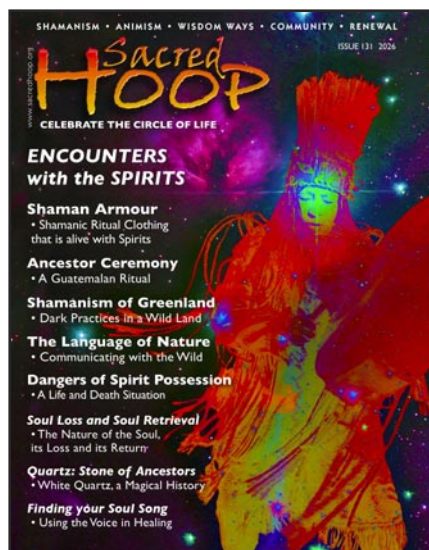




SACRED HOOP MAGAZINE 131

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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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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.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the editor.

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We might be attracted to wearing ritual clothes for our sacred practice, but how can we go about it. We share some simple tips about asking the spirits and creating appropriate armour.

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While visiting Guatemala, to take part in a ritual festival there, **Nicola Dentico** found himself caught up in it all and reflecting on the flotillas of boats heading for the Amazon and Gaza.

THE PRIMAL LANGUAGE OF NATURE

Nature is alive, and seeks to communicate; indigenous people have always known this, but we have mostly lost the knack of listening. **Géral Blanchard** shares tales of wild encounters.

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With Greenland in the news recently, this is a classic reprint from **William Thalbitzer**, about shamanism and the dark spirits and practices that populated it a century ago.

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Soul retrieval is an important part of all shamanic traditions. **Nicholas Breeze**

Wood, in the first of a series, looks at the nature of the soul, reasons for loss and methods of restoration.

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EDITORIAL

IThe first issue of the Fire Horse year, and I hope you enjoy it.

The human world seems to be growing more and more insane and dysfunctional, and yet Nature and the spirits are there, just as they have been and will be, even if our culture has lost, or damaged its connection with them.

So, in this issue, we focus upon ways of connecting; from sacred clothing that is alive, to festivals that 'dance the ancestors;' from listening to Nature, to honouring and working with quartz stones; from learning how to take care and be tidy when we encounter spirits, to examples of the powerful and dangerous spirits of Greenland's harsh landscape; from exploring the nature of the soul, why we lose it and how to get it back, and why singing is good for the soul and our ability to heal ourselves and others....

It's a mad world out there ... look after yourselves and keep body and soul together in a good way.

Blessings to all Beings
Nicholas Breeze Wo.

AN ALTAR FOR THE SPIRITS AND ARMOUR FOR THE SHAMAN

Céline Baron
in conversation with

Daan van Kampenhout
about his long experience
with the ritual costumes
of Siberian Shamans

Céline Baron: Let's start with the basics. What is a shaman's costume?

Daan van Kampenhout: The people we call shamans did not work full time in this role. When their help as a shaman was required, they would put on a special costume. In Mongolia and Siberia these costumes could be very elaborate: a coat, boots, a headdress, sometimes even gloves... Depending on the specific culture, the shaman costumes come in different variations.

They all serve the purpose: to empower, protect and disguise the shaman.

When did you start to become interested in shaman costumes?

More than forty years ago, in the middle of the eighties, I was in art school studying in the textile department. Shamanism wasn't new to me, but in those early years of contemporary shamanic practice, nobody was paying attention to the classic shamanism of Siberia and Mongolia.

Michael Harner's 'The way of the Shaman' was published in 1980, he focused on Core Shamanism, not on cultural specifics, and when I found photos of traditional shaman's costumes I immediately fell in love.

They were like nothing I had seen before. Their rich combination of leather, metal objects of all forms, spirit figures, symbolic embroidery... I wanted to understand them better, knowing from the beginning that I would never be able to fully grasp their full meaning.

There were very few resources available then. I had to go to museums, look in archives, dig up books in university libraries to find more photos and information.

Being an artist in training at that time, I started to create simple costumes myself, inspired by what I was learning. Early on, I realised there are skeleton structures on many of the documented costumes. So, I made structures of vertebrae and ribs and attached them to a coat that I made. When you create a symbol, an object yourself, it becomes much less abstract than when you just see it.

What is the role of the textile, leather, metal and animal parts in your costumes? How do you make a choice?

In the earlier years, I just had an artistic perspective, but in 1987 I thought: 'If I want to stay true to the spirit of shamanism, I should include materials from my own environment, from where I live. I wondered whether maybe I should make a plastic costume, because my world is saturated with plastic.' This is, of course, an artistic way of looking. And so, I made a costume completely out of all kinds of plastics.

On traditional shaman costumes, you often find bronze mirrors, and there are iron discs which represent the Sun, the Moon and the entrance to the lower world etc, so I used the bottoms of yoghurt cups for these.

From a plastic bag I cut out a nice moon symbol, and stitched it to the back of the costume; I attached a plastic whistle, to bring the sound of the wind, because flying fast through the other worlds, you might hear the winds in your spirit ears.

I went to an airport and took plastic forks and spoons from a cafeteria, because an airport is a place that helps us to travel from one place to another, so I 'reasoned' that things from there must be helpful for the journey. I was trying to think shamanically and at the same time artistically.

So, materials and function overlap; but what about the shaman's costume being a kind of armour?

Yes, in Traditional Shamanism, there is a paradigm that there are spirits with bad intentions, and you have to defend yourself against them.

Some costumes, notably those from the Yakut people of North Eastern Siberia, will have some piercing elements, like simple knives made of iron, hanging from them. These can be attached to the crown, or found hanging from the coat.

But the idea of the costume being a protective armour is much more complex and rich than simply being a defensive tool.

The costume is a gathering place of the shaman's helping spirits, so when the shaman wears it, they are surrounded by them.

Also, the objects on the coat need to be made in a certain way. The process of creating them transforms them, so they will actively help and protect the shaman.

Many years ago, I had a lucid dream, I was fully aware. I was in a laboratory type setting, a frozen place, and two ladies were unpacking the remains of a Yakut costume.

I understood somehow that the remains of a shaman costume were discovered in the melting permafrost. There were just a few frozen scraps of leather and some metal pieces left, but it was still recognisably of Yakut origin.

The women documented the pieces, stored them and left.

Nothing happened in the dream for a while, and then I started hearing a voice singing a melody. The melody got clearer and clearer. It came from the metal pieces: a spirit was still present in them and was singing.

The melody repeated and repeated, and in the dream, I started singing with this spirit, and when I could sing the melody, I woke up. I recorded the melody so I wouldn't forget it.

I then decided to make a shaman costume, based on costumes that I'd studied, and I did all the metalwork myself.

The costume has all the elements that you will see on a classic Yakut costume: ribs, iron disks, spirit figures, conical jingles, feathers and more; and when I was hammering the red hot iron, I would sing the song four times, and then plunge the object into cold water, 'sealing' the song into the iron.

Each iron object on this costume - more than 200 - has the song imprinted in them in this way.

My traditional shaman teachers later told me that they sometimes would 'catch' songs coming out of shamans' graves or objects. Sometimes the spirit contained in certain objects will reveal itself in this way.

I do not claim this song is an original song from a Yakut shaman. I have

however accepted the dream's gift and honoured it to the best of my abilities.

I made the coat and other parts of the costume from red, instead of undyed leather - this would never be done traditionally.

The red represents the colour of life, Earth, blood, it is the colour of energy and vitality, and I found it was an appropriate colour for an altar, for this song.

I made it in red because I wanted to make sure people recognise this is not truly a traditional Yakut costume, although it certainly looks like a generic Yakut shaman coat.

I made it as an altar for the spirit who sang this particular melody, which was released in my dream when they found this remains of a shaman costume. I have no way of checking this objectively, but I know the power of dreams.

Are the costumes that you have, meant to be worn?

I don't put on the costumes for ceremony. I see them as gifts to the spirits, they are altars, so the spirits know they are welcome, that they have a home in them; but I have taken some to my groups, so my students can wear them for a moment.

It is fascinating how the costume changes the experience of the trance: your body moves very differently with the weight of the iron and the hundreds of textile snakes.

Shamanic costumes often are a representations of the tree of life, and the shaman becomes the tree of life itself when they wear it: the head connects to wisdom and the upper worlds, the pelvis to vital forces and the lower worlds, and the heart and belly to the middle worlds.

The costumes can regulate our energetic structure, and can help us to understand certain elements of shamanism a little bit better. But in general, they are not part of my shamanic practice as such.

I remember, in one of your trainings, I was wearing one of your costumes. While I was journeying, the spirit of the costume told me in a clear voice: "It is way too big for you!" I answered: "Oh, well, it's not mine. It's the costume of my big brother."

The remark about the size was completely surprising. It showed me that

not only was I aware of the costume, but the costume itself was also aware of me. Its spirit was wondering why I - as a small person - was wearing such a big costume.

This shows that the costume is an active force. A shaman coat gains power through the way it is made, and this power increases over time as it is used and kept, fed and cleaned in the right way. It works almost on its own and supports the shaman actively.

How does wearing a shaman coat change your experience?

When the shaman is dancing, spectators can't see any details. People present at the ceremony just see the movements of textile snakes, ribbons and leather strips, bouncing metal pieces reflecting the light... They hear the noise the metal makes, the sound of the drum, the singing of the shaman...

And you cannot wash an old shaman coat, it will smell, it lasts a life time. The shaman sweats in them, the smell of the fires, the smoke, it's all in there. All of this together creates a very strong experience for the people present.

For the shaman themselves, the weight of the coat has an effect. Let's say the coat weighs 10 kilograms. It limits the movements you can make and you tire fast. You move slower. It changes your consciousness when you're dancing and singing with this weight and noise surrounding you.

And apart from the effect on the five senses, there is an overwhelming sense of the spirits being present, which lifts the whole experience to another level.

But this is the classic context – we can't really re-create this in the same way. As contemporary shamanic practitioners we can learn from the tradition, but we have to find practices that are attuned to our life, our place, our time. We cannot just copy something and claim we are practising traditional shamanism.

You say that you see the costumes you have made being like an altar, but you yourself don't wear them, and your students only wear them occasionally in teaching moments. So, do they have a function in your work with clients?

Yes, of course. For example: I just described the costume I made to embody the song I learned in my dream.

When I receive somebody at home, I can sit next to the costume with them, and together we can go on a shamanic journey while we are singing the song.

The spirit in the costume will wake up, and I introduce the client to them.

Then, when the trance of the client deepens and they stop singing, I continue the song while I drum. Nobody is wearing the costume, but its presence is essential in the ritual. And each of the costumes I made, opens another door.

Shaman costumes are always an expression of a shaman's individual understanding and powers. Have you ever made a costume inspired just by your own personal history?

As I gradually understood more about the traditional costumes and the differences between the different cultural groups, I saw that the costumes of the Evenki were specially interesting because of the fantastic way they combine leather, textile, iron and glass beads. Their expression and beauty is often exceptional.

I wanted to understand these costumes better, and my way to do that was by making one, so I created a number of generic iron objects - the sorts you will find on practically all costumes - but I added a number of iron figures that were inspired by powerful dreams I had.

For example, I had a dream in which a two headed owl was sitting on my shoulder, talking to me with two voices. One head saw into the light, one head saw into the shadows, they saw the known and the hidden.

So, I made a two headed owl from iron and attached it to the crown. It hangs over the left shoulder, where the owl was sitting in my dream.

In another dream, a bear had me in a strong grip and tickled me. I can't stand tickling, so I fought to escape, but of course the bear was stronger than me.

The bear continued tickling me until I surrendered and stopped fighting. In the bear's arms I entered a state of unknown bliss, he became the cosmic bear in the night sky, and I was embraced by the universe itself.

I created a small iron bear, holding a human figure in its arms, and attached it to the coat.

There are more objects on it that are very personal in such ways. In the end, the coat and crown are an honouring and a study of an Evenki shaman

costumes, but it is also a personal interpretation and expression.

Ancestors are important in traditional shamanism, are your ancestors an influence in your work?

All my male ancestors I know of, from 1480 onwards, were tailors, shoemakers and tanners. I know the names and the professions of all these generations. My father is the only exception, he studied in university, but I went back to textiles.

When I am stitching leather, making a shaman coat or shaman's boots, it feels like the most natural thing. It is deeply relaxing. I can do it for days and days on end.

But yes, ancestry has importance in shamanism in various ways.

On some of the remaining actual Yakut shaman costumes you can find certain ancestor figures. These figures are rare because they could only be made by a blacksmith who came from a direct lineage of at least nine generations of blacksmiths.

Only when it was literally in the genes of someone to be a blacksmith could they make certain kinds of objects, and certain skills grow with each successive generation.

I absolutely sense a support from my lineage; my ancestors didn't make shaman costumes and boots, but my relationship with the materials, the leather, the needles is clearly embedded in something larger and older than just coming from myself alone.

You find inspiration in traditional old shaman costumes and call the costumes you make yourself altars. You make them to let the old spirits know they are remembered and welcome in your home and your dreams. How has your own personal relationship with the traditional spirits developed over the years?

Forty years ago, I started to visit museum depots in various countries to see the few shaman costumes that were kept there.

I would always present myself to the costumes before I would touch them. I would tell them my name, where I came from, and that I came, because my love and respect for them drew me to them.

I told them that I admired their beauty, could sense their power, and that I came in the understanding that I could never know everything about them.

I told them I came in ignorance and was willing to learn.

Later I had an advisory role in several museums when they were preparing exhibitions about shamanism, and I approached all the objects in the same manner. I think this slowly made me visible for the spirits, that they started to know about me.

I sometimes had dreams with information about how to make certain objects, about the making of the costumes, the reasons why certain things were placed in a certain spot on the coat.

Then, in the late nineties, I had three successive dreams in which I received a complete shaman costume from an old female shaman.

She gave me the costume three times, and each time I could see other details, which I then drew after waking up.

I had just been connected to the internet at that point, and one day I searched for 'Shaman Costume'. When I did, to my surprise, a photo showed up of the costume I had seen in my dreams. It had just been put on the market, by a trader in Buddhist textiles in another country.

Mongolia had recently opened up after the fall of the Communists, and many traders in Tibetan Buddhist antiques had gone there. This costume had been bought without any knowledge about what it actually was.

So, I made an appointment to go and see the costume, and arriving there, I asked the seller if I could sing and pray... Well, that was a bit unusual for them, but it was okay, and after a few moments of singing, I saw the old shaman that I knew from my dreams, standing next to the costume.

She said; "Are you a complete idiot? Are you trying to find out if this is the costume that I want you to have? Are you blind? Can't you SEE it is the one!"

"Why do you bother me with questions you can answer for yourself? Take it home."

I laughed out loud, she was right, so I acquired the costume, which was in a pretty bad state.

Because of my years of studying shaman costumes I was able to restore it.

Several drums, another complete original costume, and some old objects have all come to me in similar ways.

Always the dreams come first, and I have even been told where exactly to go to find them.

The spirits wanted me to have certain objects I guess, because they know that these will be treated with respect.

They must also know that I will not just keep them for myself, but also introduce my students to them too. I don't think that this would have happened without many years of persistently showing my respect and clarifying my intention to spirit.

About 25 years ago I acquired a set of iron pendants that had been part of a shaman costume. The iron was corroded, but the set was practically complete.

I knew this type of iron work, it is typical for the tribes of Northern Mongolia and southern Siberia.

I decided to make a costume in the generic style of these people's shamans, it seemed to me the best way to honour the objects.

Still, it took me years to gather the right materials. For example, these kind of costumes often have two sets of feathers on the shoulders – they represent the wings that help the shaman fly through other worlds. These feathers should come from the left and right wings of the same bird.

One day, a friend gave me two wings from the Uhu, the eagle owl, complete with the necessary papers that showed this owl had been born, lived and died in a zoo. Then I could finally start making the costume.

