me until March 20, and the campaign would end then; and so far we had only raised \$22,929 out of the \$350,000 we needed.

That night I cried in anguish, and I dared to tell God: "I am out now, I'm done!"

But, once more, on the next day I went again to try to see the guy who had promised to give a big donation, saying to myself all the time; "This is the last time you try with this guy".

And guess what, it really was the last time, because on that day he saw me, and he gave me \$60,000!

But the most exciting thing of that day was still about to happen. After giving me the donation, he invited me into one of his favourite rooms. It turns out that he was an angel collector. The room he showed me was a beautiful room with figures of angels everywhere; archangels, angels, cherubs, on tables, on walls, on shelves, everywhere.

The experience of the San Pedro ceremony in Peru came back to me, and I just felt the same amazing joy again. It was a pretty clear message to me: "There is an army of angels behind you; do not give up!"

So a lot of angels came into the campaign, we called them 'urban angels.' There were still some very difficult days, as we all felt the stress. There were fights, tears and dramas, but every time I nearly

said again; "I am really done with this now, I am out!" God sent me help.

National TV shows came knocking to interview Fernanda about her condition, newspapers got interested. One time a national paper actually used the headline 'An Army of Angels are doing everything they can to save Fernanda.' I told nobody about the army of angels that I saw in Cusco, so it was clearly another message for me. Keep going.

Then God sent me another gift. After three really bad days we got a call from the Mexican rock band Molotov - my favourite rock band of all time. They joined the cause, and began doing concerts for Fernanda, and from the stage they asked their fans to buy little heart-shaped keyrings we'd had made. As an extra gift for me, I even got to meet the band, my heroes, several times.

In Cusco God had told me the truth, that during the campaign I would feel the same orgasmic joy that I felt at the San Pedro ceremony, without even taking any substance at all. That feeling is so amazing that I do not have words in English or in Spanish to describe it.

Then came March 20, and just as God had promised, we made it. In fact we crossed the goal and on that day we had \$361,214 US! Fernanda had her surgery and she is alive. Her last words to me before she flew to the Mayo Clinic, a nonprofit medical practice and medical research group based in Rochester, Minnesota were; "You are a superhero, thank you for saving my life."

I felt it for real then - because I really did. Me, I had saved someone's life. Her father's words to me were: "Thank you for being a sister and mother to my child."

Other than doctors very few people have the grace to save a human life, and I am so grateful to San Pedro, because it showed me how I could, and it cleaned and revived my relationship with God on such a level that I could trust in His plans for me and follow His instructions.

Nowadays, many of us have lost our connection to God, to our Mother Earth and even to our humanity. For me, San Pedro was the key to opening the door to where my humanity was hidden, and to realising that I am an important piece in the world. If I listen to God, and the divine, in myself I will be free, and infinitely happy - as I am right now. San Pedro showed me that nothing is impossible.

What are the potential dangers of shamanic plant medicine?

In general, pretty much zero, unless you're an idiot.

In 2005, for example, the British Medical Journal warned that 'in England alone, reactions to drugs which led to hospitalisation, followed by death, are estimated at 5,700 a year, and could actually be closer to 10,000.'

By comparison, between the year 2000 and August 2004, there were just 451 reports of adverse reactions to herbal preparations, and only 152 were considered serious. And there were no fatalities.

That statistic equates to just 38 problem cases a year resulting from plant medicines, compared to perhaps 10,000 deaths a year as a result of accepted mainstream medicine. Reviewing these figures the London Independent newspaper concluded that, 'Herbs may not be completely safe - as critics like to point out - but they are a lot safer than drugs.'

The situation in America is very similar. There, orthodox medical treatment itself is now the leading cause of death, ahead of heart disease and cancer. Infections, surgical mistakes and other medical harm contributes to the deaths of 180,000 hospital patients a year and another 1.4 million people are seriously hurt by their hospital care.' [Consumer Reports online: www.consumerreports.org].

Other studies reveal that adverse drug reactions are under-reported by up to 94 percent, since the US government does not adequately track them. Death, as a result of plant healings, meanwhile remain next to zero.

With teacher plants specifically, as long as you approach them in a grown-up and responsible way, they are as safe as any plant. In fact, in perhaps the last five years we have heard of just three deaths connected to ayahuasca ceremonies in Ecuador and Peru, and, while the mainstream media like to have a frenzy with stories like these' and to dwell on the dangers and the exoticism, three deaths in five years is nowhere near 10,000 deaths a year from pharmaceutical drugs, which is where the real danger lies.

What is your opinion of the modern recreational use of shamanic plant medicine?

By definition, there can never be a recreational use of shamanic plant medicine; there can only be a recreational use of drugs.

In plant medicine ceremonies a number of factors are at play: the ceremonial space and the healing energy invoked there; the ceremonial setting and context - which focuses the mind on healing - the healing work, and the curanderismo performed by the shaman; and also of course the medicine plant you take.

All of these contributes to the healing, and is part of the respectful, responsible context to healing that is created. It goes without saying that this is quite different from dropping a few tabs at a party.

There may be nothing wrong with the latter either, if that's what you're into, and, once again, you take responsibility for your experience and well-being, but it won't be a medicine ceremony, so there's no point pretending it is, or that you're doing anything very useful or sacred.

Has the role of the shaman changed in our modern society and if so, how?

Well, firstly I'm making a distinction, when we talk about the role of the shaman, between 'authentic shamans' and 'core shamans' who are generally a wishy-washy, weekend warrior brand of ego-led spiritual interference, which has unfortunately come to be seen as 'modern shamanism,' when it isn't.

In terms of authentic shamanism, the principles of healing haven't changed at all - shamanism is, and always will be, faith healing in the true sense of the word.

But the application of those healing principles - their method of delivery, if you like - may have changed to make that healing felt and understood. In other words, as the modern world becomes more faithless - and more diseased as a consequence - the shaman must do whatever new thing is required to reactivate faith in his patients and reconnect them to God.

But then, shamanism has always been a creative force, which works uniquely with each individual patient, so maybe at its root, shamanism hasn't really changed in the modern world, not at its basis.

Can shamanic plant medicine change our modern world for the better?

Absolutely not; it can do nothing at all.

One of the first lessons you receive from the plants is about responsibility: that no-one is going to do it for you, so you need to stand on your own two feet and get it done for yourself.

Be the change. No-one is interested in your cry-baby whining either, when things don't go your way - not even as you imagined - you either get busy living and creating the world you want, or, well, you're just getting in the way of others and wasting oxygen your kids could be using.

So it's like this... plant medicine can, and will, expand your mind, give you fresh ideas, bring you beneficial insights, potentials and possibilities, but the thing is,

a good idea never did anything to change the world.

A potential remains a potential, and a possibility a possibility until you make a stand and do something practically in the real world, with everything you've been shown and taught. So no, plant medicine can't change our modern world at all. You can.

If there was one piece of advice you could give to someone beginning along the shamanic path, what would it be?

You must do this with commitment, with integrity and authenticity. The shamanic world - or what passes for it these days - already has enough con men, jokers and core idiots; we don't need any more. What we do need is new, creative thinkers and genuine healers who are prepared to put in the work.

The late Ross Heaven was a shaman, psychologist, author, healer, workshop facilitator and presenter. From early childhood he trained extensively in the shamanic, transpersonal and psycho-spiritual traditions. From the late 1990s he apprenticed to the Ayahuasca healing traditions of the Peruvian Amazon, and the San Pedro traditions of the Andes. He also worked with the curanderos of Mexico, the houngans [shaman-priests] of Haiti, and with other indigenous shamans. He wrote over 20 books, as well as many articles for Sacred Hoop magazine and others, about on shamanism, empowerment, plant medicines, teacher plants and healing. Ross passed into spirit in January 2018.

Brett Lothian is an Australian ethnobotanist, researcher and writer. He is a regular contributor to New Dawn Magazine, Dragibus Magazine and is the author of the Tricho Serious Ethnobotany blog. He is also the creator and administrator of 'The San Pedro Trichocereus Appreciation group', the 'Peyote Appreciation group' and the 'Ethnobotany Appreciation group,' all on Facebook.

RIISING FROM THE EARTH LIKE MAIZE

The Mayan Way of Self-Realisation

Geral Blanchard with Victoria Murcielago

There are several profound and enduring concepts which always find their way into any discussion about the Maya worldview. They include: the foundational ideas of seeds, and the importance of maize, the cardinal directions, multiple cosmic dimensions, honouring the ancestors, unity with the divine, and the mathematical ordering of the universe(s), with a related cyclical perspective of sacred time that overlays ordinary time.

In ancient Mayan cosmology, a person's birthdate is the starting point from which everyone can unravel our very personal divine story, whether we are from Antigua or Atlanta.

Our birth date determines who we are, and our preordained destiny. In this way, Nature can be understood as a mathematical genius. She works from a complex set of mathematical computations. It is a science of Her own, far superior to anything humans could ever contrive, even with the help of computers. The origins of the rules are not fully known. They help to partially unravel miracles humans can't fully comprehend. What remains is an elegant and enticing spiritual mystery.

OUR SEED AGREEMENT

The Holy Seed that rests inside us has a countenance before it is born. An identity too. It comes with a life script that is written into our spiritual make-up, one which can be announced and interpreted from the day of our first breath.

The natural beauty of who we are meant to be is present and, much like the seed of a plant, we open to the world on that first day, we begin to sprout, and start on the path created for us by the Divine.

This natural expression constitutes our soul. Once our life's purpose is understood - and if we are faithful to its meaning - we can embark on a soul-making journey.

All of us enter the world with an unspoken agreement with Nature - a sacred trust - to live out this divine expression, or purpose, to its full fruition. In doing so, we are rewarded with a sense of wellbeing, a feeling of being at home, wherever we may be, or whoever we are with.

Following this path never requires us to invent an image of ourselves, or to reinvent ourselves with changing circumstances. There is an authentic part of us encoded deep inside awaiting our full discovery. Who we are is good. After all, it is divinely inspired and therefore perfect.

It is beautiful, or as Victoria would say, "Delicious."

Along with revelations computed by the daykeepers, Victoria believes there is an obligation to develop into an even more advanced being - to personally transform ourselves.

It is important to avoid repeating the same way of life, the same patterns. Knowledge is gleaned from the sacred calendar [Cholq'ij], which form 260 energies - guided by Fire, Water, Earth and Air - and the pulsing of our blood, which is used to guide our growth.

With this information, we can advance to new and higher spiritual dimensions.

This process is the evolution of the soul, or the growing of the seed. It is an ongoing sacred process, and every person, at the centre of the cosmos, is responsible for doing their part to keep creation going. This isn't simply about self-centred growth as much as it is about a far broader perspective - about growing the universe.

The seed can be regarded as an everlasting spiritual force. With human birth and death this spirit - or energy - which moves through us. It unites us with all sentient beings, whatever their form that appears as matter.

From this Mayan perspective, the rocks upon this earth are kin to the water, the wind, the animals, and to you and me. Just when we feel lonely and alienated, a walk in the forest, a dip in the ocean, a glance at the evening sky, all can foster a comforting feeling of belonging, and healing too. Simply by looking upward, many of our small personal problems can easily feel insignificant and fleeting in the grand scheme of things.

The Maya are intensely focused on energy and time, and they remind us the universe has plenty of both. In the grand scheme of the universe, there will always be time for personal attunement, whether in this dimension or the next.

We are not to waste this existence. It is important to always use our knowledge to motivate personal growth. For each of us, it matters not where we are on our evolutionary path, it simply matters that we are on our path, otherwise, like beans without water, we wither on the vine.

Maya belief is that we are integral and important co-creators of this existence, and finding our place in this interlocking

energy system is vital to the sustenance of all life forms. After all, everything in existence is the child of stardust, therefore all of us have arisen from a shared heritage.

With these insights we are left to wonder, who and what is the father and the mother who spawned all this magnificence?

THE SACRED TREE OF LIFE

The shamans and daykeepers of this ancient culture serve many functions. These men and women explain the overriding order of the universe, the intricate patterns that we are intertwined in.

Shamans organise knowledge, blending the old and the present-day, to facilitate a cooperative alignment of all the energy systems.

From atop the temples, on 2-3000 year old pyramids, their predecessors meticulously observed and recorded the vast ordering of life, the unfolding of predictable patterns.

When Mayan shamans conduct ceremonies, it is often at volcanoes - depicting a fiery birth from the underworld - or within ancient ruined cities, such as Iximche, where Victoria frequently leads healings.

Visiting these locations one will notice isolated trees towering above large mounds of earth, often with sacred altars at the base. This signifies what Mayans call 'The Tree of Life,' a portal for communion with the divine. It symbolises the centre of the universe, or the naval of the world.

Whether this is understood from the old teachings of the Lakota Holyman Nicholas Black Elk, or from the Mayans of today, the symbols are instructive and far ranging.

On one hand, the elevated tree epitomises the three worlds - upper, middle, and lower, and it also connects all the worlds, all the dimensions - from where life originates. It links the everyday world around us, and the unlimited reaches of the cosmos.

It can also be described - as Black Elk regarded Mount Harney in the Black Hills - as a place where everything is joined, everything converges; a place of unity, where all things exist without separation.

In many respects the lofty trees and mountain tops can help modern people anchor themselves in deeper truths than the day-to-day trends of modern existence.

At the base of such a tree sacred altars are artfully created by Mayan shamans. They symbolise and become the *axis*

mundi, the Maya cosmic centre. From here, the ancestors are summoned, intentions are presented, petitions are offered, and a transformative fire is ignited for those who are in discomfort, and desiring of blessings, or a life renewal.

What we focus on, we can become, is what some refer to as a 'destiny retrieval.' Swept away in ritual, vibrational change, brings about a restoration of spirit, health, and of overall wellbeing.

The high-rising tree points skyward, while firmly rooted in the earth below. It can be regarded as the stable central axis of our world, and it reminds us that we are all fruit of the same tree. Other cultures symbolically liken the tree trunk to a spinal cord with energy moving along its main line of physical support.

People - like trees - carry a fundamental kundalini energy up and down their spines. This transmission, while invisible, can become apparent when we quiet our lives and meditate.

Still other worldviews regard these pillaring trees as suggestive of an inner world that looks beyond the traditional four cardinal direction of north, south, east, and west, and directs us inward - the fifth direction.

Being at the centre of the universe is not to be interpreted in the Western idea of being singularly important. Unlike our chants at sporting events, we are not 'Number One,' rather, all of us are essential parts of a unified whole, not ranked by importance, but equally valued for reverent service to a greater good.

With our outward signs of diversity, the metaphorical tree reminds us that internally we are individual branches arising from the same life source, subtle variants of a single, unified creative force.

When a Mayan shaman makes reference to centrality, they are usually referring to being consistently rooted in - and faithful to - the sustaining authority of this ancient knowledge. Yet, on that same day, the shaman may be seen typing their thoughts into a computer, and emailing them to a friend, absorbing and utilising the gifts of today's time period too.

Beyond the sacred, a shaman can be as fluid as water. Similarly, with the cyclical passage of time another thing remains steady, namely humility, which can function like a moral compass. The shaman has one foot planted in the past (which cyclically also exists in the present) and another positioned in the shifting dynamism of this modern era.

When a fire is lit at the base of the sacred tree - the centre of the universe - it

is the symbolic equivalent of reigniting the original first fire that sparked all existence - what today's scientists often refer to as the 'Big Bang.'

Aromatic smoke rises to the heavens, connects with the unseen Otherworld, and pleases the ancestors.

Ceremony brings spirits together and, paradoxically, 'grounds us in the sky.' Said another way, the sky is like a consoling blanket laid upon the earth. Our small worries dissolve into insignificance when positioned inside this vast and eternal worldview. How can I worry about this year's taxes while situated in the sublime?

MYSTERY OF THE MAYAN CROSS

The Mayan Cross symbolises the four directions that intersect at the centre of our being, which is the fifth and final direction.

East is represented by the colour red and the energy of fire, west by black and the energy of the earth and minerals, north by white and the energy of air or wind, and south by yellow with energy coming from water.

Although unspoken, two additional directions are incorporated, by looking skyward to the heavens, and by supplicating ourself. While bowing our head to Pachamama and kissing the altar.

At the centre of the cross is our day of birth and below the centre point is our destiny sign, which points us in the direction of growth.

Above it, are the conception sign, the forces of energy and the ancestral imprints, which influenced our conception.

To the right are the physical or material signs and, to the left, our emotional and spiritual elements.

Combining the five signs, it can be divined what our personal strengths and weaknesses are, those which can be encountered on our path of spiritual evolution.

If we wander away from our responsibilities to Creation, and our community, a higher force will likely come along and reset our course -perhaps somewhat agonisingly.

A person's individual sign is called a nawal. There are 20 such signs. It will have an energy force attached, and with it there will be a guardian animal.

The assigned nawal provides a direction for the life purpose we will pursue - such as doctoring, farming, or matters of justice - and additional behaviours we should employ to develop ourselves further.

RITUAL - INFUSING WITH SOUL

To continue the analogies, the Maya cosmivision is about time, the repetitions and cycles of life energies.

A healthy life is one which is lived in harmony with the larger rhythms surrounding us. Falling into disharmony is the same as falling ill.

Similarly, rituals that are embedded in ceremonies are enacted cyclically, repetitively. These sacred activities carry ancient time forward into today's world. And we can find comfort in their predictability.

When someone feels 'out of sorts,' a ceremony can be orchestrated by a shaman. They are the organiser of ceremonies, and the carpenter of rituals which return much needed balance.

Whether seeking a cleansing or a healing, being immersed in ceremonial aromas, ritual chants, and the transfixing light of the fire, people are more easily transported to new physical and emotional destinations.

In this way, it can be said that rituals create magic in the moment. Rituals may also produce altered states, which lift us up and remove us - at least momentarily - from the discomfort and confusion of our everyday existence. They reenergise participants and change internal vibrations, so that a shift in wellbeing can occur.

Rituals also reconnect us to our past, reminding us of the life supporting and enduring cycles that are integral to us.

An altar must be infused with soul and tradition before a ceremony can commence. Preparation requires that we imagine a three tiered foundation upon which we are about to conduct a ceremony.

At its base is the sacred. All shamanic activity must be spiritual and reverent, filled with prayer and petitions. Never is it about show or motivated by money. Otherwise no good results will be forthcoming.

The second foundational block is knowledge. Shamans provide insights gathered from cultural and ancestral insights, the teachings of elders and mentors, personal readings, dreams, and their' own silent intuition. This collective wisdom further energises the sacred space.

Finally, and just as important, there is an artistic element. Beauty and sweetness are always incorporated.

This may entail the careful arrangement of various coloured candles, copal resin incense, flowers, cigars, liquor or cologne, and sweetness - often in the form of raw sugar, spices, chocolate, nuts, and seeds.

It is customary to offer three kisses to every one of the dozens of candles being placed on the fire, and prayerful words can also provide additional warmth and sweetness.

Combining all these elements is not only essential and proper, as Victoria says, it should also be artistically delicious.

Before ceremony a female shaman will adorn herself in her finest formal clothing. She dresses in colourfully woven attire that may display symbolic embroidery revealing birth signs, or hold other significant meaning - perhaps the sign of lightning, a serpent, or the jaguar.

A finely woven cortes - a belt which is yards-long - is cinched around their waist; and a headband is added, just as the ceremony commences. This too may have meaning hidden in designs that are folded inside.

THE DEAD ARE NOT DEAD

All people are an echo of an earlier time in history, from the time of creation onward. Life never ends, it is ongoing. After all, we are energy. Even plants will compost and transform into new life. No person fully dies, or as one Maya tried to clarify, "The 'dead' are not dead." A two million year old person still lives in all of us in an unbroken chain of energetic life that some call genetic memory.

We continuously manifest energy masked as matter. It is as if we are tiny packets of energy, dropped into the vast ocean of life. We continuously create ripples which extend outward, until the next human version of life arrives and does the same. Our prior way of existing, and our future way of being, is one never-ending form of life, intermingled with all other forms of vibrant spirits emanating from Creation.

Those who have come before us, forever remain our teachers. Some people refer to the ancestors as the 'pool of souls.' They permeate this reality. Their spirit is always carried forward and is alive in us, but periodically needs to be renewed in ceremony.

The wisdom of the ancestors - if summoned, respected, and understood - can advance our personal evolution. All of us, our human and animal predecessors, and our incarnations of them, have fallen from the sky like rain, and have also risen from the earth like maize.

All, in a cosmically attuned manner, reside in the middle world in an ongoing multilayered existence.

If we forget who we are at the deepest and most ancient levels, we will wonder aimlessly in the modern world. So, connecting with the ancestors is a way of realising, sustaining, and following the true direction of our energetic life. Our remembrance of the ancestors brings a sacred quality to this current moment in the life cycle. In so doing, we reconnect with the grand and the grandeur, and feel

a consoling embrace.

It is the priestly shaman who serves as a mediator between the spirit world of the ancestors and this Middle World existence. It is their skill at propitiating the ancestral spirits and channelling their energy which gives the shaman a unique role in the Mayan culture. Additionally, they interpret ancestral wisdom to her people.

INDIGENOUS HEALING

Martin Prechtel, the author of many books on the Maya, has helped us realise a more accurate interpretation of the term 'indigenous.' Its Latin roots, 'Inde' and 'genous', are understood to mean "inside" and "born," not simply an idea of geography.

When individuals are healed - at a sacred altar in Guatemala, or a psychotherapy office in Wyoming - we must understand that what is most important is our natural or indigenous soul. Its cosmological origins fills everyone with beauty at the time of birth.

This soul makes them a part of the 'sacred whole,' a place of belonging, sweetness, and love. Trauma can defile that natural feeling of greatness, ceremonial healing can restore it.

The Mayan way of understanding what is native, takes us back to an ancient creative force which brought each of us into this world, as a small, but magnificent part.

The duty of healers is to help traumatised individuals return to their original sweet beauty, a beauty which may have been temporarily stolen from them.

A soul retrieval can occur at the sacred altar where a powerful force of goodness overtakes hurt and fosters a homecoming to our original indigenous splendour.

Explaining the Mayan way, the authors are humbled in the knowledge that there are many conceptualisations of this ancient cosmivision. We don't pretend to believe our description is the definitive one.

What we do assert, however, is that Mayan philosophy is a proud tradition; a cultural way of being in the greater world that extends far beyond mere self. It is not a religion. It is a way of personal evolution.

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DOLLS AND RITUAL

The Use of Human Effigies in Shamanism and Sorcery Nicholas Breeze Wood

Many shamanic, and other magical traditions across the world use dolls of one kind or another in their practices. Their use is ancient, with evidence for their use going back at least 3,000 years to ancient Greece, China and India. Examples are found in most other cultures too, such as the ancient Egyptian ushabti - magical doll-like figures buried in tombs alongside the dead, who come alive in order to act as servants in the afterlife.

Magical dolls are well known in western culture too, and have a long history in many places in Europe, but more recently Caribbean voodoo dolls have become the stuff of popular fiction and horror stories, and so many people now think of magical dolls as being a primarily Afro-Caribbean tradition.

In Britain such dolls are called poppets, which comes from a medieval word for small child, and the word has a double meaning - as it not only refers to the magical doll, but is also a term of endearment for a young child, mostly a young girl.

A doll may represent a person or a deity or spirit. When it represents a person, it may be made to help protect them, help in their healing, or help in their cursing. In short, a doll, in this form, is a surrogate, representing the person for whom the magic is intended, in lieu of the person themselves.

When it represents a spirit or a deity it is an idol or fetish figure.

Idolatry - the worship of idols - has a bad name because of strong prohibitions found within the three dominant Abrahamic religions - Christianity, Islam and Judaism - but I would argue that idolatry is important and natural, part of the animistic mindset, which I think human beings are hardwired with.

DOLLS AS ACTUAL PEOPLE

Probably the most important form of doll found in shamanistic and animistic practices around the world, are dolls which represent ancestors. These are very common, and they can take the form of small amulets, right up to large statues.

The modern West tends to see large figures as sculptures, pieces of art, which are dead, we have a 'dead-matter-thinking' culture and so it's natural for us to think a statue representing a dead

person is just a lifeless image - a 'keep sake' of some sort, or a figure to remember and honour them.