I had the three big old pieces for the backside, the small pendants for the boots and for the headdress, and one set to cover the heart, at the front.

I didn't know for sure if there were dormant spirits in the metal - I could never get a clear contact - but when the costume was nearing completion and all the metal was in place, one evening they woke up.

There was a strong kind of 'electric current' in the air, which came from the coat. I could hardly get close to it, all the hairs of my body were standing out. So, I prayed for a long time, telling the spirits that were waking up where they were, and that a new costume was available for them, that it had been made for them as a new home.

I told them that people would get to know them through the costume and admire their beauty, and would want to get to know them. After more than two hours, the energy dimmed again.

I remember you brought this particular costume to a training.

When I was wearing it, I remember realising that, until then, I had never realised - never had the feeling - that I was going 'naked' into trances; but having that metal on - or at - my back, gave me such a strong feeling of being protected.

I was surprised, I had not been aware that I could have been missing something like that in my practice.

That is interesting, because that corresponds to the function of the armour, the protection. Did you follow up on this teaching moment somehow?

Yes, since that moment, I have put an old bronze Chinese mirror on my back, and another more recently made mirror in front of me.

I asked the spirits of the mirror to protect me, and a man with a female tiger appeared. I followed the tiger, which lead me to a Chinese temple. There, I was invited to relax and to dream.

I was drinking the milk of the mother-tiger. It felt like I had nothing to do myself, just to be nourished by the power of the spirit which would take care of my protection.

And that shows one of the many possible ways the objects on a costume will support the shaman actively when they are doing healing work. When the right prayers are made, when the intentions are clear, the objects can be filled with energy that has a specific function, just like batteries can be charged.

When you began to create shaman costumes, were you aware about the risk of cultural appropriation? Nowadays, as this topic has become much more thematised, has something changed in your approach?

My approach has stayed the same, all those years. When I am making a costume it is a long process of prayer, in which I tell the spirits I come in ignorance and I want to learn. I ask them to guide me and correct me, I welcome them in my dreams. This is essential.

On purpose, none of my costumes can be mistakingly taken as an 'original' one. For example, I will choose a non-traditional colour for the coat, so everybody who knows about the

costumes sees it's not a usual one. I present the costumes to spirit as an offering of love, an honouring of the mystery of the shamanic universe. I never claim to be a shaman and correct people if they call me one.

I see my costumes as embodied dreams of a person trying to understand shamanism better. They are starting points for shamanic journeys. I have asked feedback from various representatives of shamanic traditions, and after asking me about my dreams during the process of creation they told me to go ahead. All of that said, I am a western person using imagery from other cultures. I can only hope that the reason and the ways I do it makes a difference.

You've been studying shamanism for over 40 years. There are a few original old shaman costumes at your home, and you have made many costumes yourself. How do you see the future?

As I start to get older, I am travelling less. The shamanic teachers with whom I used to travel have all passed away, I am becoming one of the older ones myself now and am gradually shifting to a more grandfatherly role.

I am creating a small 'shaman museum' at home in Amsterdam: a place where I can guide students in their shamanic journeys, while they connect to the objects and costumes for a direct transmission.

In a normal museum you can't do this, but I want to offer a place where this is possible.

I am the caretaker of some old costumes, drums and objects, but I do not feel like their 'owner'. They own themselves. I believe that in the right context their gift can be shared with all sincere students of shamanism.

Daan van Kampenhout lives in Amsterdam and Berlin. He has been a student of shamanism for more than 40 years and teaches internationally. He is the author of seven books, and his writings have been translated into twelve different languages.

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SHAMANIC P.P.P

Some Tips on the Making of Ritual Clothing for Shamanism

Ritual clothing is important in lots of sacred traditions, because when special clothes are worn, we are in the 'other' state.

On one level this is psychological, it says we are not our 'normal' selves right now. It reminds us we have stepped out of our ordinary self; that we are in a different role for the duration of the time we wear it.

On a sociological level, when a shaman - or 'priestly figure' - dresses differently from their community, they are announcing that they are in their sacred role. This lets the community know that a sacred action is taking place, it clearly says something special and important is going on.

But shaman's armour is much more than that, because in a shaman's universe everything is alive, and it really does act as armour, protecting the shaman, because it is filled with spirits and spirit power. I often think of it being like bio-hazard clothing, or the P.P.E. - Personal Protection Equipment - worn by medical staff.

In Northern Asia, shaman's armour can look splendid and exotic to our eyes, and I know, it makes some people want to 'dress up'. But the important thing is not to come from the head.

The first thing anyone sensing a need for armour has to do is go to their spirits, and ask about the right sort of armour for them - if indeed armour is needed at all.

And, having asked, there is a need to be ruthlessly honest about what the spirits exactly said. If they said we don't need armour, then we don't need armour, however tempting the idea of fancy armour may be. If our spirits do specify armour, we need to pay attention to what they tell - or show - us, so we have a good idea about it, and don't go off into flights of creative fancy.

Traditional shaman's armour can be amazingly complex, with thickly padded cloth or leather coats, hung with metal objects, bells, stuffed fabric snakes, feathers - or whole bird wings - as well as sometimes wolf or bear pelts, and many have lots of bronze shaman's mirrors and many other things. All of

these are there for a reason; they might look spectacular, but the reason for the decoration is not for display.

Full shaman's armour typically consists of boots, a coat, possibly an apron worn on top of the coat, and some sort of head covering, often with a fringed mask. Some traditions have ritual gloves too.

As the first shamans were likely women, a lot of the clothing used by male shamans is female in origin; the male shamans were copying - and therefore taking on the power of - female udigans [shamans].

One traditional Siberian view is that there are three sexes, 'male', 'female' and 'shaman', and this is to do with the balancing of the male and female aspects of themselves that shamans have to do.

My own armour consists of a old pair of boots, given to me by a Darkhad Mongol shaman, and I have a long, black cotton tunic, shaped like a Mongolian deel coat. My spirits were adamant that my clothes had to be black, with elements of red, as black and red were 'my colours'.

On top of this, at times I wear a type of ritual breastplate apron, called a dudig by the Evenk people. My dudig is made of deerskin with attached amulets and ritual objects. It is my main shaman's armour, and I wear it more than anything else, often just putting it on over top of my regular clothes when I do work.

I have several pieces of head gear. The simplest is just a band of brocade that ties around my forehead, with leather fringes that cover my eyes. I also have a Buryat Mongol shaman's cap with a fringed face mask, called a maykhabsha, and a Mongolian shaman's ongoi, which is a sort of wrap-around hat, open to the top and tied at the back. This has a fringed face mask and bird feathers that stick out of the top.

As I am not a Mongol shaman I tend not to wear the maykhabsha or ongoi very often, but my spirits instructed me to make my own simple maykhabsha-like cap, which has silk ribbons hanging from the back representing my spirits, and five small human skulls across the forehead, which have meaning in Tibetan traditions, which I am heavily involved in.

I also have an iron orgay antler crown that I was instructed to make by my

spirits. This has a fringed face mask hanging down beneath it.

Cord fringing that hangs down over the face is very common in North Asian shamanism, and almost all shamans have it. The fringe helps the shaman separate from the everyday world, and is also said to prevent people seeing their eyes when they are in trance and possessed by their spirit helpers.

Shaman's armour is traditionally made by the shaman, their teacher, a commissioned craftsman, or their community; there is no one single way. But before it is used for the first time, it has to be blessed and awoken, so the spirits come into it and the armour becomes alive; again, there is no one way for this either.

There will also be ceremonies done before the making of the armour, in order to bless the materials, as well as prayers and rituals along the way, as needed.

Traditionally a shaman blacksmith would be called in to make the metal items of the armour, and there will be specific aspects to this making too.

It is really important to realise the degree of depth and detail a lot of ritual objects require in their making, and all of these steps are there to empower the object, by building up intent surrounding it, and connecting it to the spirits in a powerful way.

So, to recap, we need to listen to our spirits and get as good as we can at understanding what they are saying, and learn how to tell the difference between the nonsense our mind creates, and their true voice.

We need to listen to our spirits, and ask for help - because, as the old saying goes; 'no spirits equals no shamans.'

This is an edited extract from 'Walking with the Tiger' by Nicholas Breeze Wood, available from Amazon.

MAKING THE ANCESTORS DANCE

Encounters with the Sacred in Guatemala

Nicola Dentico

I have just left the cyberpunk little town of La Mesilla, on the border between Mexico and Guatemala: cables, concrete, and stalls that sell everything from SIM cards to plastic containers. Beyond the polluted main road, mountains and forests rise up.

To cross the border we had to say goodbye to our Mexican driver near to a huge Coca-Cola warehouse, and wait for Marco, the new Guatemalan driver, to pick us up after our passports were stamped.

Alberto Fragasso - an anthropologist and medicine man, and student of C. Michael Smith - and I have just finished guiding a group through Mexico during the Día de Muertos.

Now we are entering Tz'utujil territory to meet my *madrina* - a curandera - to help her sketch out the notes for a book. This is to be a biography, which is also meant to be an inheritance for the village youth; a bridge, so when the hypnosis of smart phones finally fades, the cultural roots will still be there to return to.

I feel like an explorer of the past, but inverted: here one doesn't come to extract treasures, but to support those who struggle to remain themselves; a sort of Gertrude Duby - the Swiss-born photographer, journalist, anthropologist, and environmental activist - among the Lacandon.

Yet the landscape depresses me; everywhere concrete houses are sprouting, like an infection on the skin of Mother Earth.

Concrete is a legacy of the United States after the thirty-year internal armed conflict, fueled by the CIA's covert operations. This CIA involvement was confirmed by documents declassified in the 2000s which reveal the intelligence agency's role in the 1954 coup, and in disinformation campaigns against Guatemala's democratic governments.

The US wanted to 'modernise' the villages with stable houses; but without the understanding that the impermanence of Maya dwellings followed a social and cosmic logic: building together, beam by beam, as part of the communal fabric.

Today concrete is also a status symbol - grey ostentation worn like a jewel.

After seven hours, we reach Panajachel, a small town in the southwestern part of the Guatemalan Highlands; then take a *lancha* - a little boat - across the lake toward Santiago Atitlán.

Even the lake has now become a magnet for hotels and yoga centres, and I can't help wondering how many of them are Indigenous-owned, and how many are the result of foreign speculation.

CELEBRATION OF SAN MARTÍN

I had been waiting for years to take part in the Celebration of San Martín, one of the most important events in the complex universe of the *cofradías*, the religious brotherhoods where Maya - Catholic syncretism takes form.

The traditional music reaches us halfway down the street, distorted like a black metal concert; but no directions are needed: as the road is closed, transformed into an open-air theatre.

On the stage stand two gigantic marimbas and, in front of them, two young men dancing.

At first they seem to be wrapped in strange leather aprons, but, as we get closer, we realise they are real animal skins. One dancer wears a horned headdress - a deer - while the other carries the faint markings of the jaguar. Their dance is slow, guided by a rhythm older than the marimba itself.

At one point the jaguar-boy lifts a furry object and strokes his companion's back: it looks like a *limpia*¹. The gesture is tender, mysterious, laden with meaning which I have not yet grasped.

Crossing the threshold of the *cofradía*, we are swallowed by a dense smell of wax and pine.

The room is tiny, yet it holds around thirty people. The ceiling has disappeared under hundreds of coloured flags, and the altar is a layered universe: Catholic saints beside enormous stones dressed in scarves and banknotes folded like bow ties. The stones are so carefully tended they seem ready to come alive.

The *madrina* Dolores welcomes us, as if the room opened itself to make space for her.

She leads us to a small secondary altar, where a colourful bundle rests. It is the Heart of Martín, and Dolores tells us that inside it lies a quetzal-serpent feather, a symbol of creation itself: a bridge between matter and the divine.

During this celebration - as at Christmas and St. John's Day - all the statues and stones are made to dance. The confraternity members move them, following the rhythm of the marimbas. We are the only white people there, attracting curious, but not hostile glances.

Time flows according to the Maya logic: cyclical, redundant. It feels like an eternity before the marimberos - who are taking a break - finish eating.

Here, waiting is not a delay; it is part of the celebration, a prelude that forces you to slow down.

In a moment of calm, Dolores reveals a detail about the scene we saw outside: that 'furry stick' was a taxidermied squirrel.

The jaguar gives energy to the deer - nature and deep intelligence nourishing each other. As in the Popol Vuh, when the ancestors, upon reaching Cozumel, received divine instructions from a pair of jaguars.

The resonance of the symbol lights up inside me instantly; but a celebration like this is not meant to be understood; it is meant to be crossed.

Suddenly the room stirs: a crowd of jaguars and deer enters. Not two anymore, but twenty.

Some wear spotted pelts, others enormous antlers.

One confrade lifts the censer - a recycled tin can filled with burning coals - and pours copal resin onto it. The white smoke envelops everyone. Each young dancer is purified: antlers, chest, pelts.

Some sway as if drunk, but Dolores corrects us: it's the energy of the ceremony.

This becomes clear when one of the boys - moments after a trance - removes his antlers and casually asks for a Coca-Cola.

After the consecration, everyone shakes hands with the young animal-dancers. Then a howl breaks the air, followed by ten more. The crowd of jaguars and deer howls like a single pack and disappear, leaving the resinous scent of copal behind.

And now, the 'real' ceremony can finally begin.

The first confrade lifts the statue of Santa María and carries her outside, presenting her to the four directions. Then he dances.

After her, it is the turn of an ancient stone representing Maximón². The elder is too weak to lift it, so a younger man takes his place and dances without faltering.

My madrina tells us that this ceremonial house was founded by Francisco Sojuel, prophet and legendary figure of Santiago Atitlán, a man who - according to tradition - could speak with the winds and bend the rain.

He is credited with visions of the future, such as: 'boxes with tiny people inside, used to communicate with faraway places.' Television? Video calls? Who can say.

The dances go on for hours. Statues, stones, saints. The air is thick, sugary drinks circulate, the floor is sticky.

We are exhausted, when, suddenly, the confraternity members invite us to take part. They are including us. I am to make two stones dance.

I lift them. They are rough and heavy, and after a few minutes my arms burn.

When I ask whom the stone I'm holding represents, the answer stuns me: "You have danced with Francisco Sojuel."

My madrina's entire story flashes before me: the prophet who extinguished fire with rain, who unleashed landslides, who foresaw the future, who foretold the arrival of white people to be welcomed as grandchildren. And now I was holding his stone in my arms.

Beside me I notice an enigmatic three-headed stone. My madrina says it represents Ixchel, the Great Mother who weaves destiny.

It brings back the memory of the triad of fate-weaving women in the Alpine valley where I grew up; we Europeans, too, once had a religion of the earth - before we forgot it.

And perhaps this is why I want to write: to remind Western readers to make the spirits of our mountains and seas dance. A spirit does not die when we stop naming it; only our connection to life falls asleep.

The Heart of Martín is about to dance. It's a delicate moment: tradition says

this dance can trigger real storms. In recent days the lake has been restless, as if something were trying to emerge.

But then, a group of drunk boys enters. One of them is particularly obnoxious.

He talks to us as if he already knew us, asks for drinks, insists. My madrina stiffens. In a clipped voice she says she is tired and that it's best to leave.

Before exiting we must go through the ritual of farewells: shaking hands with everyone, following the hierarchical order of the confraternity. Then we are outside.

"That boy is a known drug trafficker," she says as we walk. "Not dangerous, but I don't want that energy in the ceremony."

In Guatemala, the sacred and the risky run as close as two veins in the same arm.

A WORLD FULL OF BOATS

The next morning I wake up dazed, and not really rested.

The night passed quietly, yes, but I slept poorly, tossed around by images and dances that have not yet settled.

The lancha is already waiting; as we walk along the wooden pier, the lancheros shout out all the lake destinations.

I climb aboard, the water flat, and the mountains surround me. I unlock my smart phone and am immediately flooded by news from the outside world - news that sparks a reflection.

In the very days when, here in Santiago Atitlán, the spirits were being nourished - the dance that feeds nature, the Heart of Martín, the ancestral stones lifted like sacred children - another 'ceremony' was taking place across the continent, in Brazil: COP30, the global climate conference; where governments, NGOs, and Indigenous peoples attempted to wrestle an agreement from those who are consuming the Earth.

And almost at the same moment when the marimbas were playing in Santiago, a flotilla of Indigenous boats were cutting through the rivers of the Amazon; boats full of women and men from distant villages, navigating to tell the powerful of the Earth that without the forest there is no future.

Between 2024 and 2025 I was given many books about the Amazon, but the one that comes to mind now is 'Amazzonia: una vita nel cuore della foresta' by Emanuela Evangelista.

Emanuela is a biologist and environmental activist, and in her book she explains that if even 20% of the Amazon forest disappears, irreversible changes will begin - changes that could turn the planet's green lung into a sparse savannah.

What would happen to the world if that process were set in motion?

Indigenous traditions have always said it: everything is connected. Fortunately, science now says so too; and science, not economics, should have the right to speak first at a place like COP30.

I don't yet know it at this point in my journey, but COP will not achieve the hoped-for results.

Despite promises, the Brazilian presidency will exclude Indigenous peoples from the main negotiations, advancing the agreements behind closed doors, in the presence of lobbyists.

The final document will contain no concrete plan to phase out fossil fuels, no roadmap to halt deforestation, no significant increase in funding to help low-income countries adapt to the threats of climate change.

Indigenous activists will, however, manage to secure a commitment to create a mechanism for a 'just transition,' aimed at protecting the rights of workers and communities as fossil fuels are abandoned.

Another positive sign: during COP, Colombia and the Netherlands will host the first International Conference on an Equitable Fossil Fuel Phase-out.

It is striking that two rituals—one ancient, one modern - the dance of the Heart of San Martín and COP30 - unfolded in the same window of time. As if the consciousness of the Earth were manifesting in different forms, in different places, using different languages... but with the same urgency.

Perhaps we are like the Maya of old, and we will soon need to find a new Cozumel, a place where the original instructions of Mother Earth can be heard again. Or perhaps the ears that listen to the speaking jaguars will not be human at all.

The lancha pulls away from the dock, and its slow movement across the surface of the water calls up another image; and the Brazilian flotilla echoes another one, that, in 2025, crossed a very different sea: the humanitarian flotilla headed to Gaza, made up of civilians, activists, and improvised sailors who

defied the shameful inertia of governments to bring aid where aid had been forbidden.

Two waters, two continents, but the same image: boats challenging empires; lightweight, almost fragile boats, facing the giants of the world; yet they are stronger than any diplomatic statement, because they carry a gesture, not a promise.

The lancha accelerates; the air stings my face. I realise I'm seeing four concentric rings of water: the Maya of Cozumel, Santiago Atitlán, the Amazon, and Gaza; all sharing the same shape - a boat as political act.

There is a third signal, deeply generational. In 2025, youth protests across half the world rallied under an unexpected banner: the Jolly Roger, a smiling skull wearing a straw hat.

They didn't want a military flag, or a party symbol, but a form of piracy as an act of freedom - not for plunder, but to challenge the established order in the name of the Earth and human rights.

And so the new 'pirates' break naval blockades, contest climate summits, and cross seas and squares with a single shared image: a boat that says, "I do not obey."

And as the lancha cuts through a small wave and throws up a spray of water, I understand that everything is converging toward a single question:

What connects a Maya ceremony in the heart of Guatemala, a COP in Brazil, a flotilla for Gaza, and a smiling skull waved by protesters in Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, France, Morocco?

Perhaps the answer is simple, perhaps we are witnessing the return of the Earth as a political subject. And every boat, every dance, every protest, every spirit, everywhere, in every form, is saying the same thing in different tongues: it is time for humans to remember that they are part of the world, not its owners.

Perhaps Cozumel is not that far away.

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NOTES:

1: A *limpia* is ritual of healing and blessing performed by rubbing the body with plants soaked in perfume and/or alcohol, with the

symbolic intention of 'sweeping away' spirits of illness and returning them to Xibalbà, the underworld, from which they are believed to originate.

2: Maximón is deity of pre-Hispanic origin, later also adopted by mestizo communities under the name of San Simón. A syncretic and ambivalent figure, associated with both protection and transgression, whose cult is still practised today. The epicentre of his veneration is located in Santiago Atitlán, where Maximón occupies a central role in the ritual life of the community. For an article about Maximón, see Sacred Hoop Issue 124.

THE PRIMAL LANGUAGE OF NATURE

Geral Blanchard

Many people - whether they reside in large metropolitan areas, the remote Arctic, or the Amazon jungle - want to find greater life meaning, perhaps serving as healers.

When attempting to heal physical and psychological issues, a traditional animistic or shamanic model can provide a prerequisite understanding which promotes an effective and principled standards of care.

Native Americans still look to nature for guidance in many facets of life. The Mother speaks to them about living in a balanced way, in accord with the inherent order of the Universe. Her message - the 'Original Instructions' - offer fundamental truths about harmonious existence.

Humbly, as a white person, influenced by forces of modernity, I try to interpret and incorporate this natural intelligence.

Nature is a worldwide web of obscure communication networks. Experienced healers connect with the mysterious frequencies of the cosmos that overlay them, and rest in the soil's root-like electrical grids beneath their feet.

In ancient times, before humans developed their unique and separating verbal language, we spoke with Nature in an interactive way, but that is now relegated to our imagination.

Left-brain language narrowed communication with our plant and animal relatives, diminished our intuitive abilities, and so we slowly devolved into a solo form of consciousness. To heal anyone, however, the inner and outer worlds must be in balance.

We have an internal language, with a 'current' still continuously flowing through all sentient beings. The greatest plea that a jaguar, or a dolphin has toward humans is simply for us to try to learn how to be equals with them; to resume communication and partner with them, and to feel our way into a shared complementary intelligence that intuitively seems familiar, yet quite dissimilar from our own.

Gifted healers are supportively in sync with all sentient beings. This is animistic lesson number one: keep your feet on Mother Earth in order to sense what is underground, as well as spoken in 'sky languages.'

Nature has born witness to, and remembers ancient currents, the felt voice of the land that is registered by cells in our bodies, even without conscious awareness.

Lakota author Luther Standing Bear has written; *'The Lakota knew that man's heart, away from nature, becomes hard; he knew that a lack of respect for growing living things soon led to a lack of respect for humans too.'*

The language of creation can never be reduced to mere words. It has been described as a 'divine fire.'

While in the company of an Indigenous Ecuadorian mother, I witnessed it without any spoken words. Her four-year-old daughter was tending to her personal garden at the start of the day. The little girl cut a furrow in the earth, took two kernels of corn, one male and one female, kissed both, and placed them aside each other. Sprinkling tobacco over them, she proceeded to cover the seeds with a blanket of soil.

Early in life she seemed aware of her sacred feminine role in creating new life.

Her next ritual act was to enter a small wooden shed, where she lit a candle and kneeled. With hands held together and her head bowed, she prayerfully added her intentions of health and growth to the seeds of corn, and gave thanks for what was to come.

She seemed to be communing in an unspoken language that resonated with that of 'Grandmother Corn.'

This charming child's behavior 'spoke' with a seemingly natural reverence and a love for life. She demonstrated the cooperative deep ecology of a well-gardened mind.

Another teaching moment in my development occurred while hiking above an immense cattle ranch in the mountains of Wyoming.

As I silently moved through prime grizzly bear habitat, suddenly, and just a few feet in front of me, two black wolves with golden eyes jumped up from their resting place, woofed, and loped away. But not very far.

Wolves have their reconnecting ceremonies; at least once a day they take a census count. It boils down to

howling over extended distance to locate where their relatives are. I call it their 'reconnoitring call.' Reassured of where their brethren are, this social canine is then at peace.

Aware of this practice, I mimicked the call, and I was spellbound as they responded to me for many minutes. While unseen, I felt linked to them, like they were a welcoming pack.

Returning to the ranch house that evening, I exuberantly told the foreman and his wife of what had transpired. They assured me that such an occurrence was unlikely; but with my enthusiasm their certainty eventually diminished.

I issued an invitation to accompany me to reconnoitre with the wolves, and so, early the next morning, with me in the lead, we hiked to the same spot where the two wolves were first encountered, video camera in hand. There they were, with a few additional members of the pack.

Spotting us and watching how we calmly laid down on Earth; they did the same. All of us enjoyed the warmth of the rising sun. It was like an ancient reverie, man and wolf seeking safe companionship, as was once commonly experienced by Native Americans.

After a few minutes of sharing space with us, they began howling, the same call I initiated the previous day.

It was clear the entire pack was being located, but there were many more announcing their presence, perhaps a dozen in total, and they completely encircled us.

We felt ecstatically linked by their melodic ceremony; privileged and safe too. It was a wonderfully mystical and binding reunion. A spiritual reminder that the mysterious harmony found in wilderness settings is essential to our psychological and spiritual well-being.

Animistic healing lesson number two: rediscover the forgotten languages of Nature. Make an effort to rejoin lost dialogues and unconscious processes.

To be a whole and interconnected healer, consider returning to the laws of Nature, going beyond human laws, and resuming relationships with old guardian animals. We don't have to look for them, they come to us when our essence has been readied through spiritual practices.

Much of what occurs in a busy city occurs in fast time. Most everything that

happens in traditional Indigenous villages occurs in slow time - whether in the Amazon, where the Achuar live, or high atop the Sierra Nevada Mountains of Columbia, which is the remote home of the ancient Kogi tribe.

Here is animistic lesson number three: be patient; easy does it.

Traditional Diné [Navajo] healers often extend healing treatments over four days. There's no rush.

The first step in the healing process is to slow down the patient's chattering ego, harmonising them with their inner self, their tribe, animal life, Mother Earth, in fact, the entire Universe. That alone is elemental medicine - a calm connection to something bigger.

Likewise, Wakeunai medicine people of Columbia may spend four to five days devotedly tending to someone with a serious illness.

Over that period, they may use music, chants, and other quieting ritual techniques to help patients reintegrate their soul(s) and, thereby, heal.

On a wilderness sojourn, going 'low and slow' and being willing to wait and receive can invite a relationship with animal helpers.

An example of this came to me atop Wyoming's Mount Washburn, where I communed with wild bighorn mountain sheep over the course of a day. At a distance, and with my gaze somewhat averted for hours, all of us were relaxing into camaraderie.

Eventually I climbed to a high peak whilst staying visible to the sheep. To my surprise they ambled toward me, as if we were engaged in some sort of mysterious herd communication.

I rested on a precipice overlooking a vast expanse of terrain. All of the sheep approached and bedded down around me including two rams with massive curled horns, one laying on each side of me and within arm's reach.

Together we gazed into the distance for a long time. Then with no audible sound between them, the herd immediately jumped up and locked a collective gaze down the mountainside. I stood too, and inched forward with one hand on the back of each male while asking them what had startled them. The answer emerged. Far below a wolf was stealthily darting from one boulder to another, doing its best to close distance, while remaining largely unseen.

All of us stared attentively, and as is often observed among social animals, the entire herd, as if one mind and without a sound, instantaneously and simultaneously thundered down the mountain in a safe direction. It was a familiar, quiet, and natural messaging that, when discerned in humans, is often described as telepathy or as intuition.

As if these examples weren't enough to educate me on the importance of communion with the All, I was given yet another example.

This time, my son and I decided to go to a bighorn sheep sanctuary on a large island in Flathead Lake, Montana.

To get there, for a day of hiking, we accepted a Blackfoot Indian's offer to boat us to the island. At the end of the day, we were told to meet at a specific promontory where the boatsman would pick us up. There stood a lone, tall, burned-out pine tree. No missing it.

After a tranquil day on the island, we went to the meet-up point and looked across the large lake for a motorboat heading our way. As we sat leaning against the tree, we noted a bald eagle approaching in the far distance. As it neared, there was no chance that the two humans sitting below the tree wouldn't be seen. We wondered when it would veer off.

What happened next was astonishing. The Eagle never soared to the side but chose to land on the lone pine immediately above us. Then, she shook each of her extended wings and dropped two long feathers, one landing by each of us. Mission accomplished, she flew off.

When the event was shared with our Indigenous friend, he spoke the obvious. 'That is regarded as 'good medicine among our tribe. Take the healing message with you. Use it. This blessing was clearly intended for the two of you.'

Nature speaks in mysterious ways. Underground fungus can 'talk' to various root systems over long distances. Even stones with their long-held memories can 'speak'.

Humans, being an integral part of Nature, can tune in to the rest, often requiring nudging support from plants and animals.

Some call this ability 'morphic resonance.' Quantum physicists might refer to it as 'entanglement.'

In the book 'Blackfoot Physics,' by F. David Peat, Native observers point out how the Western desire to control,

manipulate and exploit gets in the way of healing - as does certainty. There it is, lesson number four: With humility, get out of your way.

Powerful medicine people nurture natural relationships - their intrinsic pact with cosmological forces.

This relationship can be enhanced with a shift in consciousness when thinking and hearing improve. It may also be done medicine-free while fasting or on a vision quest that quiets the second-order mind.

A greater realm of knowing comes online - the 'universal mind.'

Blackfoot medicine men say the world, people included, is continuously engaged in a transformational process; so, the healing task at hand is to capture whatever momentum for change is experienced, and develop it with highly personalised attention. They let afflicted people know that change is always right on time.

Traditionally the Blackfeet acknowledge there are multiple ways of knowing beyond mere human intellect. Dialoguing with the rest of Nature roots us, expands us, and increases our ability to diagnose and heal.

Western belief in the primacy of the individual leads to hubris, and arrogance rarely heals; although humble confidence - born of experience - can.

Returning to the Whole makes us bigger and stronger via connections.

David Peat, writing in his book, offers this: *'Coming-to-knowing means entering into relationship with the spirits of knowledge, with plants and animals, with beings that animate dreams and visions, and with the spirit of people.'*

My Western psychotherapy training encouraged me to listen well and then give concrete 'expert advice' that would promote healing.

Worldwide experience with authentic medicine people and shamans has taught me more unpretentious ways.

Through storytelling, patients can listen, extract resonating value, and make necessary inner alignments. Then their personal and universal compass can instruct them from a place deep within.

Healers are best seen as guides to one's inner healing journey. They keep things safe and sacred. They do away with diagnostic compartments and the

division of people into hierarchical categories.

When my role is not used for personal notoriety, I best support patient healing. But when I collaborate as an equal with the person sitting aside me, sacred magic unfolds.

Occasionally it has been tempting to ascribe special attributes to myself after a seemingly miraculous healing occurred in my presence.

Or even when a white dove landed on my head during a Shona ceremony in Zimbabwe, "aren't I special?" was the sentiment that came over me.

I now realise a simple rule of thumb at work. When we synchronise with ancient patterns of Nature and the shared knowledge of animals and plants, anything is possible.

Merging with natural rhythms pull us toward healing, and then animals are pulled to us. This is not about me, it is about we.

There is an integrity, a planetary intelligence at work. As healers we must make a valiant effort to reconnect with the face of the land – the face of All.

*'The lands around my dwelling
Are more beautiful
From the day
When it was given me to see
Faces I have never seen before.
All is more beautiful.
All is more beautiful.
And life is thankfulness.
These guests of mine
Make my house grand.'*

Inuit shaman's song

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STONES OF THE ANCESTORS

The Historical Use of White Quartz Stones for Protection, Healing and as Memorials of the Dead

The Sacred Hoop office, in West Wales, is in a landscape rich with quartz. These are not the nicely polished crystals, beloved of New Age crystal therapists, but instead are jagged boulders in the landscape, or veins running through cliff faces or other boulders, or in the form of sea-storm-tossed, rounded pebbles scattered on a beach.