For most indigenous cultures however that is not the case, as, of course, a carving is 'alive' and 'awake'; it 'is' the person, or at least acts as a focus for that person, being given offerings and taken care of, as it guards and advises or watches over its descendants.

In Mongolian shamanism, such a figure is called an ongon. These are figures - often, but not always, in human form - which represent important shamanic spirits, most often ancestral shamans within the shamanic lineage.

The shaman will be taken over by these spirits during a shamanic trance, and the spirit - also called an ongon [plural: ongod] will come into the shaman's body and advise members of their community who ask for information, or give healings using the shaman's body as their own.

A physical ongon is a house for the ongon spirit to live inside of, and once made they are ritually brought alive and the spirit invited to live within them. Then the ongod is given offerings and cared for in culturally prescribed ritualistic ways. These ongon figures - and the whole concept of ongods - is a vitally important aspect of Mongolian and Siberian shamanism.

The ritual clothing of a shaman can be thought of as being an ongon - or a collection of ongods - itself, as each part is alive and contains a spirit helper, as are all their other ritual objects, such as their drum and drum beater.

The same thing can be found in Tibetan Buddhism in a slightly more formalised manner. The statues of the Buddha or any of the beings of the Buddhist cosmology - such as protector beings - are also seen as being alive and hiding the quality - the spirit or essence - of the being they represent.

When a statue is put on an altar, it is not a statue in the Western sense, it is always empowered and 'brought alive' in a ritual way, by the recitation of mantras and specific spell-like prayers, and by the offerings made to the being - which is now sitting on the altar.

DOLLS AND MAGICAL WORK

There are many ways in which dolls are used for magical work - both helpful and harmful - across the world. Knowledge of healing is also knowledge of harming, the two are the different faces of the same coin and if the one is done, the other can be done equally easily. Anyone who knows how to heal could - if they so wished - instead seek to harm someone, the important thing is the intent of the practice.

There are two main ways of working with dolls, one is to bring something to the

person they represent, and the other is to take away something from it.

In the next article in this issue of Sacred Hoop, the Korean shaman Jennifer Kim describes a doll tradition from her culture, where a person's illness is taken up in a doll, which is then ritualistically removed from the sick person, so the illness leaves the person and goes into the doll.

I recently took part in a similar ceremony performed by a Nepalese shaman friend. During this ceremony we each made small clay dolls which represented us. Once the doll was made, we filled it with our hair and some toe nail clippings, and then our illness, attachments, defilements, pollutions etc, were ceremonially put into these clay dolls. Once this had been done, the dolls were put out in the wilds - so the harmful spirits would attach themselves to the dolls and eat them - not us.

After the ceremony was performed, and while the dolls were being taken outside into the wilds, we all had to change our clothes, so we became 'a different clean person'. This was done to confuse the harmful spirits, and it is the reason why people wear black at funerals - an old tradition, the black clothes confuse the spirits and stop them following the living back to thier homes.

These kind of ceremonies are often called 'ransom ceremonies' and they occurs in lots of animistic and shamanic traditions. In many ceremonies the person not only changes their clothes after the defilements have been taken, they also have to change their name, so the harmful spirits can not find them and continue to do harm. In effect they become 'new people' - and the 'old person' is left out in the wilds to be eaten by the spirits which are allowed to feed upon it.

Here, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, a Tibetan Bon lama, recalls a ransom ceremony (Tib: *glud*) he witnessed, performed for his mother:

'I remember when my mother had been ill for a long time we tried to heal her by means of different medical treatments, but nothing helped. We then performed several minor rites, but these did not work either.

So finally we invited some shaman monks, who performed a big ransom rite, in which they prepared a large effigy of her (in fact, people often make life-size effigies), and we dressed it in her clothes, so it was very lifelike and resembled her closely.

Then we performed the ritual, offering the effigy in her place to repay her karmic debt to the spirits.

She was given a new name, Yehe Lhamo, in place of her old name, Drolma, as a kind of new birth into the world, and she recovered from her illness.'

The Korean, Nepalese and Tibetan practices above, are all examples of taking away something from the person.

Ways of bringing something to the person would include the archetypal sticking of pins into a wax figure to do harm, or other ways of bringing healing or protection. Remember you need permission from the person you are working for - or in the case of a child their parents - before you do this or any other form of healing work. You don't just 'do it' on people - that's unethical.

I use dolls quite often in my own shamanic practice, and the way I do it is simple. It can easily be adapted by anyone reading this.

To represent a person, I generally use a small figure, either a small cut-out made of leather, or a small bronze figure. The bronze figures I use, of which I have several I keep specifically for this task - are shaman's ongon figures from Inner Mongolia. These are small figures, often with suspension loops so they can be worn as amulets, and they are traditionally made to represent ancestral figures and spirits. However I often use them to represent the person I'm working for, and as they come in both male and female forms, I can select one that 'fit's the person the work is for. I also have one or two wooden dolls I use when it seems right.

Sometimes I am instructed by my spirits to ask the person I am doing the work for to send me some clothing, I generally ask for an old T-shirt or scraps they have cut from some other piece of old clothing, something they have worn quite a lot, and are associated with.

In these cases, I generally make a specific doll just for them, normally out of sticks, or scraps of wood. At the end of these healings, after the spirit has been removed from the doll, I normally leave these dolls to decompose in nature.

Most often I work with a single doll for a single person, but occasionally the work I do will be for a couple, or a whole family, and when this is the case, I will use - or more likely make - a set of simple dolls, one to represent each person the work is for. These may only be a simple wooden stick, onto which I always paint a face to help bring them alive.

The way I perform this ritual is to start by calling my spirits to me in my normal way, and then, when I have done that, I call the spirit of the sick person and into the figure I am using to represent them. If you don't know how to do this, you are probably not really capable of doing this work yet.

Then, because I work with mirrors a lot, I then place the doll-person onto a bronze shaman's mirror.

Bronze mirrors (toli) are important ritual objects in many forms of traditional Siberian shamanism and they have a lot of uses. One of these is as a connection to the sacred centre of everything - so by putting a doll-person on top of a mirror, I am symbolically putting them in the very centre of creation - a place of perfect balance and great power. They are truly centred.

Placing them on a mirror is also very protective, but - like all these ways - putting them on a mirror could also be done to harm them deliberately.

Not everyone works with shaman's mirrors I know - so here you may well have to ask and listen to your own spirits about what you should use instead.

When I don't use a mirror, I have a bag of dried flower petals from an Andean despacho ceremony and I sometimes use those as a bed for the doll-person to rest on. I also have a square of white rabbit fur I put the doll-person on sometimes. You have to find what is right for you. Ask your spirits.

It is important to place the doll-person on something however, the act of placing them down in a special place - whether it's a mirror or a piece of special cloth - is a way of magically separating them from the everyday world. You are taking them from the ordinary and placing them into a special, sacred, environment.

The person is now ready to be worked with, and we need to determine the nature of the way they need to be worked with.

A lot of the times I do this, it is for protection. The person might be in a difficult place in their life - maybe personally, or perhaps they are travelling, and wish to be kept safe, or maybe they are undergoing a medical procedure.

Because of this, I quite often wind red woollen thread, or red ribbons around the doll-person too. Red is a protective colour - the colour of blood, and therefore life - and so, by winding red around them, you are winding protection around them.

I sometimes take a photo of this doll-person on my altar and send it to the person, i find on a human, psychological level, it often gives great comfort to them.

For additional protection work, I often put a Buddhist mala (string of prayer beads) around them too. I do this because as well as practicing shamanism I am a Tibetan Buddhist, and so, for me, they are an ideal powerful thing to use to make an encircling band of protection and healing around a person. I have heard of people who place a circle of salt or tobacco around a doll-person in this way too, and one Siberian shamanic tradition I know of - and one I often do

myself - is to simply circle the doll with a burning match three times clockwise, circling the doll-person with protective fire.

Of course, it goes without saying, one should smudge the doll-person, and in so doing of course you are smudging the person too.

If the person needs specific protection, I often put a protective 'fence' of phurbas (ritual demon destroying daggers) around them - facing outwards.

Again this is drawing on my Tibetan Buddhist practices - I work a lot with phurbas, and so I often do quite specific phurba practice for people too - the aim of which is to kill - or at least immobilise by pinning them down - any spirits which are provoking the person. In Tibetan traditions a provoking spirit can cause fear, illness and other maladies.

Instead of phurbas, you can again ask your spirits about other things you could do here; the circle of salt I already mentioned is an excellent barrier for example. When I am working with physical people in the room, rather than doll-people, I have often used a circle of eagle feathers, or a circle of sage (smudge), or sometimes a circle of tobacco, or blue corn meal - any of these could be used with a doll-person too.

And so, the doll-person is there with you - on your altar- even if physically the person they represent is thousands of miles away. Now you can work with them - using the doll-person as their surrogate.

I often have people on my altar like this for several weeks if it's a long healing process, or if they are in great need. A few doll-people have been on my altar permanently, until they died - for years sometimes, and sometimes I use containers for people, small pots, into which I put doll-people.

When I do this I normally use red containers because of the traditional protective nature of the colour. I will also sometimes tie additional protective things on the jar too - iron objects especially, as iron is seen universally as protective. These objects may include small shaman's weapons such as a bow and arrow or a sword.

When the time comes to finish the healing process, I thank the spirits, and I dismantle the doll, and it's bed. The spirit of the person is still in the doll - so it has to be sent back. Again, if you don't know how to do this you probably should not be working in this way yet.

When the doll is empty it is ready to be used for the next healing.

THE KILLING OF DOLLS

We normally associate harmful acts done to

a ritual doll as dark magic, but this practice can also have a healing side to it, but in these cases, the doll does not represent a person, but instead is a house for the spirit of a disease or a malady.

Personally I take a Buddhist view of such things, a troublesome spirit is a suffering being in its own right, and is trapped in its suffering state by its karma. Because it is suffering, it does harm, but this does not make it evil. Buddhists don't really accept the concepts of good and evil, instead they see enlightenment and ignorance. A being - such as a spirit of illness - is ignorant - and therefore suffering - and its suffering causes it to harm others by its ignorant actions.

The Tibetan Buddhist view is to 'liberate' (Tib: *bsgral-ba*) the spirit from its suffering, and one of the ways of doing this is to compassionately kill it, so it can then have a more fortuitous rebirth, being released from some of its negative karma.

This 'liberation' of a spirit is an important part of many Tibetan exorcism ceremonies, and plays a part in traditional new year ceremonial dances, called cham, which have their roots in the ancient pre-Buddhist shamanic traditions of Tibet. In these dances - enacted by masked dancers who represent beings of the Buddhist cosmos - a special human figure, called a *linga* is used.

In the new year ceremony the *linga* is employed to gather up all the old energy and spirits connected to the old year - which need to move on - and 'liberate' them. If the ceremony was done as an exorcism at another time in the year, the *linga* would hold the ghost or harmful spirit, which needed to be dispatched to its next life.

In the ceremony, the spirit is summoned and bound within the *linga* - which is usually made of dough, but can be as simple as a person shaped drawing on a piece of paper.

This figure is then placed inside a triangular box, generally made of iron. Iron is considered wrathful and a powerful binding metal because of its protective qualities - it can keep things out, and also keep things in. The triangle shape is also considered wrathful and is connected with the element of fire. This is also why some Mongolian shamans play triangular shaped drums sometimes.

This triangular box is a spirit trap, the spirit to be 'liberated' is trapped both within the dough body of the *linga*, and then bound once more in the prison of the inescapable iron box.

The *linga* is then ritually killed, in a magical way, by using a mixture of magical texts and magical weapons - it might be

stabbed with phurba daggers, hacked to pieces with ritual swords, or shot by ritual bows and arrows.

Once the spirit inside the *linga* is dead, and the physical *linga* mutilated, the corpse of the *linga* is burned. On one level this is a form of psychological drama, acted out for all to see, and on another level it is deep and powerful sorcery.

There are six designated and identified parts to this ritual:

- 1) Creating the *linga* (Tib: '*bri*)
- 2) Summoning the target spirit to go inside the *linga* (Tib: '*gugs*)
- 3) Causing the target's spirit to be bound into the *linga* (Tib: '*bstims*)
- 4) Separating the target from any protecting spirits looking after it (Tib: '*dbyc*)
- 5) Cutting off the target's life-force (Tib: '*srog-chod*)
- 6) Liberating (killing) the spirit of the target (Tib: '*bsgral-ba*)

Of course - such practices can be employed to do harm just as easily as they can be used to do good, and Tibetan culture is full of dark magic.