This quartz has drawn local people to dig here for thousands of years, as where there is quartz there is also copper, iron, tin, lead and gold. So quartz has been a lure for those people seeking riches since before the time of the Romans.

But it is also a sacred stone, one which is 'alive', one which - according to folklore - has magical powers of healing and protection.

And certainly it is a stone that draws the eye - and the soul. Is there anyone who has ever walked on a beach scattered with rounded, sea-smoothed, white 'eggs', who hasn't, at some point, stooped to pick one up?

White quartz has sacred aspects all over the world, in many varied cultures; but this article will focus on the use of white quartz - sometimes known as 'snow' or 'milky' quartz' - in what can be very loosely termed the 'Celtic' West of Britain, including Ireland. These pebbles - which can sometimes be stained pink from traces of iron - have been a precious item for people in Western Europe for a very long time.

The stone - whether as pebbles, cobbles, or larger crystal masses - occupies a special place in the archaeology and folklore of Western Europe.

Its luminous appearance, its durability - and its rarity in some areas - make it a visually striking and symbolically potent material.

Despite some caution about over-interpreting its significance, archaeological evidence clearly shows that white quartz was collected, selected, transported, and deposited in

grave sites and other ritual places from at least the Neolithic period, through the Bronze and Iron Ages, and into the medieval - and even post medieval - periods. That's at least 6,000 years of continual human stone relationship.

Across Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and beyond, quartz was not considered to be a neutral stone: instead it carried - and carries - meanings associated with the dead, with light, purity, and with thresholds.

Originally, before Christianity, evidence suggests it held deep sacred symbolism for people, and its later survival in folk practices suggests that although people may not be aware of its lost deeper sacred significance, it has folkloric qualities that - however watered down - still speak to us today. It is a stone with a power that is far beyond its mere physical properties.

But before we go further, it's perhaps good to say something briefly about the word 'Celtic'.

The term is often misused as a as a broad, catch-all label, describing the cultures, art, and peoples of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, and Brittany. However, this usage is often considered a very loose, oversimplified - and inaccurate historical invention - generally best avoided. Celtic is a popular term, and useful - even if inaccurate - and the use of the term here is done so with that awareness.

The use of white quartz goes way back, beyond its use by the 'Celts', as the Neolithic peoples of Britain - including Ireland - were not 'Celtic' people. The 'Celts' had not migrated to Britain when Quartz came to be used in a ritual way; and that fact shows that the sacred traditions around the stone were picked up and continued by wave after wave of later arriving peoples.

THE PREHISTORIC ROOTS

Perhaps the most iconic use of white quartz - and one which immediately connects it to the dead and the ancestors - is the iconic Neolithic passage tomb of Newgrange in Ireland

Newgrange, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, dates to C3100 BCE, and it is thought featured an outer façade of white quartz cobbles that glinted blindingly in the sunlight, and which - then and now - capture the eye from a distance. The modern façade is a reconstruction, based on a large quantity of quartz cobbles found at the site during excavations.

Archaeologists have argued that the choice of the bright white quartz was deliberate for symbolic reasons, perhaps reasons associated with light, rebirth, and aspects - unknown to us - from within their cosmology.

If Newgrange really did had a quartz façade, it was the use of quartz on an almost industrial scale, but it is often found in far less elaborate tombs too, such as in Bronze Age cist graves in Scotland and England, where white quartz pebbles were deliberately placed with the burials, sometimes in significant numbers. The number of stones indicates intentional placement of the stones, rather than any sort of accident.

At a Bronze Age cist in Burgie, near Forres, Scotland, quartz was placed under the skull of the buried individual. This was not accidental, as the nearest quartz outcrop is a long way away and would have not been on the site.

In Derbyshire, England, one burial contained around eighty quartz pebbles, which again suggests a deliberate use of them as grave goods.

But this use is not just in the 'Celtic' lands, as also in Sweden and southern Scandinavia, archaeologists have found graves from the later Early Iron Age with large quantities of white quartz, and quartz has been associated with grave sites across France, Spain and beyond. it is a pan-European phenomenon

THE LATER TRADITIONS

After Christianity arrived in Western Europe, initially with the Romans, and then more systematically, the older beliefs and sacred understandings began to gradually lose ground.

In Britain, this especially happened after the year 664CE. Before that date, the form of Christianity in Britain was, what is often called, 'Celtic' Christianity, and that was very different to the Roman Catholic Christianity that came to hold sway after this date.

Celtic Christianity was a simplistic folk Christianity, brought into Britain during the latter days of the Romans, mixed with the pre-Christian spirituality - which we could perhaps call druidry - of Britain.

These two formed a synergy; a animistic Christian-paganism, that kept the old ways - and often old spirits - and added Jesus to the mix. This all changed in 664 however, at the Synod of Whitby

in Yorkshire, England, when Britain became Catholic and - officially at least - turned its back in Celtic Christianity.

Grave goods - the burial of objects with the dead - has been a common aspect of humanity for as long as there have been humans, but it is not generally part of Christianity; and so it began to gradually die out as the new religion became more and more established.

But long into the Christian period, white quartz pebbles have been discovered, as obvious grave goods, in excavations - especially graves of women and children - where it has been buried with the dead, generally near to the person's heart area or head.

Although it might be stretching the point a little; it is perhaps interesting to reflect on the fact that white stones - generally marble, or white synthetic stones made from glass - are still a popular covering on modern graves. I am not suggesting the people who choose to use these are doing so as a deliberate continuance of ancient practices, but it does appear that the use of white stones is still a part of unconscious culture; its sacred meaning long stripped out and lost, so only a dull echo remains.

Written Christian sources from the early medieval period - including from the life stories of saints' - also reveal a continuity of belief in the power of white quartz stones.

The 7th writer Adomnán, in his book 'Life of Columba,' describes the Irish missionary Columba finding a white pebble in a stream, and pronouncing it a healing object, capable of curing disease if used with water. The stone was later kept in the king's treasury as a holy relic.

Medieval burial sites across the British Isles - such as on the island of Lindisfarne - also continue to show deliberate quartz deposits in graves.

PROTECTION AND HEALING

One well-documented traditional folk belief in Wales - still practised until fairly recent times, - but now probably slipped out of common folklore, except by those who study the subject - was the deliberate inclusion of a white quartz boulder into the stone wall of a cottage.

This stone was set into the wall to deliberately protect the house and its inhabitants from spirits, mostly the Tylwyth Teg [fairies].

White quartz boulders were also often set up around the boundaries of a property too, as a means of protection; and it is not at all uncommon to see walls around houses in West Wales with quartz rocks set into, or with stones set on top of boundary walls.

In the boundary walls, this is no doubt partially for decoration, as these walls can often be relatively modern; but even so, I would argue it is still part of an unconscious continuation of the folk tradition.

But stones set into the walls of old houses, would without doubt, have been done for magical protection - or luck.

White quartz pebbles were sometimes carried in pockets as 'lucky charms,' or protective amulets too, and although not white quartz, in Scotland, a local quartz known as 'Cairngorm' - a form of yellow citrine quartz - was widely used as a protective amulet; carried on the person, or set into jewellery. Historically, scottish warriors often carried pieces of this quartz into battle as protection against physical and spiritual harm.

Quartz is widely believed to repel or confuse supernatural beings, and a pebble might be placed in a cradle, at the threshold of a house, with livestock or simply kept in the pocket.

One modern day Core shamanic practitioner reported that during shamanic work concerning her property and the local spirits; the local spirits - the little people - were insistant that she remove the 'loud rocks' from her garden, because they were disturbing them.

When the woman asked for more details as to what exactly the 'loud rocks' were, she discovered the local spirits were refering to several large quartz boulders that had been collected from a local mountain and placed in her garden.

When it comes to healing, a common practice was to dip a piece of quartz into water, or place it into a glass and pour water over it, generally along with a prayer; the water is then drunk. Similar practices of empowering water using stones, or other ritual objects, can be found worldwide.

By the later Anglo-Saxon period, healing charms connected to stones became Christianised, including such things as lines from a Psalm or the names of saints. The stone retained its

power, but that power was reframed as Christian, God-given, rather than pre-Christian pagan given.

In later medieval and early modern Britain [C12th-C18th], the Church authorities often tolerated stone charms if they were linked to saints and used with prayer.

White quartz stones could even become 'saint's stone', which might be blessed on religious feast days, and while urban culture became more and more skeptical as time went on, rural communities continued to use quartz pebbles in all the ways they had been doing for centuries.

There is a tradition of different types of 'stones' being used to protect pregnant women and help the birth process; natural red coral being a very well known material, but there is evidence that a white quartz pebble was also used in this connection. After the birth, the stone may be given to the baby for protection, probably placed into its cot.

Ireland, despite its strong Christian tradition, shows one of the strongest continuities in quartz use, from prehistory through the medieval period and into modern folklore.

White quartz pebbles were commonly used as 'cure stones,' kept by families and passed down through the generations. They were used to heal all sorts of things, including eye problems, warts, fevers and skin complaints and were normally used in conjunction with water from a holy well - often a well associated with curing the specific malady that help was being sort for.

But care of the stones was important, as some stones were believed to lose their power if they were mis-handled.

In Scottish Gaelic culture: *clach-leigheis* [healing stones] are often made of quartz, and used by traditional folk healers. Quartz stones are also sometimes associated with Scottish Clan ritual objects too.

As British society became more urbanised after the Industrial Revolution, when people flocked to the towns to work in the new factories, the rural traditions they brought with them faded away.

These traditions survived in the country however, until modernity caught up and overtook them in the C20th; then, as the old people - brought up in the old ways - died off, and new people - often

from towns - moved into the countryside, the old ways, even in rural backwaters, began to be lost, until sadly, in many places today, little remains beyond habit.

WHY IS QUARTZ SACRED?

The colour white has mattered for a long time. It has several key associations; purity being a big one of course - the white of the virginal bridal dress for example - but also liminality.

This liminal quality can be seen in the way that quartz often appears at natural boundaries - in riverbanks, on the seashore etc. It is a striking stone, out of place with the other, duller colours of the landscape, and that also adds to its specialness.

With its liminality and its specialness, it appears to have become significant at moments of transition - birth, illness, death, and perhaps marriage - the white of the wedding dress marks not only purity, but also a liminal moment between being single and being married.

With this liminality, with the big divide, the big threshold - that between life and death - it would make it logical that the stone became associated with death, and became a symbol of death and a gift of beauty - as white quartz stones are beautiful - to the beloved dead; something to take with them. And as symbols of the dead, white quartz becoming a protective agent for houses and individuals also seems a logical step.

The electrical aspect of quartz is likely to also be historically important. It has piezoelectric and triboluminescent properties, which enable it to flash electrically generated light when struck. If you bang two quartz pebbles together you might - if you are lucky - see them light up. This is not a spark, like a flint might make if you strike it, this light is electrical and comes from within the body of the stone.

It is likely this visual 'aliveness' added to the magical qualities quartz was seen to have.

In healing, quartz acts and symbolises both purity and its alive specialness, which brings power - as well as its protective qualities - so, simultaneously purifying, bringing healing and protecting the sick person from illness.

White quartz pebbles then function as quiet, but powerful special objects; and so the next time you are out and about, and one encounters you; maybe

you might wish to ask it if it would like to come with you as a protection or healing stone, to be your stone friend as you travel the wild roads of Middle Earth.

AARON AND THE DRAGON

A Cautionary Tale of Spirit Possession

Robin Youngblood

Six wisdom keepers and myself were invited, as elder lineage holders, to attend a wisdom gathering in Europe, and the event was organised by a man, I will call Aaron - but that is not his real name - who had no experience in creating a gathering like this.

Aaron was a very spiritual man, but had never been taught the protocols that create safety for a ceremonial gathering of any kind.

As wisdom keepers, we came prepared to hold space in integrity, safety, and with the protection of all our ancestors, and at the time of the invocation each of us shared prayers of protection, summoning our ancestors, guides and helpers.

We called in the ancestors of the East to help us understand our dreams, new visions and new directions.

We invited the ancestors of the South, asking them to help us understand more about our life purpose and passions.

We requested the ancestors of the West to assist us to heal what needed to be healed in each person.

We evoked the ancestors of the North, and sought their presence to protect and assist us to heal any ancestral trauma, while identifying the gifts they've given us with our gratitude.

We gave thanks to Father Sky for the benevolence of sun and rain, and to Mother Earth for her nurturing sustenance, as well as their combined creation. And we blessed the hearts centred with love and joy in every person who attended.

When a ceremony is invoked through prayer, the ceremony must also be closed with prayer, and all those who have been invited to participate - in the spiritual world as well as in the physical - must be released from their realms and dimensions, so that they may do their work on our, and their behalf.

If the ceremonial container is left open, a portal has been created, and anything can come through. That means

that entities from other worlds, can and will enter.

If someone who hasn't been trained - and is unaware - happens to be standing in the ceremonial space at that time, they can be easily possessed by whatever spirits emerge.

In this instance, Aaron, the young man who initiated the gathering became possessed by a spirit that he was not even aware of. Several of the elders had other appointments and ceremonies to do on the last day of the gathering, so they were not present at the time when the entity crossed the boundary into this dimension and overwhelmed him.

The following day we all met with Aaron at his house.

I was extremely puzzled and concerned, because Aaron was unable to stay awake for more than a couple of hours at a time. He also had trouble standing, so I gave him my staff, and I asked him to use it to ground himself.

My colleagues and I examined him and detected that there was a presence, which was not Aaron's, occupying his physical body.

It took most of the first day just to determine what was actually happening. Three of us decided that we would work together to help Aaron to ground himself, and perhaps figure out what was going on.

While this was happening, Aaron was leaving us to nap every couple of hours. Every time that he got up he seemed weaker and more cognitively disabled. We were very worried about him.

During this time we were in constant prayer together, seeking answers and guidance, so we would know what we needed to do to assist him.

Eventually we came to understand that we needed to be in conversation with the being who was now living inside our friend.

Over the next two days we had several conversations with this entity, which turned out to be a spirit that I will call a 'dragon.'

The dragon entity was ecstatic, because for the first time in centuries he could see, touch, taste and feel the things of this world.

Yet while this was happening, Aaron was getting weaker and weaker... fading in and out, to the point where we were afraid we were going to have to hospitalise him. It was becoming

obvious to us that if we could not remove this being from Aaron's body, he was going to die.

His 'naps' were becoming longer, and his discombobulation was more apparent every time he was awake. His body was shaking, and even the staff I'd given him couldn't help him ground anymore.

At this point I told the dragon spirit that he was killing our friend, and I told him that he 'vibrated' at an entirely different frequency than Aaron's human body could live with. Aaron didn't like hearing this either, he loved the 'vibrational frequency' of the dragon spirit; it was exciting, almost addictive, to him.

We talked the situation over with Aaron, and suggested we move the dragon spirit out of his body and into another object, but Aaron resisted this, even though he knew he needed to live in his own body without the addition of the dragon.

Aaron had a very large single pointed crystal in his home, and eventually, we convinced him - and the dragon - that the dragon could, and should move into the crystal, as in that way, the two of them could continue to communicate together.

We told both of them that in this way they could maintain contact without damaging - and probably killing - Aaron's body.

Once they agreed, my colleagues and I - as trained professionals - were able to do a ceremony to remove the dragon spirit from Aaron's body, and place it within the crystal.

We also sent one of the wisdom keepers to the land on which the gathering was held, in order to make sure the portal was closed, and all the beings from other realms and dimensions had been sent back to the places where they belonged.

We used sage to cleanse Aaron's energy, and cedar to heal his physical body. We also used burning copal resin smoke to entice the dragon spirit out of Aaron's body, and to invite him to inhabit the crystal.

The dragon's vibrational energy seemed to match that of the crystal, therefore it could live in it comfortably.

Aaron started recovering almost immediately, and by the next day was pretty much his normal self.

He was very happy to be able to communicate with the dragon spirit, whom he felt had become his friend, and the dragon seemed happy to be in the crystal, and agreed to impart its wisdom to Aaron for a period of time.

Once he had communicated everything that he wanted to give to Aaron however, the dragon spirit asked if I would come and release it and send it home to its own realm, so, a few months later Aaron called me and asked me to come and send the dragon home, which I did.

IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED

The time that I and the other lineage holders spent helping Aaron and the dragon spirit had been a difficult few days, and I'm very glad that there was a team of us working on the case so we had each other to assist in the process.

The lessons were profound for all of us. Aaron nearly died. He came right up to the edge of what his physical body was able to take; and he learned never to allow anything else to possess him.

In addition we elders learned that we could depossess someone, even though we'd never done this type of work before.

There are cultures in the world that allow possession, but the wisdom keepers of those traditions also train people to assist those who are possessed, so that it's done safely, with the protection of the ancestors. Without that training, possession can be very dangerous.

Those of us who helped in the case of Aaron are lineage holders, and while we had never done this exact type of work before, we had been trained in at least the ways of how it is done, and so knew how to do it. We had been given the initiations and ceremonies that helped us to assist Aaron and the entity that possessed him.

I am not at liberty to share about those ceremonies, which is why I can only tell the story, without being specific about the ways we were able to accomplish the work.

To try to depossess somebody is dangerous if you haven't been trained to do so, and if we had not been trained to facilitate in this kind of situation, we could have possibly killed Aaron ourselves... Please don't try this at home folks, unless you have the skill set that allows you to safely protect both the possessed and the possessor.

THE NEED FOR SOLID TRAINING

There are consequences for every action, and even with training, we were concerned that we might do something that would adversely affect Aaron, the entity, and us.

If an entity comes into this world, and is without the correct safeguards of protocols and protection, the entity can wreak havoc on us, our families, and our communities; so if you come across a situation that you don't know how to handle, please seek an elder, a wisdom keeper, a lineage holder, that has the training, experience, the connection to the correct spirit helpers, and the guidance to do whatever is needed.

People often ask why they need proper training, and this is why. A connection to the spirits alone isn't enough. There are many trickster spirits who will whisper whatever we want to hear.

We all make mistakes, it's part of our growing up. Our mistake, as elders, was that we didn't realise Aaron didn't know that he needed to close the ceremony if we weren't there to do it.

We wrongfully assumed that he knew that he needed to do that. I'm sure most of us know the mnemonic for assume - 'When you Assume, *U* make an *Ass* out of *U* and *ME*.'

Nonetheless, all humans do it at one time or another, and in this case, our assumption almost cost Aaron his life.

Aaron's assumption that he knew all that he needed to know, and that he could allow the 'dragon's' energetic frequency into his body, without consequence, almost caused him to lose his life.

In this circumstance the only reason that Aaron survived was that all of us elders had been trained, even though - as I mentioned - we'd never used that training before.

We were a group with a wide range of backgrounds; each trained by a master in the culture and traditions that we follow. Myself, I've been trained in both Siberian Ulchi shamanism, and by my own Native American medicine people. One of the other elders has spent over twenty years as the right hand man of a Mixteca elder; and the third medicine person was that Mixteca elder, who was a lineage holder and Sundance Chief.

Not too long ago, a stranger said to me, "Yeah. *Seems like everybody's a shaman now.*"

Personally, I sincerely hope he's wrong, and while I understand that 'shamanism' has become a cult word, in the days when I was training, elders would say; 'anybody who wants to be a medicine person or a shaman is crazy.'

Medicine people and shamans have hard lives. Personally, I've recovered from alcoholism; been through the depths of depression; survived a mudslide, and many other things.

Why? Because in order to aid someone else who's experienced something traumatic, a medicine person or shaman must have digested and worked through trauma themselves. They have to go to the depths of many experiences - in many worlds - in order to help their community.

And part of the definition of a medicine person or a shaman is that they can truly assist members of their community by going into the other worlds, to battle for the health and well-being of others... and that's what we did with our friend Aaron.

Even so, even with my training, I doubt that I could have done that work by myself. I needed the help of others who'd been trained to do this, because it was a huge, life-threatening job.

The other two elders who did this with me, are also travellers; the world is their community, just as it is mine. We do our work wherever we are.

In the old days, people lived in villages, and there was usually one medicine person or shaman to a village.

Nowadays we're very blessed if we live in a community environment, and that means it's even more important to learn from a 'qualified' teacher, an experienced and real teacher who holds traditional wisdoms; no matter what your discipline is.

So, if you feel 'called' to follow the medicine or the shamanic path, you need to pray hard for a traditionally trained teacher who will initiate and guide you to discern your true connections and gifts.

Ego has no place in the sacred, and if you're looking for praise and acknowledgment, the spirits will just laugh. They do have a great sense of humour... but you may not like it.

While we may all have the 'heart of a shaman', there's a big difference between our hearts and our actions. Yes, we can feel deeply, but in order to

perform the actions of a true medicine person or shaman, we must be initiated into the secrets of traditional methods.

My prayer is that this story exemplifies some of the many mysteries of the universe and our part in it. May Aaron's and our story serve you as you explore your own trajectory more deeply.

Robin Tekwelus Youngblood, [Okanagan/Tsalagi Nations] is a minister, teacher, author, artist and shamanic practitioner. She has been a student of her heritage for many years, and has learned the sacred teachings of Indigenous elders from her own Native American peoples, along with Siberian, Polynesian and Aboriginal elders. Robyn travels the world, offering Medicine Wheel, Wheel of Relationships and Wheel of Co-Creation Workshops; as well as ceremonies such as Sweat Lodges and Vision Quests.

As a member of the Seven Generations World Wisdom Council, she helped organise multicultural Wisdom Gatherings in several countries. She was also a founding member of Grandmothers Circle the Earth, and was Travelling Ambassador between 2009-2018. She is also a board member of the Sacred Earth Council, an organisation dedicated to honouring the sacred in all beings.

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WHERE THE DANGEROUS SPIRITS WALK

William Thalbitzer

Travelling in Southeastern Greenland in the early years of the C20th, this is an extract from his writings about Inuit sacred traditions in the district of Angmagssalik, which is now called Tasiilaq, within the municipality of Sermersooq

The Angmagsaliks believe that person consists of three parts; body, soul, and *atekata* [name].

The soul is quite small - being no bigger than a finger or a hand - and lives in the person. When the soul falls ill, the person falls ill also, and when the soul dies, the person dies also.

An angakoq [shaman] or an ilisitsut [witch] can rob a person of their soul. The person then becomes dull and heavy, falls ill, and then it remains for the angakoq to find out where the soul has flown, and fetch it back to the person.

The soul may have descended to the nether world, or the tornarsuk [spirit helper] of the angakoq, who has stolen it, may have eaten it.

After a person's death, the soul comes to life again, either below the sea, or up in the sky. It is good to be in either place, but the sea is to be preferred.

The Greenlandic missionary Johannes Hansen [Hanserak], who documented his journeys among the Inuit in the C19th wrote in his diary about the Angmagsaliks' belief in the soul: 'A person has many souls. The biggest of them live in the larynx and in the man's left side, and are tiny manikins of the size of sparrows. The other souls live in all the other members of the body and are about the size of a finger-joint.

'Now, when an angakoq removes one of them, that part of the person which has lost its soul, falls ill. If another angakoq on examination finds the soul removed, and then fetches it back and replaces it, the

person becomes well again; but, if it is found impossible to get the soul back, the person dies and the soul wanders about to the dismay and terror of all around'.

The atekata [a person's name soul] is of the same size as the person, and enters the child at the moment when a finger dipped in water is passed over the child's mouth, the names of the dead ancestors being simultaneously pronounced.

Care must be taken not to offend the 'name' in any way; for then the name soul may desert the person, who is then sure to fall ill.

When a person dies, the 'name' remains with the body in the water, or earth, where it has been buried, until a child is called after it. It then enters the child and continues its existence there.

A person called Adlagdlak had, some time in the past, taken part in the dressing of his sister's dead body. He thus put upon himself a prohibition against working with iron, but despite that, he had been guilty of this piece of imprudence.

His sister's 'name', was angry, and so took away his little son's 'name', who then fell to crying violently, and was seized with severe diarrhoea.

Fortunately, the angekok, while performing, discovered the loss of the boy's 'name', and had it fetched back, just when it was close to the far-away dreaded land known as Ipertif. The boy's 'name' was cold there, and shrieked aloud, and hence it was the child fell ill.

Had the 'name' reached Ipertif, it would have frozen to death and the child would have died."

The Angmagsaliks have a decided dread of pronouncing their own name.

When asked what they were called, they invariably turned to others to answer for them, and then assented to the correctness of the answer given.

Once when I asked a mother what her little child was called, she answered that she was unable to say: the father was equally reluctant to pronounce the name, and told me that he had forgotten, but that we could get to know it from his wife's brother.

Children who are put to death¹, and still-born children, go to heaven, where they cause the northern lights.

The children take each other by the hand and dance round and round, and

swing in mazes; now they wind round each other at one end of the ring until they form a spiral, and now untwine again. They play ball with their after-births, and when they see orphans they run towards them and knock them down. They accompany the games with a shrill whistling sound.'

The first game is seen when the northern lights appear as broad streamers, or draperies, in which the single rays point to the zenith and are continually in wavy or maze-like motion.

The ball game is seen when single rays from the streamers shoot out at a great speed towards the zenith.

When single rays swiftly dart out in a horizontal direction, the children are running towards the orphans and knocking them over.

THE UNSEEN SPIRITS

The Angmagsaliks believe in spirits which surround them everywhere, but are only seen and perceived by some few initiated persons, namely the angakoq, and it is by their agency that the spirits harm or benefit human beings.

When a kayaker is at sea, he is surrounded by Inersuaks [spirits of the sea], who live under the sea, but otherwise engage in the same occupations as people.

Inersuaks are somewhat broader than people, are closely-cropped and have no noses. The angakoq - or those who are to become angakoq - are able to see them, and they relate how they visit them under the sea, where they always have plenty of meat.

The following legend is told as to their origin: *'In the beginning, the earth was quite flat, and there was no water on it; but then the earth burst, the water poured forth, and men were hurled into the cracks. All those whom this fate overtook became Inersuaks, and now people the nether regions.'*

The animals of the sea are governed by a great woman [Sedna], in whose hair seals, narwhals, and other sea-animals are found.

When the angakoq are led to her by their spirits, and they comb her hair, the sea-animals are driven to the coasts.

An angakoq from Sermiligak had once combed her hair so skilfully that there was an abundance of seals for three years.

In the sea live also Tornarsuk and his helper, Aperketek. These are animals which can be seen by others besides the angakoq.

Tornarsuk is described as being as long as a big seal, but much thicker in proportion. His head and back paws resemble those of the seal, while his forepaws are longer, being as long as a man's arm, but thicker and ending in fins. He is often described as having red arms and being red about the mouth.

Aperketek may be as much as four feet long. He is black and has nippers in his head.

Both these animals are at the service of the angakoq. They are neither good nor evil spirits, but simply obey their master.

The land is inhabited by Timerseks, Erkiliks and Ingaliliks.

Timerseks have the form of a man, but are much bigger. Their soul alone is as large as a man. They live by the chase; they hunt animals, such as reindeer, grouse, hares, and foxes, which they kill with bows, and also seals, which they catch in nets, and narwhals, which they harpoon. For the most part they are at enmity with the human race, and occasionally carry off a person or two; but they may also live on a friendly footing with men, and even exchange wives with them.

They have no kayaks; but in spring, when their provisions are beginning to give out, they go down to the sea on hunting expeditions and are then seen by the angakoq.

The Erkiliks have the form of a person above, and that of a dog below. They dwell on the inland ice. It is said that the Erkiliks and the Kavdlunaks [Europeans] have the same origin, being the descendants of a girl and a dog. We Kavdlunaks have therefore no souls, or at most dog-souls.

The Ingaliliks carry large pots in which whole seals can be boiled.

Of other beings that live on the earth, I shall only mention the Gobajaks, who are pot-bellied women with iron nails; Nevrasejots, who are hairless, naked, shrieking beings, with knives in their hands; Makakajuiks, who are hairless beings who rob men of their seals; and finally Tarajuatsiaks, shadows, who are less than men and have pointed bald heads.

The sky is also peopled with spirits. Of these I shall only mention the Sun, the Moon, Jupiter and the star Vega.

With regard to the origin of the Sun and the Moon; *'The Moon dwelt in a*

house in the country, where his sister, the Sun, also dwelt.

When the lamps were put out in the evening, the Moon went and lay with his sister, and as she wished to find out who it was lay with her night after night, she smeared her hands one evening with lamp-soot.

When he lay with her as usual, she rubbed her hands over his shoulders. Next morning when she found out that it was her brother, she took her knife, sharpened it, cut off one of her breasts and tossed it to her brother, saying: "As you seem to be so fond of me, eat me then!"

She now took a small stick, stuck some moss on one end of it, dipped it in oil, and set fire to it.

Then she ran out, and as she ran, she rose up in the air.

When the Moon came out and saw that she was up in the air, he too got moss, set fire to it, and ran out with it in pursuit of his sister.

But when he came up in the air, the moss lamp went out, leaving only some glowing embers.

Whenever the Moon's moss is about to go out, he blows on it, so that sparks fly out in all directions, and it is these that turn into stars.

The Moon does not shine so brightly, because he has only a glow, and sometimes he must go down to the earth to hunt seals; but the Sun shines brightly and gives forth warmth, for the lamp-moss was still burning, when she came up into the air.

Jupiter is regarded as being the mother of the Sun; and it is very dangerous for the angakoq to pass near it on their journey to the Moon.

Vega, who is called Nelarsik, is, like the moon, the brother of the sun. As to how it got into the sky a similar legend is told as with regard to the moon.

MAGICAL PROTECTION AMULETS

The spirits mentioned above, and many others besides, are not worshipped with any special rites, but in order to shield themselves against any harm these spirits might do, the East Greenlanders wear all kinds of different amulets, which they believe are able to protect them against sickness and danger, and to secure for them a long life. Amulets serve other purposes as well, as, for instance, to obtain the fulfilment of a wish.

As a rule, amulets worn by men are on a cord which they wear round the body, or sewn in their anorak, and worn by women in their top-knots, or sewn in the flap of their frock in front.

The choice of amulets is absolutely arbitrary, and they are worn in a variety of different ways. Old people advise the young what to pick out as their amulet, and in what fashion they are to wear it.

Thus, for instance, a man called Kutuluk had a tongue of a loon bird and his grandmother's hair band in his amulet strap, while his son Napardlugok wore a splinter of his grandmother's lamp-stool sewn in his strap.

When Napardlugok fell ill, his father hung a dried fox's head above his head. This fox was the first animal that Napardlugok had caught as a child.

Many men wear in their amulet straps a male and a female figure carved out of wood. The female figure is worn on the chest, and the male on the back, while smaller pieces of wood are placed under the arms.

When a woman becomes pregnant, special amulets are used in order that the child may be a boy, for instance, a splinter from the centre tent-pole.

People who are subject to epilepsy wear a fox's snout as an amulet. Children are sometimes given an amulet from the 'Sun's urine' - a red-coloured lichen - whereby they are said to cast a light from behind, so that the Inersuak sea spirits can see them and communicate with them, without the person needing to learn how to become angakoq.

CHARMS AND SPIRIT SONGS

Other supernatural means employed besides amulets are *sekatit* [spoken charms and chants].