HOUSES FOR THE SPIRITS

The other main use of effigies in shamanism is as fetishes of some kind or another.

As previously mentioned, in Mongolian and Siberian shamanism an *ongon* is generally the ancestral spirit of a shaman who has been bound to the earth so they can come back and be available to other shamans.

When a powerful shaman dies there is a period of three years, during which the mourning happens and things are prepared. At this time the shaman's soul is said to go to be with the naga spirits - the *lu* as they are called in Mongolia.

Then, at the end of this period, a series of ceremonies, called 'the taking back' are performed, and these take back the shaman's soul from the naga, and bind it to the earth in order to stop it leaving and having a rebirth, or passing to the heavens.

A special shrine called an *asar* is made, and the shaman's old ritual objects and armour (costume) are placed within it. This is now the main *ongod* (spirit house), of the *ongod* (spirit of the shaman).

The *ongon* spirit can then come back and take over living shamans while they are in trance.

But smaller *ongon* houses are also made, especially for very old *ongon* spirits whose own *asar* has long ago been taken back into nature - some ancestral *ongon* spirits are truly ancient.

These *ongod* can take many forms, and be used to house many types of spirits -

ancestral and otherwise, but most physical ongon spirit houses are in human form in some way or another.

The way a spirit is called into an ongon varies according to tradition. When I have done it for ancestral spirits and helper spirits whom I have met in my own shamanic work - and who have specifically asked me to make an ongon house for them - I make the physical ongon house, and then call to the ongon spirit and invite it into the effigy.

I do this by preparing offerings to the ongon spirit, which are placed in front of the effigy, and then generally I play a khuur (a shaman's jaw harp) to draw down the spirit. The spirit is then transferred to the ongon figure by wrapping the effigy in the streamers and cloth snakes - manjig - representing nagas, attached to the khuur.

A drum could be used in a similar way, the effigy being placed into the body of the drum, wrapped up in cloth streamers attached to the drum, and so transferring the ongon spirit into the ongon effigy. There are many ways to do this, some very elaborate and some quite simple.

This technique can also be employed for soul and power retrievals. The returned soul part, or gift of power, is brought back inside a drum, and once back, a physical stone - or some other object - is put into the drum and wrapped in the drum's cloth dressings. Once it is empowered in this way, it can be given to the person it belongs to. I have done this many times, especially for people I am working for who are physically a long way away. I often use small shaman's mirrors, putting the soul part or gift of power into them, and these I then send to the person I am working for with the instruction they have to wear them around their neck for a period of time. The act of physically wearing the mirror or an amulet helps with the integration.

THE SELF OFFERING STICK

Human effigies and dolls are very much part of Native American traditions too, and they come in a variety of forms, from simple cut-out rawhide human shapes, to elaborately crafted or carved figures.

One sacred doll tradition was taught by the Lakota holyman Frank Fools Crow, who was said to have been the most powerful Native American holyman born in the C20th. This doll is what he called the 'sacred self-offering stick.' Here is a part of a description of the stick, written by Thomas E Mails.

'... The first time he presented it to me, he held it with the greatest care, and I could see in his misting eyes and soft

smile how much he cherished and respected it. He handed me the stick and as I inspected it I could smell the smoked sweet-tobacco and sweetgrass that impregnated it.

"I made this many years ago," he said, "in 1928, just after our two sons died... I wanted Wakan Tanka and the Helpers to know that I did not blame them for the deaths, and that I would continue to serve Them.

"It is made up of things that represent me and my thoughts, along with my love and devotion to the Higher Powers. It also expresses my continuing gratitude for what the Higher Powers have done in and through me for others.

"I call it my 'sacred self-offering stick,' and Stirrup [another Lakota medicine man, one of Fools Crow's teachers], who had one of his own, taught me how to make and use it. He told me that in former times every medicine person had one.

"I was only a boy when he taught me, but he said I would know when the right time had come to make it."

In appearance alone the stick was a fabulous creation... It was a ten inches long and one inch in diameter cottonwood stick. It was hand-carved and painted red. At its top end, which was rounded off slightly, were painted three black dots, to represent his own face. On the back, extending from top to bottom, was a narrow, undulating black line. The stick was wrapped in a piece of cloth in such a way that the face was left exposed.

On the outside of the stick, about where belt level would be on a person, he had wrapped and tied four strings of thick yarn in the four directional colours - white, black, red and yellow. To this were tied two pouches, one containing tobacco and herbs, and the other sage and sweetgrass.

Hung from the belt on string loops were two beautiful sea shells, some beads of different colours, and a white fluffy breath feather. Above the belt, a string of seven tobacco packets was wound around the stick. Tied upright to the stick were two long feathers.

There was a small fragment of cloth from the clothing of each of his deceased children, a scrap from the clothing of his surviving daughter, and a fragment from the clothing of each of his two wives.

Fools Crow told me that he refurbished the stick from time to time to keep it up to date and beautiful - so that it would please the Higher Powers. He added items that represented significant moments in his life, and he regularly replaced the tobacco offerings.

The stick was a very personal item, and I was not certain that he wanted to tell me

anything more about it, but he did.

"I am fully wrapped up in this stick," he said as he caressed it lovingly. "It is my way of continually telling Wakan Tanka, the Helpers, and Grandmother Earth, how much I appreciate the opportunity to serve them. When I am busy with daily tasks, or when I need to go someplace, this stick continues to tell Them how I feel.

"Wherever I am, I know the stick is doing this for me, and that my thanksgiving is not being neglected. Wherever I am, it is always in the back of my mind.

"You must tell people to make their own sacred self-offering sticks and to put them out as I do. It will give them a feeling of closeness to Wakan Tanka and the Helpers that nothing else can equal."

Impressed as I was, I had one more question: "What is the purpose of the undulating black line on the back of the stick?"

"My prayers fly up it, on their way to the Higher Powers, and then their responses come flying back down it to me."

Then he lifted up the cloth wrapping where it covered the bottom of the line and added,

"See, there is a little painted cup there to catch the blessings I know the Higher Powers will send me."

The aim of this article was to give some possibilities, to perhaps open up some possible ways you might work with ritual effigies in some way or another yourself, whether making a self-offering stick, or performing healing or protection ceremonies for people, performing exorcisms, or creating homes for some of your spirits.

Working with spirit dolls is part of our birthright as humans, and although we may not do it in the same way as our ancestors did, or in the same way as a Mongolian shaman or native American medicine person might do it, an awareness of such things allows us to put a key in the lock within the doorway to new possibilities, and open that door and see what's inside.

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KOREAN HEALING DOLLS

Jennifer Kim

In Korea, dolls called *heo-su-abi* - which literally translate to scarecrow - are used in a ritual called *daesudaemyoung* is done by shamans. Traditionally *daesudaemyoung* is performed for someone when that person is on their deathbed, waiting to part with this physical world. We perform this ritual to make their journey to the afterlife more pleasant, and so that their spirit can leave peacefully when it's time to depart.

Another way it is used, is if someone is sick or ill. In this case it is performed to 'put away' the sickness. The same thing may be done if someone has any bad luck or negativity attached to them, or sometimes it's done just as an extra precaution.

When it's a day suitable for performing a kut [ceremony], the spirit mother [shaman] tells their client to bring undergarments belonging to their family - their spouse and their children.

The shaman then takes an already prepared dolls - made by shaping rough, coarse cloth - and they wrap each doll in an undergarment, one doll for each person in the family.

As it is prepared, each doll will be stuffed with three coins and three pinches of rice, and while it is made and stuffed, the spirit mother chants sacred words. The spirit mother also always has a printed cloth talisman, or amulet - which we call a *bujeok* - and she wraps this around the outside of the doll.

When this is done, we prepare the dolls in the same way as they prepared the bodies of the dead back in ancient, traditional times. Each doll has seven cords or strings tied around it, starting with the head, and moving down towards the feet. The way we tied the string is important, we cannot knot it or tie it, instead we have to twist the thread, so it holds in place.

Lastly, we tie our sacred five colours - red, blue, yellow, white, green - the colours we use in our *Mugyo/Musok* - our shamanic tradition - to represent the elements, the directions and the gods/deity with each colour referencing a specific spirit.

My own spirit mother shaman teacher also likes to take an extra step, and she write a small prayer on the doll to give it - and the person it represents - greater blessings.

In the ceremonies we do as Korean shamans in New York - where I live - when

the ceremony draws to a close, the shaman; who is possessed by either an ancestor spirit, or the shaman's 'god' [a powerful cultural helper spirit, who comes into the shaman, while the shaman is in a trance] picks up the dolls, along with all the handmade paper props that decorated the ancestor offering table and altar.

The spirit mother then carries all these ceremony items, while assistants hold a long white cloth up, which is torn part way down the middle to make a hole in it.

The spirit mother then walks through the hole in the white fabric, while its pulled it taut in order for it to be easier to walk through. This is like a symbolic gateway, a threshold which the spirit mother passes through, taking all the sickness or bad luck with her.

When a person is dying, this passing through the cloth symbolises the ancestral spirits leaving, travelling back to the the Heavens - or the many levels of hells - and represents the dying person's soul going back to the world of the spirits.

That is why the spirit mother takes all the ritual props from the ancestor table, and blows out the candles on their altar, these things all symbolise the departure.

The client will never see these items ever again, and later we burn everything we used for the ceremony. No items are ever reused twice, every time we have a ceremony we always handmade all the sacred props we need, it would be disrespectful not to do so, taking a shortcut because a shaman was lazy could have devastating results.

CEREMONY WITHOUT DOLLS

Traditionally, the ritual ceremony is performed slightly differently, depending on the exact purpose it is being done for, but it is along these general lines.

If this ritual was being performed for someone who is severely sick or ill, the mudang [shaman] might use a live chicken instead of a doll, but this varies from mudang to mudang.

The chicken's beak is filled with the nail clippings and hair of the sickly person, and the undergarments are used to wrap the chicken. Then the seven ties will be tied onto the chicken in the same way as they would with the dolls, again each tie must be twisted never tied into a knot.

Once the chicken is secured, after being properly dressed and treated, then the ceremony will begin to start,

Some mudangs say the ceremony can not stop until the chicken has dropped down dead, which is seen as a great sign of success, as the sickness or disease is said to have gone with the chicken, but other mudangs say they have to either

break the chicken's neck or cut the chicken's neck, and spill blood, in order to have a successful ceremony.

Chickens are used when there is sickness or illness involved, but my own spirit family [shaman lineage] do not perform any ceremonies with live animals, or feel the need to spray blood or have a bloody ceremony, although this is still practised in the Korean countryside by the older shamans.

There are also other instances when a mudang will use a whole dried pollack fish, which we call a *bugeo*, in place of chicken or doll. Again, it varies from mudang to mudang and their spirits. The fish is used because it is believed that the anatomy of the fish is similar to that of humans, and some people think the face of the fish is similar to a humans too. The dried fish is also given as an offering, and is often present during kut ceremonies.

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WHEN SPIRIT HELPERS MANIFEST

David Kowalewski

Many Western shamanic practitioners are reluctant to share stories about their spirit helpers with the public. As I see it, their are two main reasons to do with this.

The first reason is clear enough; the telling may feed a shaman's ego - maybe the most dangerous pitfall of the practice. The motive of providing information can easily morph into one of saying, "Aren't I special?"

The signs of corruption are easy to spot: unwillingness to admit ignorance, failure to acknowledge failure, aversion to questions, privileging power over humility, exaggeration, authoritarianism, and above all reluctance to give most - if not - all of the credit for success to the spirits. Too many shamans-turned-gurus have met a bitter end this way.

But the danger of egoism can easily be addressed by stories themselves - cautionary tales about egoic shamans, who went astray, and the hardships they visited upon themselves. Certainly, bureaucratic religious leaders these days provide examples of such dangers. The gods have ways of putting us in our place, and none of them are pleasant.

Second reason - as I see it - is this. After centuries of marginalising shamanism, the spiritually and scientifically underdeveloped sectors of Western society still see the paranormal, the esoteric, the pagan, and the non-Christian, as somehow imaginary, psychopathological, demonic; or even all of the above.