Sekatit are used during sickness and famine, in order to ward off dangers. They can also be used as a defense against foes, having the power to inflict disease, injury or death upon them.

The charms are of great antiquity, and are, as a general rule, handed down from one generation to the other by sale.

They are most effective the first time they are used, and little by little lose their power; hence they must not be used, except in times of danger, or when they are transferred to another.

When the transference takes place, none but the buyer and seller may be present, and in order that they may have effect, they must be paid for immediately, and dearly paid too, if there is to be any power in them; but then they can do the possessor much benefit. The payment may consist of dart points, lance points, or other costly iron work.

As people are much reluctant to use the charms without absolute necessity, it is extremely difficult to get to hear them.

The man Kutuluk has a charm which he once used during an illness, and which helped him to recover. The same charm can be used in any danger connected with the hunting and also to ward off famine. Others can also use this charm to harm or kill other people, but, he said, he would not use it for that purpose.

Uitinak learnt a charm from a person who is now dead. He had only used it once, when he had been ill for ten days and was at death's door. Four days afterwards he recovered.

The charms are recited slowly in a low mystic tone, but the words are unintelligible. As far as my experience goes, they all begin with "zya-zya". Some of them are short, others are long.

The natives do not conceive of any spirit in connection with the charm, and are ignorant as to how they work; it is only the words themselves, they declare, which have 'power'.

The magical chants are sung, but the words used in them are intelligible, and they are more openly used than the charms.

They are used, for instance, the first time a boy gets his kayak or the first time he comes home with game.

THE ANGAKOQ SHAMANS

As has been already mentioned, the angakoq alone are able to see and to have contact with spirits.

Anyone can become an angakoq but those who are to acquire a reputation for being good must be specially adroit and cunning.

The angakoq disciples learn from elder angakoq what they must do to become angakoq themselves, or, as they put it, 'how they are to seek for that which may put them in communication with the spirit world'.

It is usual for two people to undergo training together and the first thing a disciple has to do is to go to a lonely spot - an abyss or a cave - and there, having taken a small stone, to rub it on the top of a large one in the way of the sun [clockwise].

When they have done this for three days on end, they say that a spirit comes

out from the rock. It turns its face towards the rising sun and asks what the disciple wants. The disciple then dies in the most horrible torments, partly from fear, partly from overstrain; but he comes to life again later in the day.

This is repeated for three or four years, during which time the disciple enters into communion with various spirits which enter his service.

There are spirits called Tarajuatsiaks, and the angakoq can send them wherever they wish, in order to carry out their wishes. For instance; to the Lord of a wind, to set his wind blowing, or to rob the soul from a man, or to recover a sick man's soul.

Inersuaks - spirits of the deep - can help an angakoq get the marine animals along to the coasts; and Timerseks can be set to robbing and carrying off the souls of other men.

Most angakoq also have an Amortortok as their spirit helper, which acts during the performances of the angakoq as a kind of oracle, bringing news from far distances and answering questions laid before it.

Amortortok have black arms and are dangerous to approach, when they enter the house while the incantations are being performed; because those whom it touches turn black and die. Amortortok walk with a heavy tread and roar.

All the angakoq also give accounts of the 'angakoq bear'. It is much larger than an ordinary bear, but so thin that all its ribs are visible.

The time of its acquisition is at the end of the period of probation, and takes place as follows: The bear swallows the angakoq whole; and then vomits them up again, bone by bone, until the whole skeleton has been collected. The skeleton is then clothed with flesh and comes to life again.

Every angakoq also has a Tornarsuk and an Aperketek, who act as their spirits.

Tornarsuk answers questions addressed to it, and they eat the souls which the angakoq have robbed. Aperketek acts as mediator between the angakoq and his tornarsuk; receiving questions which are put to the tornarsuk, and obtains replies from it.

During the period when the disciple is training, they must keep a strict diet, particularly they may not eat the entrails

of animals; and they may not do work in iron. Above all they must not reveal to anyone that they are undergoing discipleship.

During this period they adopt a special language, which they say they learn from the Inersuak sea spirits.

If, after having ending their period of probation, they do not proclaim themselves as a angakoq, they have no other course open to them but to become ilisitsut, witches, who are much dreaded and hated.

The period of discipleship often lasts as much as ten years.

AN ANGAKOQ IN ACTION

The actual performance of an angakoq takes place only in winter, when the people live in houses, rather than summer tents.

When an angakoq performs, they plant themselves with their feet pointing towards the house's entrance, resting on dried skins.

Their arms are bound tightly behind their back, so tightly that sores are often left on their wrists; and the head too, is often tied down between the legs.

A thong is fastened tightly round their head, enabling, it is said, the angakoq to see quite clearly, even when all the lamps have been extinguished.

They say that their whole body now becomes stiff and unconscious. The feet move convulsively and thereby set the dried skins rattling.

The drum with the drumstick is laid by the side of the angakoq, and is said to be used during the performance by the angakoq's spirit helper. The drum dances, drumming by itself, round the angakoq's head.

The drum consists of a circular wooden frame, over which the peritoneum of a bear - or large seal - is stretched, and it is provided with a handle. It is beaten by striking the rim of the wooden frame with the drumstick.

The lamps are always put out during the performance, but sometimes, they say, it is not too dark for the audience to see the drum dancing by itself round the angakoq's head. The Tartok spirit cannot be seen, but can be heard.

There is seldom more than one Tartok present at a time, and he speaks through the angakoq in a strange language to the audience.

I shall now proceed to describe a performance of this kind which took

place in the house of our neighbours, in which the angakoq Sanimuinak performed incantations.

After an hour's wait, during which the angakoq lay quite still in the dark, everything was made ready.

New, dried skins were hung in front of the house entrance, and other skins put in front of the window above the entrance, while the other windows were left uncovered.

After the floor round the entrance had been carefully swept and scrubbed, and all dirt removed from between the flag-stones, a hair-covered skin, folded double, was carefully arranged before the door hanging.

A large flat stone was placed to the right of the entrance, so that it covered the cavities between the flag-stones. The drum was laid together with the drumstick upon the flat stone.

At length Sanimuinak appeared. He had the appearance of a sleep-walker, or a visionary, and walked straight on without looking to the right or left, and sat down on the skin on the floor.

He arranged the flat stone and the drum with great nicety. His hair was bound together in a knot behind, and a rawhide cord pressed down over his forehead.

The person who had prepared a long cord now bound the angakoq's arms with it behind his back, winding it round them, right from the hands to the elbows, and tightened the cord till the hands became quite blue.

During this procedure the angakoq snorted and groaned, as if he were under the dominion of some mighty power.

When he saw that I was watching the binding of the arms with great interest, he said to me in a pitiful tone that I could see that it would be impossible for him to untie them. There upon, the lamps were extinguished, leaving the house in complete darkness.

The spirits were immediately summoned with the cries: "Goi! goi goi goi" proceeding now from one voice, now from several, now from one part of the house, now from another. All the while the angakoq kept puffing and groaning and heaving heavy sighs.

All at once the dry skin before the entrance began to rattle, as if caught by a rushing wind.

The drum now started into motion, dancing first slowly, then with ever

increasing speed, and mounted slowly up to the ceiling.

Now ensued a veritable pandemonium of noises, a rattling, a blustering, and a clattering, reminding me of a factory at work, and at another of the puffing of engines; and now seeming to proceed from a number of great winged creatures.

In the midst of this hideous din the platform and windowsill would ever shake.

At one moment it was the angakoq one heard, succumbing to a power mightier than himself, groaning, wailing, shrieking, whining, whispering; now came the sound of spirit-voices, some deep, some feeble, others lisping, or piping.

At frequent intervals a harsh, demoniacal, mocking laughter made itself heard.

The voices seemed to proceed now from above; now from under the ground, now from one end of the house, now from the other, now from outside the house, now from the doorway.

Cries of "hoi! hoi! hoi!" seemed to die away in the far distance.

The drum was manipulated with extraordinary dexterity, frequently making the round of the house, and particularly often floating above my head.

The beating of the drum was often accompanied by subdued singing, as if it proceeded from the nether world. Lovely women's voices were sometimes heard from the background.

Then with a deafening chorus of clattering, rattling and blustering noises, the drum fell to the ground with a crash, and all was still. This was the signal for the entrance of the dreaded monster, Amortortok.

As already related, it has black arms and anyone it may touch turns black and is bound to die. It walked with a heavy tread round the house and roared out, crying "a mo! a mo!" All cowered into the furthest recesses for fear that the monster might touch them. It was loud in my ears and tried to tear away from me the skin on which I sat.

After this creature there came another who cried like a fox. One of the Tartoks declared that it smelt as if a Kavdlunaks [European] was present, and made careful inquiries about me.

The host, Kutuluk, now asked me, whether I had enough for that evening, as in that case the rest could be kept for another evening, and as the performance had already lasted about an hour, and it

was stifling hot in the house, I said yes, and the Tartok was informed of my desire.

It was, however, unable to tear itself away so quickly; its retreat was slow but by no means so noisy as its entrance.

After some time had elapsed, some one asked whether they might not light the lamps, whereupon Sanimuinak answered in his own natural voice that his Tartok was still present.

The person who had spoken had presumed that 'it had gone; for the sound of the drum was no longer heard', but Sanimuinak replied 'that there must have been someone who had touched the drum, as the Tartok would no longer beat it'. Presently, however, the drum started afresh, and the retreat took place amid the rattle of skins and lingering song.

The lamps were lit, and all were sitting where they had occupied before the performance commenced. The angakoq, bathed in perspiration, was sitting in the same place as at the beginning. His hands were tied behind his back in the same way, but not nearly so well as before.

The first thing we heard about the angakoq at Angmagsalik was that they were great liars; and indeed many people make fun of them and their doings. But in spite of that, even the most sensible people believe in their communion with the spirit world. The people believe in them out of dread, for the harm they may be able to do with their arts.

THE SICKNESS OF THE SOUL

The natives seek the angakoq's assistance in all kinds of sicknesses. Their function, however, is not that of a doctor, — as they do not know a single medicine, nor can prescribe a single remedy, much less perform operations. No, their business is to examine the sick person's 'soul'.

They maintain that all sicknesses can be traced to some harm which has happened to the soul, or to the sick person's soul having been robbed by an ilisitsut witch or angakoq, or having been lost in some other way. It is therefore the angakoq's business to see where it has gone, and to get it back again.

The angakoq's Tartok informs them what is the cause of the person's sickness, whether any harm has

happened to the soul, or whether it has been stolen.

The angakoq must then take their Tartok with them and go on a journey to the nether world, or the horizon, to fetch the soul back again.

But sometimes the angakoq merely dispatches one of their Tartoks to fetch it back, and in that case several days may elapse before the Tartok can return.

If any serious harm has happened to the soul, if perhaps it has been eaten by the tornarsuk spirit of a hostile angekok, the person is bound to die.

Johannes Hansen writes in his diary: *'They bind the angakoq's hand and foot, just as if he were going to perform his arts, and then they bend him double by binding him tight from neck to knees.*

As this causes him a great deal of pain, he is unable to rise up by himself, and, therefore, so they say, his drum sets itself in motion, goes and lifts him up in the air by the head, thus enabling him to sit up, and then lifting him in a similar manner by his back, enables him to stand on his legs.

Then the angakoq walks round the floor, though with no small trouble, and at last he succeeds in getting a start, flies round the house, and finally alights on the end of the drying-frame under the roof.

He then sets off flying once more, and finally passes clean through the roof or the wall out into the air; his drum, which is all that is left of him, sets up an everlasting dance on its own account.

The angakoq, bound as described, flies out quite naked into the cold night air, and is soon far away.

His companions sit in pitch darkness awaiting his return, which sometimes does not take place before dawn; his drum is still dancing away.

When the air-voyager returns, he relates, either that he has been up in heaven, or to remote quarters of the earth or up to the sun or moon.

Nowadays, they said, there are no angakoq who can make air-voyages, as none of them has had a chance of watching this done by another, and without that they are unable to make such voyages themselves.'

Under the category of sicknesses come also cases in which a person is incapable of hunting seals, or a wife is unable to bear children.

In the latter case, the angakoq, supposing must make a journey to the Moon, and then a child is thrown down

to the wife, who afterwards becomes pregnant. After having performed this journey, the male angakoq has the right of sleeping with the wife.

When an angakoq has performed their healing, an indispensable condition for the success of the cure is that it will be paid for. It is the Tartok, however, and not the angakoq that is paid for its trouble. The angakoq merely arrange about the presents. The payment is, of course, dependant on the circumstances of the sick person.

There was only one person at the time who was universally regarded as a really great angakoq, namely Avgo of Sermiligak, but, they said, he is now so old that he is no good any longer. When his Tartok appeared, the whole house began to shake. He could fly to the Moon and fetch children, and he had robbed a great number of people of their souls.

It is related that once during a performance he was seized by a bear, who dragged him down to the shore, where a walrus fastened its teeth in him, dragged him out to the horizon, and devoured him there. The skeleton returned, and met on its way the pieces of flesh, which little by little grew up around it, and finally the eyes, so that the person returned whole.

This person is the only now surviving angakoq who has been able to perform such difficult arts.

Wise old folks shake their heads over the present-day angakoq and say they are no good, but can relate marvellous tales of the wondrous skill of the angakoq in times gone by, as, for instance, that they could recover, after having cut their own throats, by just passing their hand over the gash.

A FEAR OF WITCHES

Whereas the angakoq commune with the spirit world in the presence of others, and as a general rule help rather than harm their fellows, the ilisitsut witches commune with the spirit world in secret, and only in order to harm their enemies, or society.

Whereas the angakoq say that they train themselves for their calling by the process of continually rubbing a stone and thus summoning the spirits; the ilisitsut must serve a term of discipleship under an elder ilisitsut. They must be alone during their novitiate and they must pay heavily for their training.

As mentioned before, when an angakoq novice has trained for ten years, and has not proclaimed himself an angakoq, he has no other course but to become an ilisitsut.

The most important art of the ilisitsut is to create tupilaks which will kill the people against whom they are sent. They are made from different animals, such as bears, foxes, ptarmigan, and seals. The tupilak must also contain a piece of the anorak, or something else of the person against whom it is to be sent. It is then animated by chanting a magic charm over it.

In order that the tupilak may grow, the ilisitsut makes it suckle its self between their legs.

Before doing this the ilisitsut turns their anorak, so that the back of it is in front; then they draw up the anorak's hood before their face. The ilisitsut then sits on a heap of stones close to where a river discharges itself into the sea and makes the tupilak suckle.

When the tupilak has grown big, it glides down into the water and disappears. It is to bring death or misfortune to the person for whom it is destined. If it fails in this object, it turns against its maker.

Women can become ilisitsut and make tupilak as well as men.

It is the angakoq's business to detect and catch these tupilak. They may either be eaten by the angakoq's Tornarsuk, or if the angakoq has a Tartok, they may be caught by it.

When people hear a tupilak enter the doorway during the angakoq performance, and walk to and fro, they are terrified; for if it happens to touch anyone, that person is bound to die. The angakoq usually stabs it to death, and the next morning, people can see the stain of blood on the spot where the tupilak was killed.

There are many other ways in which a ilisitsut harms people, for instance, by making snares from dead men's sinews, fastening it around a knee-cap, and sticking a small human rib on either side of the knee-cap. In this case the ilisitsut does not even need to see the subject of his wrath; he has only to name his name and pull the snare, and the person will die.

One ilisitsut - called Pitiga - took the gall bladder of a dead person and threw it on the spot where a girl had made

water, as a punishment for her refusal to lie with him. The girl died a short time after.

When an ilisitsut can do nothing else to an enemy, they take a lump of blubber and go with it to an ancient grave in which there is a lamp. When they have set the blubber burning in this lamp, the person will no longer be able to hunt.