As such, shamanic narratives are easily ignored at best, or attacked at worst. Loose talk about spirits in the past was often a killer, and nowadays it can become a job-killer.

But the shamanic renaissance, which the West has undergone over the past half-century or so, has brought some aspects of 'primitive spirituality' into popular consciousness, and so it faces far less resistance than it has done before.

Shamanic stories are received with far less fear, and far more interest. Indeed, today's crisis in bureaucratic religion has brought a searching for a 'spiritual but not religious' way of life for many people. Shamanic stories can help to restore the magical lives, which many people are more and more yearning for. In a word, the soil for shamanic seeds is being tilled as we speak.

BUT WHY SHARE THE STORIES?

In the old days shamans did in fact publicly share their stories, by way of narration, poems, songs, and drama. They saw many benefits: making the spiritual entertaining, offering details about spiritual messages and 'right-relationship,' and so on - in a word, making 'nonordinary' reality (NOR) more 'ordinary' and 'ordinary' reality (OR) more 'nonordinary.' Their stories helped to fuse the physical with the metaphysical, for the greater vitality of their people.

It is my contention that the modern age has, in fact, become especially thirsty for such stories.

In my research into the paranormal in popular consciousness, I found over 40 English-language TV series dealing with ghosts; yet too many were sensationalised, distorted, and disrespectful to the spirits. So, while the interest in spirits is there, do we want media moguls monopolising and dictating the narrative? That, I propose, would not be good.

Telling shamanic stories can give the modern public an inside look at how shamans work, can give a realistic view of the tradition. The caveat then, is to avoid telling such stories to dogmatic (namely not genuinely seeking) sceptics - as they just want to energise, what one of my teachers called, 'the demon of doubt.'

The Western apprentices of shamans, and students of Western shamanic teachers today face hurdles that - without stories from their teachers, told to validate their experiences - are high.

The 'demon of doubt' can plague beginners raised from childhood on the cultural hegemony of disbelieving scientism, but the sharing of stories can solidify beginner confidence, by making such experiences feel more a part of daily life.

My formal education has taught me that 'all science is a comparison of many data points,' and so, hearing shamanic stories from many sources gives us a wider view of the metaphysical world, and helps us find themes in the 'repertoire of the spirits.' As such, stories helps us draw imaginal maps for navigating the spirit world with greater ease.

And perhaps there is an added bonus, perhaps the telling of shamanic stories will encourage the mass public to 'come out of their paranormal closets,' as I like to put it, and start sharing their own spirit encounters; thereby helping to spiritualise mainstream culture even more.

Lastly, traditional shamans today see severe global crises on the horizon, all of which I would propose, have their origin in

the spiritual vacuum that is so endemic in the West. They, and many Westerners, feel, these crises can best be addressed by the ancient traditions of shamanism and animism. The world's peoples are soon going to need a solid connection with compassionate spirits, in order to weather the coming storms.

Yet without compelling stories, who is going to listen? As a teacher, I know this well.

HOW THE SPIRITS SHOW UP

From this position therefore, I'd like to share a few of my own stories.

The spirit helpers I've experienced range from plant devas, totem animals, and other nature spirits, to teachers, guides, 'little people,' ghosts, ancestors, gods and goddesses, angels, and other manifestations -one of my friends has a mainframe computer spirit as a teacher, how's that for high-tech shamanism?

I've excluded all manifestations which occurred during my vision quests, since they are not directly related to specific shamanic services; and for the sake of anonymity - with one exception - I've disguised the identities of the spirit helpers, clients, students and other people, and places and other circumstances.

I've also omitted the more dramatic cases, since I can hardly wrap my head around them myself.

Spirits can manifest in physical -bodily - forms, metaphysical - spiritual - forms, or somewhere in between, which I think of as symbolic or energetic or synchronistic forms. If they show up in physical form, they can often behave in ways totally out of character for the creature they are embodying.

When a shaman connects with the spirits, their prayers, workings and ceremonies create 'portals' - which can be thought of as a 'two-way street' - between OR and NOR. By the use of this, a shaman will encounter spirits as the shaman moves from OR into NOR, or a spirit can come from its NOR realm into OR via the portal.

Let's take the former first. Shamans encounter spirits during their purposeful trance journeys from OR into NOR, journeys they make for themselves or their clients. I've detailed many such meetings in my own book 'Death Walkers,' and many more such encounters are described in Michael Harner's book 'Cave and Cosmos,' so I'll leave such meetings to the reader's own research and practice.

Also fairly common, but far less mentioned, are appearances of spirits in a practitioner's dream.

Early one morning, while in bed dreaming about a wildflower, known for healing female maladies, I was awakened by a cheery young female voice in my ear saying: "Good morning!"

During other dreams, shaman-spirits have taught me their healing practices. One night, for example, I dreamt of a male shaman in a Tibetan cave who showed me his ceremony for treating a common, but serious disease.

Dream encounters are quite commonplace, and many people who practice shamanism experience them. More dramatic are the encounters with spirits coming from the spirit world into the waking ordinary world.

These spirits break into our humdrum lives in an endless number of ways - a shaman may meet or experience their own spirit helpers in the physical world.

I once had a - literally - touching experience, right after another shamanic practitioner had connected me with a male Native-American spirit helper for me. That afternoon during a healing ceremony, suddenly I saw that helper in spirit form touching my wrist, at a place I had injured during a martial arts class the week before. The pain vanished, never to return.

Spirit helpers sometimes seem especially fond of communicating to a shaman through electrical devices like smoke alarms, lamps, and radios too, even when the devices are unplugged or missing batteries.

One day I was working at my computer and thinking of my Native-American spirit helper. I typed the words 'In that spirit,' and suddenly my printer turned on and printed out a sheet of paper with those words - 'In that spirit' - upon it. I still get goosebumps when I think about that incident.

Another cyber-encounter occurred after finishing my book 'Death Walkers,' when I went online to the website of 'Omega: The Journal of Death and Dying.'

Suddenly on the screen up popped an old article in that journal, written by a university colleague of mine who had taught a course called 'Death and Dying' and who had died shortly before. Her name? - Walker. If you don't like tricks, synchronicities, and jokes, maybe the shamanic life is not for you.

Waking visions of spirit helpers can also occur. During a period when I was being threatened by a dark force, a spirit in human form, appeared next to me in my car as if to say, 'I've got your back,' and then disappeared. A few months later, after the threat had passed, I saw him

walk across my living room and out of the front door, as if to say; 'You're in the clear now.'

SPIRITS MANIFESTING

Likewise at a workshop taught by Michael Harner, I once saw a fellow student, who had told me he was feeling 'out of sorts,' walking across the classroom.

Suddenly I 'noticed' one of my animal spirit helpers sitting next to me, and it was gazing at him intently. So I asked it if there anything we need to do?"

Right away, it bounded across the room and pulled out a long black tarry substance from the student's waist - a shamanic extraction as it were.

Later on, I told the student about this, but he looked sceptical - until our next workshop meeting, when Harner told the class that 'power animals' just love pulling out harmful energy intrusions. Here I learned that there are spontaneous shamanic healings, just like there are spontaneous shamanic dismemberments.

It's possible to get very useful information from the manifestations of spirit helpers. During one university semester, while I was sitting out side at home, worrying about three of my students who might not complete a key assignment for the course I was teaching. Suddenly an avian spirit helper of mine appeared overhead in physical bird form, hung in the air unnaturally, and wagged its wings three times back and forth, as if shaking its head.

I sensed it was saying: "No, no, no." so I stopped worrying about them, as I interpreted that the student's work was a done deal, they were not going to do the assignment and there was nothing I could do about it. And indeed, none of the students did completed the assignment.

Next year same course, same situation, same scene, but now four students. My avian spirit again appeared, but this time tilted its wings up and down four times, as if nodding its head. "Yes, yes, yes, yes" I sensed, and I stopped worrying because - again -it was a done deal. And yes, all four students completed their assignment - but I knew already because 'a little birdie really had told me!'

A few times, one of my avian spirit helpers, in physical form, has entered a room full of people - coming in through the window. It has flown around my head a few times, and then it has left. On another occasion - at the wedding of a friend - it came in spirit form. I saw the groom looking very jittery at the altar, next to his bride-to-be. Suddenly I 'saw' this helper fly up to him and gently wrap a wing around his shoulders.

Later at the reception I heard my friend tell some relatives that he had been very nervous during the ceremony, but then mysteriously felt a sudden calm. I chalked that one up another spontaneous healing from my spirit helper.

It's especially sweet is when other shamans or practitioners see one's spirit helper.

At one shamanic training session - right after I received my avian spirit - I saw a student move across the classroom angrily toward a young girl, and right away I saw my spirit helper fly off to protect her. A few minutes later the teacher came up to me, pointed at the girl, and asked me; "Did you send your spirit helper over there?"

At times, I too have experienced the spirit helpers of other practitioners. One day while sitting behind a shaman and assisting in his healing ceremony, I had a vision of an elk, who rushed up to me from behind, ran over my left shoulder, and then stood in front of the shaman to help in the healing.

When I later told the shaman, he said; "yes, I know, I saw it coming in over your left shoulder."

Shamans may also hear another shaman's spirit helper. While at a training session about tracking nature spirits, during one exercise I was tracking a quarry but lost the trail. Suddenly I felt my left shoulder pulled way back and heard a loud voice, which I took to be the shaman's spirit helper, in my left ear. The voice said; "Look down." So I did, and I saw the tracks of the quarry, I had been following, but had lost the trail of.

This same spirit manifested to a fellow student tracker, who one day was having lunch under a tree. The tracker heard a loud voice in his left ear saying; "Get out of here!" And so the student took heed and quickly left. Later, upon returning to the spot, he found fresh bear tracks right behind where he had been sitting.

Possibly even sweeter, is when a large group of practitioners see the same spirit. During one training session, I was with a group of practitioners who journeyed to meet a stag spirit in a group exercise.

Afterwards, while we were all writing down our experiences, suddenly a whitetail stag appeared in physical form outside the window and staring in at us quizzically as if to ask; "You called?"

Likewise, during a sweat lodge ceremony, poured by late Lakota medicine man Grandfather Wallace Black Elk, an eagle bone whistle started flying around the lodge by itself, next to everybody's ears, piping loudly. Grandfather Wallace was well known for things happening like this in his ceremonies.

Such group experiences are often this dramatic. During one training session, a group of us were standing in circle, when the floor started to shake.

Three of us, who were standing right next to each other, 'saw' one of my spirit animal helpers. I don't know if we all unknowingly happened to have the same spirit animal helper - if it was a synchronicity - or did the other two simply 'see' mine.

At times, clients too will experience a shaman's spirit. In my case, this often seems to take the form of energy movements in the client's body. During one healing ceremony, my avian helper appeared to me in spirit form, and right after, my client felt his arms flapping like wings. During another ceremony I had a vision of a female spirit helper hovering over my client and then disappearing, and later the client said; "I felt some nurturing female energy entering me."

But spirits, not limited by space, may show up far away from the practitioner. One of my clients, who was sitting at home a thousand miles away, suddenly saw a spirit helper of mine appear in his living room, standing seven feet tall.

I find it especially gratifying to see the spirit helpers of my clients in OR. Behind the head of one client I saw a ferocious ninja-like spirit form, ready for battle. When I described what I saw, the client said, "Exactly!" Now, that is a protective spirit of the first order - I was quite envious.

During another case, right after I help retrieve [bring from the spirit world in order for the spirit to bond with the person as a helper spirit] an animal helper spirit for a client, we both saw it fly past the window in physical form.

On other occasions, my clients, apprentices and students - whilst by themselves - have experienced the spirits who earlier had been retrieved for them.

Often these spirits show up in some kind of physical form. One client, shortly after receiving an avian spirit helper animal, woke up one morning with the physical sensation of being wrapped in its wings.

Another client, shortly after getting a helper - a fierce and secretive wild animal - saw it come up to him one day in physical form, fearless, and sit right in front of him, staring for several minutes. Likewise, a week after one of my university students received a spirit animal, our class held a sweat lodge ceremony, after which he came up to me wide-eyed and blurted out; "During the sweat my animal helper crawled up my leg!" "Oh," was all I could say, after all, what else can one say, when people tell you things like that?

But such spirits can come in symbolic form as well. The husband of a client of mine had scoffed about 'the whole shamanism business,' and mocked the very idea of a 'spirit animal.'

When I retrieved his wife's spirit animal helper, unbeknownst to me the logo of her husband's company was in fact that very animal, and had been stenciled on the door of his pickup - hopefully one demon of doubt slain.

Synchronistic appearances are common too. One of my university students received an African lion as a spirit animal, and right after class, he went back to his dormitory room and turned on his TV, and up popped a documentary on African lions. At the next class session he came up to me wide-eyed and exclaimed "This stuff really works!"

THE THEMES OF ENCOUNTERS

These stories reveal certain patterns that may, I would argue resonate with the mass - non shamanism aware - public, and in particular they may steepen the learning curve for new practitioners.

For example, we've seen that spirits are detected via a variety of physical senses - sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and many would add the phrase, 'gut feeling' too. They are also detected in metaphysical ways as well, such as clairvoyance, clairaudition, clairolfaction, clairsentience, clairgustation.

Whereas modernity tends to focus on the sense of sight, the spirits have no such bias, and as one of my teachers put it, shamans need 'total sensory awareness.'

Ancient spirits do not seem to have any problem with modern electronics either. If we think of spirits as having energy bodies, and think of these energy bodies as having electromagnetic properties, then problem solved. Just wait till domestic robots flood the marketplace - that could be interesting.

I, as well as the many other non-indigenous shamanic practitioners I've met, seem to encounter a disproportionate number of Native-American spirits - especially in North America where I live. Maybe - because of today's global crises - the aboriginal spirits of a place are specially eager to help spirit workers of whatever ethnic background.

Spirits have their own personalities. For example, some are extroverts, while others are introverts. One of my spirit animals is a real 'ham,' having appeared in spirit form to three separate individuals, on three distinct occasions, and probably to even more which I don't know about. It also came to me weirdly three times in physical form.

Other spirits are downright humorous - there's a lot of tricksterism in the spirit

world. They do want us to take them seriously, but not solemnly.

Finally, manifestations are surprising. There does not seem to be any standard operating procedure that shamans can use to predict appearances. The spirits take on a life of their own, confounding any expectations the shaman or shamanic practitioner might have. But then, after all, spirits reside in nonordinary reality.

And the lessons from all this? Expect nothing, but be open to anything. Just put out the welcome mat and surrender to the gods. Build it and they will come?

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ORDEAL MEDICINE

Travis Bodick

While a friend scorched holes into my skin with a burning stick, I prepared myself to receive the medicine. My traditional friend is a kambo provider in the Amazon, and kambo is a venomous secretion from an frog which lives there, and which is traditionally applied directly into the blood stream via open burns in the outer skin.

These burns expose your capillaries directly, so that the medicine can go straight into the blood - peptides in the venom then carry themselves directly across the blood brain barrier, and cause a profound reaction - sweating, increased heart rate, body heat, intense tingling through the body as well as throbbing in the skull, body aches or pain, cramps, shaking, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fainting, swelling of the hands and face...

Reading the list of common reactions you may wonder why someone would ask another person to apply this venom directly into their bloodstream, or why someone would call it 'medicine' Isn't medicine supposed to be some easy pill you take to make you feel all better?

In our culture we have been taught to look for quick fixes. We want things now, and we don't want to work for them or sacrifice to get them.

If we are sick, we often just want whatever makes us feel better the quickest. But the short cut is not always the best way.

Take cold medicines for example. Your body is trying to push toxins out through nasal mucous, but since you don't like having a runny nose, you take a medication which keeps the mucous and toxins in your body.

Or in the case of heartburn and indigestion, your stomach acid is not acidic enough to properly digest your food, so you take an antacid to stop the burning sensation, even though this antacid further basifies your stomach acid, and makes your future digestion even worse.

These are just two examples of ways we use medicine to run from our problems instead of solve them. We want medicine to be easy and quick, so we sacrifice our future health for momentary comfort in the present.

This can create problems in all areas of our lives, and one of the most noticeable areas this affects us is in our mental health.

When difficult emotions arise or we experience traumatic events our culture teaches us to bury these emotions and keep them to ourselves. Put on a happy face and buck up!

This type of emotional repression does great harm to us as individuals and communities, and the effects of these habits accumulate over time which leads to the mental health crisis many modernised countries are experiencing these days.

It is difficult and scary to face fears and emotions, or to talk about them with others and ask for help, so we take the short cut and just ignore our problems. But in the long run this makes everything harder, as the problems do not go away when ignored, but only fester and accumulate.

Eventually people can become overwhelmed and overburdened by stress and worry, which can lead to nervous breakdowns, mental illness, and even physical illness, as the body does not function optimally when under great stress.

More traditional medicines often looked very different than the quick fixes we have today. If your digestion was poor you wouldn't take an antacid for quick relief - instead you would change your diet and put some work into your healing, or maybe even try fasting to let your body's digestion recover.

If you had a cold you didn't fight your body's immune response by taking cold medication, but you let it run its course while strengthening your immune system, or maybe took a sauna to help you sweat it out.

People were taught to deal with their problems and face them head on rather than fear and repress them - and this created greater long-term health and inner strength.

In many cultures not only do people work through their problems directly, but they may even use ordeals as training, in order to help them be strong and hard working. So we have 'ordeal medicine' as a way of treating illness, and also as a way of training and preventative medicine.

In indigenous cultures when young men go on a vision quest, they are learning to face their fears as well as the discomforts and challenges of fasting alone in the wilderness. This teaches inner strength and courage, which manifests itself in all areas of life and it helps them develop into strong members of their society.

When you get sick this strength helps you choose the healthiest way to work through your illness, and when confronted with emotional problems, or traumatic events, it helps you face and work through

the discomfort rather than repress it.

These habits teach you to strive for what is in your best interest, rather than just what sounds easiest in the moment. Doing what is right is not always easy in the moment, but it almost always ends up being easier in the long run, because of how many problems it helps you solve (rather than avoiding the issues which just makes problems accumulate over time).

In the case of my experience with kambo, I had to confront my fears of physical discomfort.

I knew I was about to be burned, and that the venom applied to those burns would make me experience extreme discomfort and even pain - but that discomfort only lasted about 30 minutes, and afterwards I felt great.

Kambo is known to strengthen the immune system, remove toxins from the body, increase energy, focus and awareness, and even align the spirit in a way where you feel more connected to your personal flow and life. It is hard to describe how beneficial this medicine is, but my experience was well worth the short time of discomfort that led to all these benefits.

In different cultures around the world there exist many different medicines that could be considered 'ordeal medicines'. In some cultures tribal members will fill gloves with bullet ants, which have the strongest sting of any ant in the world. They then wear these gloves for an extended period of time, while the ants sting their hands, causing them pain so extreme, that many people will faint. They do this to teach themselves to embrace discomfort and be strong.

Such things teach us to not avoid hard work, not avoid unpleasant medicines and not avoid unpleasant emotions. They teach us to be strong and courageous.

In other cultures people might practice vision quest or difficult pilgrimages. People may expose themselves to sleep deprivation, fasting or extreme weather conditions to help themselves build strength.

Many people use cold water immersion as a way to strengthen the immune system, or hot sweat lodges for healing. They might eat unpleasant herbs and foods for health reasons.

All of these practices involve facing discomfort, because you know it is good for you. This is doing what is best for you and others, whether or not it is pleasant, and it leads to benefits in every aspect of life.

Ordeal medicine is a test of your equanimity. With the kambo there is a natural

inclination to resist the discomfort and react to it, but that is not how you actually want to respond.

If you try to hold down the nausea, or fight through the discomfort, or repress it, you will get overwhelmed and the experience will be much more difficult. If you instead face the discomfort and embrace it, while trying to relax as much as possible you will get the best results – the experience won't be as painful, you will have a deeper and more effective purge, and you will be more aware of the experience and how it relates to you personally.

By embracing discomfort that is good for you, your experience changes into one of alignment with your highest good. When you run from a discomfort which is really in your best interest, you end up fighting yourself and resisting your own benefits and success.

How you show up in ceremony is often how you show up in life. When you show up to ceremony determined and strong, it becomes easier to show up to life the same way. Ceremony, in many ways is training for life, and in this way life can become one great ceremony.

If you practice facing the discomforts of ritual and medicine with equanimity, you can teach yourself to act the same way on a day to day basis, which will benefit your physical, mental and emotional health. And not only will this help you show up better for yourself – but everyone in your community will benefit as you become more present and powerful in your own life.

By healing and empowering ourselves we heal and empower the world together.

Travis Bodick is an author, musician and ceremonial medicine guide. All of Travis's books are written to help the reader engage with and encounter their own truth through direct experience. Experienced in a number of healing disciplines and traditions, his wide range of influences allows him to relate with people from all backgrounds, and his focus is on the common threads that unite all practices based in Spirit. Travis especially focuses on nature based spiritual healing practices and helping clients encounter and know their own heart and soul. Helping others to find and embrace their true passion in life is Travis's greatest joy.
www.soulremedy.org

MENDING THE SACRED HOOP

An Invitation to join with your community and build a sacred Medicine Wheel of Life

Shima Maria Yraceburu

Did you ever feel that someone was watching you from... where? In-between. You turn quickly, and from the corner of your eye you *almost* catch a glimpse, and then there is nothing.

I was told that there would come a time when the 'seers of the world' would experience this, more often than not.

So, get ready because this is going to become a constant - in a way you could perhaps say we're mutating, and there's some things we can do to help stabilise life, where we find a helping energy as we help the earth in reciprocation.

The custom of reciprocation is pretty universal, so you can utilise my way, or you can use your own, but choose to do it; choose to do something.

BUILDING A MEDICINE WHEEL.

Imagine where you place your wheel to be the connection point between web threads. We do this now, because long ago, it was foretold... Tutuskya - the great Wheel of Life, or medicine wheel - is a physical metaphor for Changing Mother's energies.

This is the foundation of the teachings I received early in life in the ways of the Apache tlish diyán. It is a powerful teaching that is endless, ever evolving, and constantly a source of information, vision and stability.

By creating a wheel, we open the way for Changing Mother to feed and nurture all who are held within the great web we acknowledge as the magnetic grid of Earth.

A medicine wheel is a vortex of vision, healing and alignment, affecting those who actively work with it, and those who, unsuspecting, come within its 'gravitational' atmosphere.

The creation of Tutuskya - while a relatively easy manoeuvre - is a powerful act of co-creation between two-leggeds and Esonkñhsendehí - Changing Mother Earth.

I find the most powerful of all the wheels I have helped create, to be those

where the community came together to anchor the heart of our extended family.

You don't really need anything to do this other than a piece of rope 15'-20' long; a 12" wooden or metal stake, hammer, a semi flat area about 30'-60' in diameter - I'm talking about a 'life size', living and working wheel here - you could make a smaller one - a few friends perhaps - 24 is the ideal number of people, because for this wheel you need 24 rocks, but less people will do, you'll just have to do some juggling and work out how to do it, if you have a smaller number in the group.

You will need a feather and a smudging herb of your choice too, and it's good to have some drums and rattles too, and some food for a potluck meal afterwards, to pull it all together.

When all of this is arranged, and everyone is together, prepare the land and the stones. Traditionally, the men prepare the space for the wheel, while the women gather the stones - ideally from the nearby land. Each rock needs to be large enough to register as heavy when it's picked up, but the kind of stone does not matter.

When this is done - the land ready and the rocks gathered - everyone gathers in a circle. Then everyone around the circle introduces themselves, and briefly shares why they came to help in this ceremony.

The person who called the circle together then needs to give a brief explanation of the wheel, and why you have chosen to create one, and then it's really important to thank everyone for coming to co-create this powerful earth-human healing.

Now you're ready. Make a small loop in the end of your rope. Then make three knots, spaced about one arm length apart.

Hammer your stake into the ground, just deep enough to make it solid so you can tug slightly on the rope.

Put the looped rope around the stake, so it can swivel freely as you walk around the circle.

From the centre of your circle, pull the rope tight to the south. This is where you will begin.

You will be calling individuals in order around the circle to get a rock and set it in place.