The ilisitsut have a large and miscellaneous assortment of magic arts; but they know, however, of a few expedients, by which they may be able to bring about the death of their enemies. One of these is the use of the flesh of corpses; and it is by no means improbable that the Angmagsaliks' custom of casting their dead into the sea is so that the flesh of corpses might not be put to evil uses.

There is nothing to prevent a person being both an ilisitsut and an angakoq at the same time.

If a person has a high fever accompanied by headache, the angakoq says that there is a danger of them going mad, and in order to avoid this fate the sick person must confess that they are an ilisitsut, and as such saddle themselves with crimes, such as robbing souls, or killing people by supernatural means.

If the sick person fails to make such a confession, they may easily become deranged, or go mad. When the sick person has confessed that they are an ilisitsut they lose the power of acting as such in the future.

An ilisitsut runs a serious risk of 'going mad in this way', and in this case, someone showing these signs, is bound and gagged, with their hands and feet stretched out. They get neither food nor drink, and sometimes heavy stones are laid on their chest and they are left in this position till they die.

The sufferer's torments are often shortened by being cast into the sea immediately after being bound.

The only way in which the patient can escape this treatment, is for them to confess and name all the crimes - real or imaginary - which they have on their conscience. But if they are an angakoq as well, there is nothing to prevent them going on with that profession.

The most skilful hunter on the Angmagsalik fjord, Perkitigsak, who had gone through the angakoq training,

without openly proclaiming himself as an angakoq, was the sworn enemy of the angakoq.

He was afflicted with a boil on his back and afterwards caught fever. When the fever got worse he was declared in danger of going mad. He then had to confess that he was an ilisitsut and tell about his having sent out four tupilaks, who had managed together to kill a score of persons, some of whom were members of his own family.

The last tupilak he made was when he was just about to harpoon a walrus, but someone else caught it. In his anger, he made a tupilak and made it grow in the usual way, after which he sent it forth to kill the person who had taken the walrus from him.

One day after this he saw a walrus, and was just about to harpoon it, when he discovered that it was the tupilak he had made. It made for the shore and went on land, where it turned into a human being. Some time after, it killed the person against whom it was sent.

Perkitigsak had moreover collected lichens on stones, bewitched them, and mixed them in the food which his nephew and foster-son were to eat. The boy became emaciated and subsequently died.

This is an edited extract from 'The Ammassalik Eskimo: Contributions to the ethnology of the East Greenland Natives' by William Thalbitzer, Volume One. Published in 1914.

William Thalbitzer (1873–1958) was a Danish philologist and anthropologist known for his foundational work in documenting and also analysing the languages, ethnography, folklore, and music of Inuit communities in Greenland.

NOTES:

1: During periods of extreme hardship and famine, when a community was in danger of dying out due to lack of resources, the Greenlandic Inuit - like many groups around the world - historically practiced infanticide, leaving children outside to die in the cold, or at times killing them quicker. This was done in order for the community to stand a greater chance of survival.

SOUL LOSS AND RETRIEVAL

The first of a series
of articles about
the soul, soul loss
and soul retrieval

Nicholas Breeze Wood

One of the mainstays within the rise of shamanism in the West, is the practice of soul retrieval.

Right from the earliest days, from the first introduction of Michael Harner's Core Shamanism, soul retrieval gained popularity due to people's need, and also due to the method's effectiveness.

Nowadays, despite the dilution of many of the original - fairly grounded - teachings of Core Shamanism, due to the addition of a multitude of different New Age practices, soul retrieval is still a major component of shamanic practice for many people; and clients - who nowadays are often more aware of it - come to shamanic practitioners in search of it.

Soul retrieval is a worldwide practice, found in some form in every Indigenous culture, but most of those methods of soul retrieval are totally different from the Core method originated by Harner and his associates in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In this series of articles, I will look at the way the soul is seen in different cultures, the Core Shamanic method generally taught in the West, and some of the ways Traditional shamanism and animism deal with soul retrieval.

In the articles I will also give some solid ethical and safe-guarding guidelines about soul retrieval practices.

WHAT IS IN A NAME

But first, we need to try to define what a soul actually is, and why - and how - we might lose it; and that's a pretty big subject in itself.

Every culture on earth has different ideas of the nature of the soul. If you have read the article about Greenlandic shamanism in this issue of Sacred Hoop, you will have seen a few of them already.

In the West we have a strong legacy of Judio-Christian ideas regarding the

soul; namely we have one soul, and when we die it will come out of the body and go either to Heaven or Hell.

Or perhaps - as has gained more traction recently with the introduction of other spiritualities to the culture - the soul will be reincarnated, or perhaps, alternatively wander the earth as a ghost.

But then again, perhaps - as some people believe - we don't have a soul at all, and merely have brains, with electrical 'stuff' going on inside them that creates consciousness, and when we die all the lights go out... End of...

But, the ancient traditions of the world all have very different, and generally far more complex understandings about the soul and its nature, and about how, and why, we lose it, and - importantly - what to do about it when we do.

THE SOUL AROUND THE WORLD

So, there are as many different views about the nature of the soul as there are indigenous cultures; and sometimes within a culture there will be several different perspectives. Therefore, it's impossible to give a complete picture of everything 'soul'; but here are just a few examples to 'set the scene', so to speak.

Among the peoples of Northern Asia - which includes Mongolia, Northern China and Southern and Northern Siberia - every cultural group will have a different perspective.

The Evenk peoples of Siberia, say we have multiple souls, such as the 'breath-soul,' equated with life and respiration; the 'shadow-soul,' linked to personal identity and individuality; and others.

The Nganasan people of Northern Siberia also recognise multiple soul parts, and say different parts come into people at various stages of their life, so only an adult is full ensouled.

In Mongolia it is generally said a person has three souls, the *süld*, the *süns* and the *ami*.

The *süld* can be thought of as the vital power, or life-force soul. It gives strength, courage, authority, and spiritual presence, and is strongly connected to ancestry and destiny. A lost or weakened *süld* leads to exhaustion, loss of will, or collapse of purpose.

The *süns* can be thought of as consciousness; it is the part of a person that thinks and dreams. In shamanism, it is the soul part that travels in trance. It can leave the body due to shock, illness,

or fright. It is generally the focus of soul retrieval work.

The *ami* animates the body and sustains physical life. When the *ami* departs, death occurs.

After death, each soul part has a different fate. The *süns* is reincarnated, the *süld* also reincarnates but differently to the *süns*, as it goes to a decedent, or to the spirit of a lineage, or becomes a shamanic ancestral spirit, or the spirit of a sacred location in nature; and the *ami* dissolves into nature pure and simple.

A person is a combination of all three, but those three will never be in the same body again.

Tibetan traditions blend Buddhism with much older Central Asian shamanic concepts.

The *bla* is the vital life-essence which anchors vitality, presence, and coherence in the body. We could perhaps think of it as the glue which sticks all the different bits of a person together. It can be shocked out of someone, or stolen, or be pushed out due to spiritual intrusion.

In Tibetan shamanism when the spirits possess a shaman, the shaman's *la* goes out of them and the spirit's *la* comes into their body.

The *sem* is consciousness, a person's thoughts, feelings and general perception - our on-going stream of awareness. The *sem* is - in some ways - more like the Western soul, as it is said to enter the *bardos* - the gap between lives - after death, and eventually become reincarnated into another body.

The *rlung* is the animating energy of a person. It carries the *sem* through the body inside the *tsa* [the subtle energy channels]. When *rlung* is disturbed, mental and emotional imbalance occurs.

The force known as *lungta* - which means 'wind-horse' - is the fortune energy of a person. High windhorse means a person is lucky and confident, and will have, success in worldly life. When *lungta* is damaged, obstacles, depression, and a loss of vitality occur.

The *bag* is the 'karmic baggage' or habitual tendencies we carry from life to life, left in our consciousness by our past actions and experiences. The *bag* shape a person's character, their reactions and life patterns, all carried by the *sems* across our different lifetimes.

If we cross over to the Americas, again the concepts held between different indigenous nations are many and varied.

For example, the Lakota consider a person to have a *niya*, a *nagí*, a *šičų* and a *nagila*.

The niya is the breath, given at birth by Skan [the sky]. It ceases upon death and returns to the spirit world.

The nagí is a person's 'ghost' which embodies personality, and consciousness. It survives death and travels along the Milky Way to be judged by an old woman called Hihankara, after which it may join the ancestors.

The šičq is a person's embodied spirit guide; a non-human power, or guardian spirit given to a person and closely related to a person's thoughts and intelligence. After death, it returns to where it came from.

The nagila is a person's shadow, often described as a 'tiny shadow' or the 'little spirit' within. It represents the essential form of a person.

The Hopi have the *hikwsi*, which is the breath and body soul, the animating force that provides the body with thoughts, feelings, desires, and intentions.

They say people also have a *katsina*, which is their spirit. After death a person is said to become one of the *katsinam* - the collective group of katsina - joining the rain-bringing spirits and ancestors in the afterlife, to become a supernatural being.

A person also has an *unangwa*, which is the Hopi word for heart. It is a person's centre, their emotions and character, the seat of wisdom. It is intimately connected to the concept of living the 'Hopi Way' in harmony, balance, and goodness.

In many Polynesian cultures, we have the *mauri*, which is the life spark, the vital essence, and the *wairua*, which is a person's spirit, the aspect that survives death and connects with ancestors.

A person also has a degree of *mana*, which can be thought of as personal power or authority. Physical places also have this.

Illness and disharmony weaken the *mauri* and *wairua*, and healing involves restoring a person's spiritual integrity within their web of belonging to kin, the land, and the cosmos.

As with all other cultural groups across the world, Africa has a vast number of different soul models. For example, in West African Yoruba cosmology a person has an *ori*, which is a person's spiritual intuition and personal destiny; *emi*, which is breath or life force; *èèmi*, which is a person's vital spirit amongst other aspects.

Far back in time - but still an interesting soul theory - is the Ancient Egyptian model. They had the *ka*, which is the life force that animates a body; the *ba*, which is the personality; the *akh*, which is the spirit of a person after their death; the *ren*, which is the name soul - not that dissimilar to the Greenlandic name soul in some ways - and the *sheut*, which is a sort of shadow or spiritual double.

And while we are looking into the past, don't forget that before Christianity, Europeans too had a wide range of ideas about the soul.

An example of these comes from pre-Roman Brythonic Britain, where the *anima* life soul; *geis* sacred personal qualities and destiny, and a shadow part - one name for which was the *siabhra* - which lingered after death.

So you can see, just using the term 'soul' is fraught with possible misunderstandings and confusions.

And of course, none of these models are correct [and yet none of them are wrong either]. They are all simply working models - maps if you will - which aim to describe the landscape of human consciousness and animated existence. They try to give a human-sized understanding to something beyond the human ability to understand; namely, the mystery of life and existence.

When I talk about a soul part - in terms of a bit fetched back in a soul retrieval - I tend to think of 'packages of personal energy', splinters of personality, luck, life-force, vitality, va-va-voom; something which has splintered off from a person, leaving them 'de-spirited' in some way. Every case being a bit different.

THE LOSS OF THE SOUL

When a person becomes soul lost, they lose their 'spark'. They may get physically or psychologically ill - and of course, that can be a case of 'chicken or egg', as which came first, the illness or the soul loss?

They will likely feel depressed and lethargic, they may not sleep well, may have bad memory, and may feel dazed and distracted a lot of the time, and probably physically clumsy too; in short their 'get up and go' has 'got up and gone'; and they totally lack all luster.

Generally in Western Core Shamanism it is taught that the soul - or soul parts

to be more accurate - are lost due to a variety of reasons. Of course the actual root causes may be many and varied, but in essence they can generally be boiled down to a few things.

I would add however, that not everyone has the same degree of hold on their soul parts to start with; as some people - due to whatever reason - become 'de-spirited' far easier than other people. Some people are robust, built like 'brick out-houses', while others can barely keep body and soul together.

Trying to understand this difference between people is complex. Personally I would say it was to do with our karmic influences, all of which influence our pre-birth womb experiences, our early childhood experiences and many other factors. We all get the perfect life experience 'we need' for our karma to come to fruit.

Indigenous understandings of soul loss have a similar list of possible causes for the problem; so let's look at the list, both Western and Indigenous.

In many ways the lists overlap: a sudden shock or fright, ongoing trauma or physical violence; serious or prolonged illness, and grief or intense emotional pain.

But indigenous cultures tend to add a few more to the list too, such as; spirit intrusion or soul theft; the violation of cultural taboos, and a loss of connection to the land, the ancestors, or the community.

With regards to soul theft, again referring to the article about Greenland, you will have read that such practices were common in that culture, the soul being stolen, and often eaten by a shaman's spirit helpers, causing illness and the death of the soul-lost person.

This idea of a soul being stolen - or driven out of a person by the inclusion of an invading energy - is very common worldwide. Sometimes the loss happens because a shaman sends a force of some kind to 'shock' the soul part out of someone, where it is then either stolen by the 'dark magician', or driven off into the wilderness. This results in the regular soul loss symptoms for the person.

Or the 'dark magician' may shoot magical darts into a person - bolts of dark energy - which drive out the soul. These darts might be shot in conjunction with sending a spirit to possess the, now weakened, person.

We are getting into deep soul mechanics here, because anyone with soul loss is more likely to be prey to wandering spirits who will overshadow them to some degree; nature abhors a vacuum, so if we are an empty vessel, and something is looking for a home, we might get a squatter.

I would however like to reassure the reader, soul theft by 'dark magicians' is *extremely* rare in the West, because the levels of magical ability here are generally very low; such practices tend only to happen within indigenous cultures, those who have powerful, deeply ingrained traditional magical practices, the sort the West generally lacks.

Soul theft by external spirits, especially land spirits, however can happen in the West. These don't need 'dark magicians', they are just a natural part of life on Grandmother Earth.

Every culture will recognise sacred places; places where humans don't go, because they are powerful places, and the spirits of those places are either unhealthy for people to be around, or just plain hostile to humans.

In the West we tend not to culturally recognise or acknowledge those places, so we blunder into them and build our houses on them, and that can upset the natives. So, a location can cause us to lose soul energy, some places can drain us.

Different indigenous cultures will also have spirit beings they identify, who live in certain places, and will describe how these spirits capture a soul and take it away. Some of these spirits are considered very dangerous, others less so, but all harm, even if the harm might take a while to manifest.

And don't forget we can give our soul parts away ourselves too due to our actions.

If we are abusive to ourselves in some way; perhaps through drug use, life styles, or things like a string of meaningless sexual encounters - as well as a host of other things - we loosen our connection to our vital energy, and our soul forces leache away.

We can also give away our soul in more dramatic ways too, like a young lady who was so grief struck by the loss of her father that she put her photo in her father's coffin.... 'Please daddy, take me with with you!'

And where does the soul part go? Again, there is no one answer to this question, cultural worldviews vary, but wherever a soul part goes, shamans and

animistic medicine people will work to call it back, and that is the focus of the next part of this article.

Nicholas Breeze Wood is the editor of Sacred Hoop Magazine

ÍCAROS: SOUL SONG AS MEDICINE

Why Healing Requires the Return of Your Voice

Itzhak Beery

High in the Ecuadorian Andes, on the slopes of Imbabura - the mighty volcanic mountain - in a modest healing room built within a field of corn and medicinal plants, with an unpolished cement floor and walls lined with old framed photographs of ancestors and visitors, I once sat, on a worn wooden bench, before the *yachak* - Kichwa master of ancient knowledge - Don José Joaquín Dias Pineda.

Wearing a feathered crown, he began *la limpia*, the traditional ritual of purification and protection. The dense air carried the scent of crushed herbs, a trace of smoke, and trago - a potent sugarcane rum.

After examining the diagnostic candle, he blew a mixture of alcohol and Agua Florida - a traditional floral water used for spiritual cleansing - over the body of one of my friends, who stood in the middle of the room.