They will stay with the rock until you have released them at the appropriate time. The putting together doesn't take long, so this shouldn't be too stressful on any of them. Elders can have a camp chair if they need one, so they can sit down during this process.

Be aware, the placement of the stones can be a little helter-skelter. In the old days, the stars would be charted, and directions laid out over the course of a year based on planetary alignments - so, follow this sequence, and as you lay the stone, let the person putting it in place know what their energy is in the wheel.

Okay, ready? Here we go.

You operate from the inside out when working with all directions - in other words, you move from the inner stone in each direction, to the outer stone. As we lay our rocks, we work the energies in the way we see the world operating. From our perspective out.

Once the wheel is completed, we reverse this from the centre to wards the outside movement, and instead walk from the outside of the wheel, inward to find our centre of calm and peace. This is the sweet spot, which we call the 'Hub of Infinity.' Here, in the sacred centre, time moves around us.

The reason for building the wheel from the inside outwards then, has a deep philosophical reason, but it also helps us be more physically accurate in our construction; as when we can see the centre stone and the stones of each succeeding layer, we can place our next stones down more accurately.

Once all the stones are in place, everyone steps outside the medicine wheel and forms a circle, holding their drums and rattles. Then they rattle, drum and chant, which raises the energy of the circle and helps awaken the wheel.

When the energy of all the drumming and chanting has reached a pretty high level, people can - one at a time - step into the centre part of the circle, to dance and experience the 'vibration' of the energy vortex created by the wheel.

Keep drumming and chanting until everyone who wishes to has gone into the middle of the wheel and come back out again.

WALKING THE WHEEL

You walk the wheel by spiraling inward in a counter-clockwise motion starting in the south, and as you work your way around the wheel, you are caressed by the directional energies three times.

In the outermost wheel, the past is addressed.

The second wheel in represents the now moment of time - the time in which we facilitate life.

The third innermost wheel represents the future, where the 'vision of guidance' lies.

Within the very centre of the wheel lies the 'hub of infinity,' where we stand at the

calm centre, and turn and look outwards to face our challenges, fed by the opposite direction, which are the energies of assistance.

Often I walk my own medicine wheel, here at the ranch, touching each stone with a small offering of tobacco, and saying "Thank you" as I walk in. When I reach centre, I turn to the direction from which I received the strongest sensation in my walk, and I sit and meditate. I pray and watch for a sign... maybe a butterfly, a bird will pass by, and one time a cougar came.

I allow my inner knowing to teach me what these messages are saying - what I am being told and taught. Each time - no matter what I receive - it is the message I need, and I am able to progress forward.

When you make your own medicine wheel, you can continue to use it in your own work, it can be a place to sit by and pray, or you can work with it to just connect with the sacred.

Shima Maria Yraceburu is an earth-wisdom elder, author and teacher, and is the founder of Yraceburu EarthWisdom.

She is a Native American, raised in the traditional philosophy of the Apache Tl'ish diyan, and comes from a lineage of diiyin and da'igoti (holy ones and trackers).

She holds a Doctor of Laws (Lid) in Eco-psychology, as well as having spent years of life, living earth wisdom.

Maria's vision is to integrate traditional lifestyle and its connection to earth with contemporary daily life. She has written 23 books in this area, and her latest is children's book 'Connect to the Earth' will be published shortly. www.mariayraceburu.com

Mara Bishop M.S., Th.M., C.S.C is a shamanic practitioner, intuitive consultant, teacher, author, and artist.

In her practice in she combines shamanic healing, intuitive consultations, and energetic healing. She works with clients locally, nationally, and internationally.

She is the author of Inner Divinity: Crafting Your Life with Sacred Intelligence, and a companion series of guided meditations.

She holds master's degrees in Energy Medicine and Theology, a bachelor's degree in Art and Communications, and is a graduate of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies Three-Year Program in Advanced Shamanism and Shamanic Healing, Sandra Ingerman's Shamanic Teacher Training program, and has received advanced training with Betsy Bergstrom.

She lives in Durham, North Carolina, USA. www.WholeSpirit.com
mara@wholespirit.com

MUSIC AND BOOK REVIEWS

QUEST

Out of Nations

CD or Download: 45.38 mins.

Riverboat Records: TUGDD1115

Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is truly fusion music, six musicians - each from a different country - forming a wonderful rich groove. The album is upbeat, beautifully produced, with the most glorious sound, and has elements of funk and jazz mixed with traditional themes from the Middle East and Latin America.

Smooth and very sweet, with a lush quality which I really enjoyed. The album's eleven tracks are a mix of styles drawing on the musical background of the group's members, and they blend perfectly, producing a hybrid sound, which is a long way from 'traditional', but which is alive with potential and outrageous splendour.

Available from Amazon and iTunes etc.

On Spotify

www.landing.worldmusic.net/out-of-nations-quest

Four Feathers

MELODIC CIRCLES: Urban Classical Music from Iran

Mehdi Rostami and Adib Rostami

CD or Download: 48.23 mins.

ARC Music EUCD2794

Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is delightful and delicate; an album of improvised music for setar and tombak. The setar is an Iranian long-necked lute with four thin metal strings, strummed with the fingers. I've played one myself for many years, and so I can really appreciate the great skill of the playing on this album. The tombak is a 'goblet drum' a little bit like a darabuka, or even a little bit like a small djembe, it resembles a large wooden wine glass with a skin stretched across the top, and it's played with the fingers, often with complicated and rapid movements.

The music on the album is complex, at times meditative, and at times fast-paced and invigorating, but always richly textural and exciting.

Available from Amazon and iTunes etc.

On Spotify

On YouTube

www.arcmusic.co.uk

Four and a half Feathers - Album of the Issue

A CRY FOR REVOLUTION: Earth Healing Music from Bolivia

Los Rupay
CD or Download: 58:43 mins.
ARC Music EUCD2795
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of this band, this album is a delightful romp across the high Andes of Bolivia and its traditional music. It's joyous, passionate, earthy and wild. I've always had a delight and a taste for the music of the high Andes, I blame Simon and Garfunkel for their song 'El Cóndor Pasa,' which corrupted me as a very small child - only this album is so, so much better.

*Available from Amazon and iTunes etc.
On Spotify
On YouTube
www.ruphay.net*

Three and a half Feathers

MUSHROOM CEREMONY OF MAZATEC INDIANS OF MEXICO

Maria Sabina
CD or Download: 43.55 mins.
Smithsonian Folkways FW08975
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

In the interview with Ross Heaven in this issue of Sacred Hoop, there is mention of a Mazatec medicine woman called Maria Sabina, so it seemed appropriate to share this album of her, recorded in 1957. It's a field recording of the sacred songs she sang in her ceremonies - a taste of the authentic and a priceless slice of history.

*Available from Amazon and iTunes etc.
On Spotify
On YouTube
www.folkways.si.edu
Three and a Half Feathers*

A TIEMPO REAL: A New Take On Spanish Tradition

Viguela
CD or Download: 99.00 mins.
ARC Music EUCD2806
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is a 25 song double album of rugged traditional Spanish folk music, tough and fiery music from a tough and fiery land. Forget the highly produced tourist flamenco you may have heard, this is beautifully unpolished, including instruments which can lie around close to hand, such kitchen implements, including jars, bottles and a frying pan, combined with folk guitars, rustic lutes, simple fiddles a lot of drums and the wild voices of the group.

The songs are ancient and untamed, with none of their edges taken off for politeness. This is music from the land, and I swear at least one of them is almost identical to a medieval trobador melody from 800 years ago. This is music from the villages, music making in the raw. You may not be Spanish or have any connections to rural Spain, but the music will, I am sure, speak to you.

Peasant music, music from a community which came together to sing, music like a good slice of real bread, a glass or real wine and some real cheese and olives - and just as tasty.

*Available from Amazon and iTunes etc.
On Spotify
On YouTube
www.mapamundimusic.com/viguela
FourFeathers*

SHAMANISM: A Reader

Graham Harvey (Editor)
Routledge Books
PB: 478 pages. £24.95/\$29.95
ISBN: 978 0415 2533 07
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is quite an old book, but it seemed a good idea to give it a review as it is an easy reading, accurate book of writings about shamanism, written by both eminent anthropologists and members of the Core Shamanic tradition (Ingerman and Harner). I often find people interested in shamanism only read new age books on the subject, most of which have either dumbed down or highly inaccurate views about the subject, so the whole thing becomes an echo chamber. Here one can step outside of the echo chamber and maybe get some fresh air.

Available from Amazon etc.

MYSTERIOUS REALITIES:

A dream traveller's tales from the imaginal realm

Robert Moss
New World Library
PB: 478 pages. £12.95/\$15.95
ISBN: 978 1 60868 538 7
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Dreamwork is often linked with 'spirit work' of one sort or another, and shamanism, animism, Tibetan Buddhism, and many other traditions hold that we can be taught by the spirits in our sleep, and can also travel to do magical work - such as healing - in our dreams too; and these traditions often have specific methods of 'incubating' dreams. Personally I love dreaming, and partake in my nighttime

adventures - some from the gravy, and some the grave - with relish.

But I generally keep them to myself because - frankly who cares what another person dreams, I get deeply bored and sometimes feel the urge to gnaw my leg off in order to escape, when people insist on telling me their wonderful - yawn - and so interesting dreamings. So, I'm a bit perplexed as to the reason for this book, a collection of almost 30 narrative accounts of the dreams of the author - or are they dream-like tales of reality, the author in his preface suggests some indeed are.

Moss is a good writer, and an engaging story teller too, and I think this book works as a collection of short stories, but if you want to get to grips with the technicalities of navigating the phantasmagorical worlds that lie beyond the boundaries of sleep, you are better off seeking out one of his other books, or perhaps watching his very good video series 'The Way of the Dreamer', which gives much more meat in the sandwich.

Available from Amazon etc.

A SHAMANIC KUNDALINI AWAKENING

Brendan Ring
Self Published
PB: 251 pages. £13.50/\$18.00
ISBN: 978 15232 135 59
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

I have yet to be convinced that Kundalini has anything to do with shamanism, and with the exception of some of the shamanic traditions found in Northern India - and most of those are only borderline shamanic - you won't find shamans talking about kundalini type states, although similar states can be found in other borderline shamanic cultures, such as the San Bushmen of Southern Africa and others.

However, don't let the title of the book put you off, because the book is about far more than the relationship between Kundalini and shamanism, and it is in fact a very interesting read about the author's own personal path and encounter with the spirits, his own questing and discoveries, his own connections to the sacred. Not all of it is about shamanism, but all of it is related to the human condition, and the tussles everyone on a sacred path has to learn to understand, and work with. A rather lovely, well written and enjoyable read, full of delightful tidbits of knowledge and wisdom and a flowing style.

Available from Amazon etc.

TWO WHITE FEATHERS AND A HANDFUL OF ROCKS: A woman's journey through the feminine ch'amas of South and Central America

Jenny Chapman
Self Published
PB: 132 pages. £15.50/\$24.99
ISBN: 978 1533 5742 99
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This book describes itself as a 'fictionised account based on real events, so don't expect a hands-on how-to factual book, but read and enjoy it for what it is, an account of the quality of a 'medicine adventure'.

It's a gentle read, full of the feel of the adventure and the lands and places visited, and well illustrated by numerous colour photos of the places and events in the book.

It's written almost as if it was a travel diary, in a slightly clipped, matter-of-fact way, and although I don't know how much of it is actually true, it certainly has an air of grounded reality about it, it's not a mystic book of far-fetched grandiosity, keeping its feet on the ground in a good way.

An enjoyable read, and the photos throughout it's pages add to the pleasure of reading it.

Available from Amazon etc.

POST-TRIBAL SHAMANISM: A new look at the old ways

Kenn Day
Moon Books
PB: 129 pages. £8.50/\$16.95
ISBN: 978 1780 9961 96
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

A slim but very readable introduction guide to the practice of shamanism - in a post tribal world, as the title suggests.

The author argues in chapter one that it; 'doesn't make a great deal of sense to look at traditional tribal cultures for a picture of what a shaman is for us [in modern-day Western society]. And yet he follows on from this by saying; 'I have yet to meet a traditional shaman with whom I didn't have an experience of mutual recognition,' and then goes on - throughout the rest of the book - to give thoughtful reflections on the role of shamanism in society, including a useful and important chapter on ethics - something often missing from many books on the subject.

The book is sober and grounded, non sensational and full of thoughtful

reflections. I think I get what the author is trying to convey about the fact we have to practise shamanism here and now in our culture and can't plant a seed here and expect it to grow up to have the same flowers as it does in its traditional homelands, and the book is not arguing against the desire to work with traditional shamans, if that's what we want - or feel called - to do.

More of an essay on the qualities of shamanism and it's future within the West, than a 'how to,' the books makes for an interesting and thought provoking read.

Available from Amazon etc.

SPIRITUAL WISDOM FROM THE ALTAI MOUNTAINS

Nikolai Shodoev
Moon Books
PB: 107 pages. £9.99/\$14.95
ISBN: 978 1780 991 214
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is a lovely little book about the ancient sacred traditions and cosmology of the people of the Altai Mountains, which lie to the North West of Mongolia, just inside the Russian Republic, next door to Tuva. The Altai has a long tradition of shamanism, and this is a book about the wisdom - the 'medicine teachings' if you will - of the profound and respectful animistic ways of life which underlie the practice of the traditional shamanism of the region. It is a book about the heart of shamanism, rather than about the nuts and bolts of it.

Available from Amazon etc.

CLEANSING RITES OF CURANDERISMO: Limpias Espirituales of Ancient Mesoamerican Shamans

Erika Buenaflor
Bear and Co Books
PB: 107 pages. £14.00/\$15.45
ISBN: 978 1591 4331 18
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

This is a rare and, I think, valuable new book about a subject which has had little published on it, the Curandero traditions of Meso-America.

These traditions - often rather erroneously called shamanism, as they are in the subtitle of this book - are the animistic healing 'medicine' traditions of the area, with their roots in cultures such as the Maya and the Aztec.

This book is devoted to one specific tradition found within Curanderoism - probably the one most people have heard

of or experienced - 'the limpia', ritual cleaning rites. The book contains a section on the origin and background of the tradition, and then five chapters devoted to specific actions and ways of working, written in a practical 'hands-on' way.

A real nice book and a fabulous window into a long tradition which is often sparsely documented.

Available from Amazon etc.

CELTIC COSMOLOGY AND THE OTHERWORLD: Mythic Origins, Sovereignty and Liminality

Sharon Paice MacLeod
McFarland Books
PB: 277 pages. £38.50/\$39.95
ISBN: 978 1476 6690 76
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

A book exploring the cosmology and spirituality of Iron-Age Ireland, Britain and Gaul, based on the latest research available to academics.

There has been a plethora of books in recent years about so-called Celtic Shamanism, some of them flights of wild fantasy and some of them grounded in evidential research. This book, thank goodness, fits into the latter category, and presents a solid, intelligent introduction to the sacred and cosmological roots of Northwestern European culture, before the erosions of first Roman and subsequent Anglo-Saxon and Christian invasions and conversions swept them - for all intents and purposes - completely away.

Not an altogether easy read like most light-weight new-age books on the subject, it is fairly academic in its style, and yet it grips the reader with the rich and fascinating body of information it presents. It covers a lot, from historical goddesses to sacred symbolism, and deserves to be on the bookshelves of anyone who has an interest in our ancestral ways.

Available from Amazon etc.

PEOPLE ON THE PATH - EVENTS DIARY

SEPT 2018

SEP 8: ECO SHAMANISM TASTER WORKSHOP (BRISTOL) Taster half day introduction to Eco Shamanism. With Mandy Pullen, Jane Embleton and Freya Davies. Contact www.mandypullen.co.uk (01594) 541 850 or (07805) 800 313 info@mandypullen.co.uk

SEP 8-10: DRUM DANCE (NAIRN, SCOTLAND) Three-day dance without food and water to enter visionary state and transform collective consciousness. Making tracks of dancing light. From Beautiful Painted Arrow. Contact: Carlos Philip Glover (07546) 547 133 carlosrop@hotmail.com www.carlosphilipglover.com

SEP 9: 3 RIVERS SHAMANIC GROUP (N.E. ESSEX) Looking at Life, Location, Learning and Love. Contact Julia www.3riversshamanicgroup.co.uk

SEP 9: ECO SHAMANISM (BRISTOL) Taster half day in Landscape and Plant Eco Shamanism. With Mandy Pullen, Jane Embleton and Freya Davies. Contact (01594) 541850 or 07805 800 313 www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk

SEP 13-16: VISION QUEST (NORTH DEVON) Rejuvenate your soul in this quest for inspiration, healing and personal development. Let the Mystery be your greatest teacher in the heart of nature. Carlos Philip Glover carlosrop@hotmail.com (07546) 547 133 www.carlosphilipglover.com

SEP 22: PLANT ECO SHAMANISM DAY (WORCESTERSHIRE) Day working with Plant perception and resonance using Eco Shamanism and Sensory plant techniques. With Mandy Pullen and Freya Davies. Contact www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk (01594) 541 850 or (07805) 800 313

SEP 22-23: THREE YEAR PRACTITIONER COURSE (MONMOUTHSHIRE) By the end of the three year journey you will be a confident practitioner, able to undertake healing ceremonies for people, animals and our land. Being confident and present, transmuting our challenges with compassion, gentleness and sacred humour. With Maxine Smillie Contact: (07845) 933 860 Connect@shamaniclife.co.uk shamaniclife.co.uk

SEP 23: 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 25: FULL MOON PURIFICATION LODGE CEREMONY (DERBYSHIRE) open to all women. Contact Pamela. info@centreforshamanicarts.co.uk

SEP 29-30 : INTRODUCTION TO SHAMANISM (ABERGAVENTNY) Offering an introduction to the shamanic journey, exploring with safety and support from a very experience teacher. With: Maxine Smillie. Contact: Connect@shamaniclife.co.uk shamaniclife.co.uk (07845) 933 860

OCT 2018

OCT 2: WILD WOMAN WISE (WEST SUSSEX) Shamanic and Sound Healing. Explore and express your wild and wise self through shamanic practice, sound healing, voice, movement and ceremony. Strengthen and nurture yourself in preparation for winter. With Val Stagg valstagg@btinternet.com www.spiritvoice.co.uk (01736) 361 146

OCT 6: ECO SHAMANISM DAY WORKSHOP (GLOUCESTERSHIRE) An introduction to Eco Shamanism. With Mandy Pullen in the Forest of Dean. Contact www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk (01594) 541 850 or (07805) 800 313

OCT 7 : SHAMANIC SUNDAYS (GLOUCESTERSHIRE) Monthly journeying group on the first Sunday of each month in Forest of Dean 10.30-1pm with Mandy Pullen. Suitable for beginners and those more experienced. Contact www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk (01594) 541 850 or (07805) 800 313

OCT 13: THE SACRED SONG (WYE VALLEY, MONMOUTH) Singing your soul awake, explore our voice, our sound. That natural tone which heals, refreshes and resonates with our Soul, explore your unique sacred song. With Maxine Smillie. Contact: Connect@shamaniclife.co.uk (07845) 933 860 shamaniclife.co.uk

OCT 13: LEARN THE SHAMAN'S JOURNEY (GLOUCESTERSHIRE) Learn the shaman's journey technique, explore the shaman's map, retrieve a power animal and more. With Mandy Pullen. Contact (01594) 541 850 www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk

OCT 14: 3 RIVERS SHAMANIC GROUP (N.E. ESSEX) Looking at Life, Location, Learning and Love. Contact Julia www.3riversshamanicgroup.co.uk

OCT 21: 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 26-27: DREAMING WITH VENUS (SOMERSET) A 24 hour workshop from Friday 8pm to Saturday 8pm working with the orbit of Venus, our dreams and the Venus labyrinth. With Mandy Pullen and Jane Embleton. Contact (01594) 541 850 or (07805) 800 313 www.mandypullen.co.uk info@mandypullen.co.uk

NOVEMBER 2018

NOV 11: INTRODUCTION TO SHAMANISM (OXFORDSHIRE) A two Sunday course (second Sunday is Nov 18th). Learn the art of the shamanic journey, experience meeting your power animal and spirit helpers and receive help, healing and wisdom. A safe and practical workshop led by experienced teacher and shamanic practitioner. With Joanna Shipley. (07811) 398 642 www.wildbearshamanism.com

NOV 11: 3 RIVERS SHAMANIC GROUP (N.E. ESSEX) Looking at Life, Location, Learning and Love. Contact Julia www.3riversshamanicgroup.co.uk

NOV 17- 18: INTRODUCTION TO SHAMANISM (EBBW VALE, S. WALES) An introduction to the Shamanic Journey, exploring with safety and support from a very experience teacher. With Maxine Smillie Contact: Connect@shamaniclife.co.uk (07845) 933 860 shamaniclife.co.uk

NOV 18: 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 30 - DEC 2: THE HARMONY OF THE HEARTH (GLOUCESTERSHIRE) Honouring the heart of the home. We explore the myths of the home, identifying household gods and spirits, seeing the wisdom that reweaves and brings peace to the home. We will invite ancestors to the hearth to find and welcome our deep gifts. With song, story, and ritual. Caitlín and John Matthews, and Janet Piedilato. info@hawkwoodcollege.co.uk, (01453) 759 034

DECEMBER 2018

DEC 7-8: SHAMANISM AND HOMEOPATHY (GLOUCESTERSHIRE) A course for homeopaths and student homeopaths to explore where homeopathy

meets the spirit world. Experience a shamanic proving, meet your own spirit helpers to help you to become a better practitioner and learn how to receive their help, healing and wisdom. With Joanna Shipley RSHom.

www.wildbearshamanism.com (07811) 398 642

DEC 9: 3 RIVERS SHAMANIC GROUP (N.E. ESSEX) Looking at Life, Location, Learning and Love. Contact Julia www.3riversshamanicgroup.co.uk

DEC 16: 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....

Faith Nolton

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Faith Nolton is a shamanic practitioner and picture maker. She is an author and poet, and founded Sacred Hoop Magazine.

Faith now has a practise and studio in West Wales where she gives tuition in sacred picture making, and works to commission.

Where did you first meet shamanism?

As a lifelong natural mystic, that is hard to pinpoint. I have always spoken to the earth and spirits in various ways, but I met shamanism formally through Leo Rutherford at Eagles Wing when I was in my late thirties. Thank you Leo.

Which teachers and teachings have influenced you the most?

Leo of course – and the wonderful map of the Medicine Wheel, also Jonathan Horwitz with whom I deepened my journeying knowledge. But perhaps my first teacher and still a principle guiding light, the shaman of Nazareth, Joshua Ben Miriam. And above, beyond and within, always of course, my spirit helpers.

What makes your heart sing?

Oh, so much! Colour, the beaver nation, birdsong, walking on the evening edge of the sea, seeing someone discover themselves in a wider, deeper reality, finding myself in a wider deeper reality, the love of my spirits, but most of all watching sunrise and moonrise over my valley.

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

How to choose...! Probably finding myself receiving my medicine name in a naming sweat lodge from a revered Oglala medicine man in rural Worcestershire and providing tea for his workshop group afterwards at my home. I had not signed up for his workshop and it was scheduled to happen many miles away.... Long story. But then that's the shamanic path....

Where on earth do you feel most at home?

In my garden and my studio.

What do you do for fun?

Read historical novels, do puzzle books, observe life happening whether it's in the shopping mall or the riverbank. I'm a *flanneur* - stroller and observer.

What is your favourite food?

Mashed potato, gravy, chicken stew, lemon torte, rum baba, more or less in that order.

What music do you like?

I like good tunes, whether it's classical, folk, pop... Something I can sing or dance to. Latest wow was the soundtrack of 'The Greatest Showman.' But Beethoven's ninth and the Verdi Requiem still give me chills after a lifetime of hearing them.

Best book and film?

Any Terry Pratchett Discworld, especially those featuring the witches; Patrick Gale's 'Notes from an Exhibition'; 'Under Milkwood' by Dylan Thomas. I like films that weave human condition and humour, so definitely 'Shirley Valentine,' closely followed by 'Love Actually.'

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

The world that's starting to open up gets better and better, and really is magical. And you're OK kid. Keep going!

A wish for the future?

That peace breaks out and our human family falls in love with Mother Earth again. Please.