Don José's hands moved with deliberate rhythm, brushing bundles of fresh, healing plants across my friend's bare skin, from top to bottom, then continuing with eggs, stones, and bells.

And as he did so Don José sang. "*Mouri meja... Hjawa cotita... Imbabura, Cotachi Mujanda, San Juan Pogio...*" an ancient Kichwa chant, passed down through five generations of his lineage.

THE SONG AS THE CEREMONY

Don José's raspy voice rose and rose like a divine wind crossing the high mountain ridges. It was steady, hypnotic, deeply ancestral. While I did not understand the language, the syllables needed no translation. They carried the weight of primordial memory, and penetrated my heart.

At times, I felt myself drifting into light-sleep visions, as if daydreaming into another realm.

At first, I wondered why the chant continued without pause, yet as the

techniques unfolded - the brushing with plants, the bursts of breath, the rolling of eggs to pull out heavy energy, the clicking of stones - it was the singing that anchored me.

When it was my turn to be treated, his voice wrapped around my body like a colorful llama's woven poncho. The rhythm entered my breath. My breath flowed into my spine.

Then, something unexpected opened; the room expanded beyond its cement walls as a current rose from my belly to my crown. My heart exploded.

It was not imagination, it was a swift ascent. Large wings unfurled along my back, and I rose toward the apus, the great mountain spirits who guard the Andes. I was no longer observing the eagle.... I was the eagle.

I dove at great speed into a sacred lake, and rose toward Taita Inti, Father Sun. Drops of light surrounded me; intelligent, multicolored, sparkling like diamonds. I swear, Don Jose's chant was the wind beneath my wings, carrying me.

When awareness settled back into my body, as the ceremony came to an end, I sat on the old wooden bench, leaned against the cold wall, and understood. The chant was not accompanying the ceremony, the chant was the engine of the ceremony.

THE SILENCED VOICE

In shamanic traditions, every human being is born with a unique vibration; a soul signature, expressed through sound.

This living medicine is called an *ícaro* by many traditions in Ecuador and other places in South America. Yet many of us in the West have been gently, and sometimes lovingly, silenced.

As children, we are often corrected with phrases like: *'You're off-key'*, or *'You sound like a frog'*; even *'Be quiet'*.

Often, these words come from those who wish to protect us from judgment. But when we experience this, something closes; the spontaneous river of light that flows through a child's body is interrupted.

Instead of free expression, we learn performance; instead of resonance, we learn restraint. We learn to whisper and swallow our emotions. Over time, the silencing of the voice becomes the silencing of instinct. When we stop singing, the soul contracts. When we begin again, it reawakens. Expanded.

LINEAGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

The sacred art of *ícaros* lives on through wisdom keepers such as the late Don Sabino Gualinga, a Kichwa elder who lived to be more than 100, and Don Basilio Payaguaje, a Siekopai elder of the Aguarico River in Ecuador.

Ícaros are never written down or fixed; they move and change like the weather itself.

They are spiritual technologies for connecting with the hidden entities of the spirit world - our relatives - cultivated through deep listening to nature: the jaguars, anacondas, tapirs, hummingbirds, and celestial bodies.

To carry an *ícaro* is to bear a profound responsibility for the well-being of the spirits, the community, and the land.

I once asked Don José to teach me his medicine song, hoping to feel his presence and support during my healing work. He looked at me in frank surprise. *"No,"* he said. *"This one is mine. You must find your own song. Each one is unique, personal. Go find your own."*

Many years ago, when a new building was rising in front of my office, I began to hear a melody.

At first, I assumed it was just the sound of the excavators digging the foundation, yet that same beautiful tune returned, day and night, until I could no longer dismiss it as noise. I knew I lacked the talent to compose music, so its persistence left me mystified.

After a few weeks, I accepted it wasn't a coincidence. I began singing the melody out loud and recorded it on my phone. Its repetitive structure etched itself into my mind and refused to let me rest, drawing me into a meditative, almost trance-like state. As I added words, I wondered where they came from; spirit, or some deep memory?

ENTERING SACRED DIALOGUE

An *ícaro* is not merely vibration; it is a relationship. In the Andean world, a *huaca* is a sacred presence embodied in physical form; a stone, a mountain, a spring, or an animal guide. A *huaca* is not symbolic; it is alive.

When we sing, we hold the image of the *huaca* in our inner vision. We are not performing; you are conversing.

This relational exchange - this *ayni*, or sacred reciprocity - is what gives the

ícaro its power. The healer does not create the medicine alone; they participate in a living conversation with the cosmos. Without this dialogue, chanting is only an empty sound. With it, it becomes communion.

THE BODY REMEMBERS

Singing is a holistic gift to our being. It begins with a deep breath that lifts our posture and flows through our vocal cords. As our voice resonates through our throat and nasal passages, our entire body joins in.

While we sing, our nervous system shifts and calms. Our rib cage vibrates, and our skull resonates in a deep, internal massage. Also, our brain lights up on both sides, moving between melody and meaning, releasing endorphins and dopamine.

Extended repetition of our soul song quiets the analytical gatekeeper - that part of the brain ruled by ego and fear. When that gatekeeper steps aside, intuition rises.

In therapeutic language, we call this 'regulation,' and in an indigenous language, we might say: 'the soul has returned.'

FINDING YOUR SOUL SONG

To find our song, we must first find the breath. This practice clears the path for the soul to return through the voice.

- The Lower Breath [Uku Pacha]: Sit with a straight spine. Place your hands on your low belly. Inhale slowly through your nose, sending the breath deep into the bowl of your pelvis.
- The Middle Breath [Kay Pacha]: Continue the inhale into your rib cage, and feel your ribs expand outward, like the wings of a condor.
- The Upper Breath [Hanan Pacha]: Draw the final sip of air into your collarbones and the base of your throat. Hold for a count of three.
- The Release: Exhale through a slightly parted mouth with a soft, audible *'Haaaa'* sound.
- The Humming: On the next exhale, create a low hum - *Mmmm*. Feel the vibration in your teeth and lips.

You can also call in the four directions by their names, or by invoking Taita Inti [Father Sun], Mama Killa [Grandmother Moon], Pachamama [Mother Earth], and Viracocha [the Great Mystery].

CALLING OUR HUACA

Now, turn your attention inward and call upon your huaca - your sacred spirit guide.

See the huaca clearly in your mind's eye, and once the image is vivid, ask the huaca for your soul song, or ícaro.

As a sound begins to stir, sing it aloud with intention, devotion, and conviction. Let the song become a conversation: offer gratitude, and ask for assistance for others and for yourself.

THE COURAGE TO SING

Healing, in its deepest sense, is not repair; it is resonance.

When trauma strikes, fear and shame freeze the body, and our original rhythm recedes. Until that vibration is recalled, something essential remains missing. Without the voice, the spirit cannot fully inhabit the body.

Your soul song does not require perfection. Medicine results from the presence; the trembling voice and the cracked tone often carry the deepest emotional truth.

Do not hide behind recorded flutes or new-age melodies. Your clients do not need atmospheric music, they need 'you,' they need your breath, your vibration, and your courage. You do not need to be flawless. You need to be alive.

Healing is not the performance of wholeness; it is the courageous embodiment of it.

Itzhak Beery is an internationally known shamanic teacher, healer, speaker, community activist, and the author of three Amazon bestseller books. Since 1995, he has bridged the spiritual and practical wisdom his indigenous and Western teachers entrusted in him. He is the founder of ShamanPortal.org, The Andes Summit, and co-founder of the New York Shamanic Circle. He is on major global spiritual centres' faculties. Itzhak received the 'Ambassador for Peace Award' from The Universal Peace Federation and the UN.
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REVIEWS

ESSAM

Imarhan
44 mins. City Slang Records
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

If you are a regular reader of Hoop's music review pages - or perhaps my Facebook page - you will know of my love of Desert Blues, the fusion of traditional Tuareg music, rock and blues that comes out of the Sahara Desert, so this, the fourth album by this group based in Tamanrasset, southern Algeria.

Desert Blues has changed over the twenty five years or so I have been listening it, it has brought in other elements, some of it has gone more acoustic, some heavier and darker, such as the quite astonishing album Chàtma by Tamikrest, which is one of my favourite albums. This new album by Imarhan has all the charm and - dare I say - mystery of previous albums, but also has a slightly more experimental feel to some of the tracks; albeit perfectly in keeping with the music.

If you have had your head buried in a Martian sanddune for decades and haven't yet experienced Desert Blues, this is an excellent place to start, delicious.... I wonder what Martian Desert Blues would sound like?

*Available as Download, CD and via Streaming
On Youtube
Four feathers*

HUMAN HERDS

UUHAI
47 mins. Napalm Records.
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Hi-voltage Mongolian folk-metal rock, with the sort of traditional Mongolian musical themes that the Hu brought to Western audiences so well, a few years ago. If you like the Hu or some of those - somewhat plastic and fake in my opinion - shamanic pagan groups, such as Heilung and Wardruna, you will like this I'm quite sure.

The album is full of throat singing, horse-head fiddles and heavy guitar chords, complete with themes about Mongolian history and culture - but sung in Mongolian of course. Probably not for relaxing late night listening, or as an aid to help get your young children to sleep.

*Available as Download, CD and via Streaming
On Youtube
Three and a half feathers*

CLARITY OVER COMPASSION

Native American Music Consort
40 mins. Matrix / Runout Records
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Ambient soundscapes, very much music for dreaming and floating too - and yes you could use it to help young children get to sleep, no guitar riffs to be heard.

I have no idea of any of the Native American nations the musicians of this group belong to, and the music is not at all traditional, but I presume it is made up of indigenous musicians, or the group would get crucified because of its name.

If you like wafty, rather generic, new age-style music you will I am sure enjoy it. I have heard better, but if you run a new age crystal shop it would probably make ideal background muzak.

*Available as Download, CD and via Streaming
On Youtube
Two and a half feathers*

SEVEN GENERATIONS

Brian Ernst
39 mins. Brian Ernst Music
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Powerful album by an independent Native American singer-songwriter, a member of the Lenape [Delaware] nation. Songs of community, resistance, the sacred, about Standing Rock and more, with great lyrics, you will want to listen carefully.

The music is catchy soft rock with an occasional slight rap feel to the delivery of his well sung words. Skillful, creative musicianship throughout, he uses looping technology to build grooves and this gives a gentle mesmeric feel to the music.

He is a new artist for me, although this is just one of a score of albums he has produced over the years. He's good but not greatly known, it would be nice if people discovered his music as I have, and if you do, I don't think you will regret it.. very good.

*Available as Download, CD and via Streaming
On Youtube
Four and a half feathers - Album of the Issue*

ABER KHAN

NYTT LAND
40 mins. Prophecy Productions
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Dark ambient Siberian and Norse influenced music by a Russian husband and wife Anatoly and Natalya Pakhalenko. The group formed in 2013 in Western Siberia, Russia and their music is heavily inspired by Old Norse mythology - they often sing in Old Icelandic - and Native Siberian heritage, sometimes singing in indigenous languages such as Khanty.

The music is filled with traditional instruments and is probably best listened to by using headphones, as it's a very evocative, very immersive mix.

Haunting and powerful, it's a deep and rather juicy dive into dark, spirit inhabited forests; play it in a dark room, but you might want to clutch a protection bundle while you do.

*Available as Download, CD and via Streaming
On Youtube
Four feathers*

THE ATLAS OF DEADLY PLANTS: Botanical Tales of the World's Most Intoxicating, Poisonous and Dangerous Specimens

Jane Perrone
Greenfinch Books
HB: 256 pages £19.99/\$30.99
ISBN: 978 529442502
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

Come on, be honest, who doesn't like to read about dangerous and poisonous plants? They are the stuff of true-crime podcasts, murder novels and tall-tales the world over.

This is a really lovely and deeply dip-in-able book, all about the subject, with lots of scientific depth - which won't bore you - along with wonderful illustrations, and a sensitive approach to spirituality; as many of these plants are considered to be sacred plants by indigenous peoples across the world.

The book wanders through the world of plants that - if you'll forgive the slightly mixed metaphor - have a sting in the tail. Some are just downright lethal, such as curare, extracted from a vine and used to tip arrows... its strength is classified by how big an animal it will kill, and how quickly it will take to drop it in its tracks.

Other plants are the ones more know to those of us who study sacred traditions; such as peyote, San Pedro, Jimson weed, Angel trumpet and many, many more, including of course the plants used to prepare Ayahuasca.

Some are used for medicine of course, and the author explains how, very often the same plant can both kill or cure, depending on how it's used. There is also some good advice about which leaves it's best not to wipe your bottom with too.

I found the book really interesting and fun, full of juicy factoids which held my interest long into the night, and also I found the author's approach to - and understanding of - the sacred aspects of them very grounded; for example her views on the evils of Ayahuasca tourism

that has both cultural and ecological negative effects.

Highly recommended and enjoyable.

Available from: Amazon etc.

JHANKRI TALES: Folk Tales and Beliefs of Nepal and its Shamans

Bhola Nath Bantola
BanstolaKul Books
PB: 178 pages £14.95/\$20.00
ISBN: 979 8 26179 694 7
Reviewer: Luc Delafay

Jhankri Tales by Bhola Nath Banstola is a vivid and heartfelt collection of Nepali folk stories drawn from living oral traditions. Rooted in the villages, forests, and mountains of Nepal, these tales weave together myth, memory, and spiritual experience. Shamans (Dhami-Jhankris), ascetics, spirits, witches, and ordinary villagers inhabit narratives, where the invisible world is never far from daily life.

More than simple folklore, the stories preserve a worldview in which moral integrity, courage, devotion, and respect for unseen forces shape human destiny. The tone remains authentic and culturally grounded, retaining key Nepali terms to honour their original depth of meaning. At once entertaining and instructive, the collection illuminates the ethical and spiritual fabric of Himalayan culture.

Accessible to general readers, yet rich in anthropological and spiritual insight, Jhankri Tales stands as both a tribute to ancestral storytelling and a bridge between traditional Nepal and the modern world.

Available from Amazon.

MONGOLIAN DEITIES: Divine Powers

Samuel Shepherd
Pastor Publishing Ltd
PB: 202 pages. £42.00/\$19.95
Audio Book: 4 hours 48 minutes. Free
ISBN: 978 1839389269
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

I have recently come across the audiobook feature on Spotify, and - as I greatly enjoy audiobooks - I was browsing to see what there was with a shamanistic or animistic flavour. In my explorations, I found David Shi's absolutely excellent book 'Spirit Voices', which if you haven't read or listened to, you should; and I found this curious work too.

It's a bit general, a bit basic, but worth a listen, especially if you are totally new to Mongolian cosmology and the animism behind shamanism. You are not going to learn much about the practice of shamanism in Mongolia from the book

[unlike David Shi's], but you will get a fairly good general overview of some of the major concepts of the cosmology.

Really, the book is much more about Tengerism - the animistic 'worship' of Tenger, Grandfather Sky, than it is about shamanism. Tengerism is a Central Asian spirituality found in a far wider area than just Mongolia, and the spirituality has increased in popularity in various Central Asian countries in recent years as an alternative to Islam.

Not the greatest of books, but the audio book is available and effectively free if you are a subscriber to Spotify, so it's probably worth a listen if you fancy it.

Available from: Amazon etc.

HORSES AND DRAGONS: Buryat Mongolian Shaman's Staffs, Weather Magic and Soul Retrieval

Nicholas Breeze Wood
3Worlds Publications
PB: 178 pages £13.95/\$18.99
ISBN: 979 8 24217 053 7
Reviewer: Zhen-mèd

I recently had the pleasure of proof-reading Nick's newest book, and am delighted to introduce it to you. Horses and Dragons is primarily about the staffs used by Buriyat Mongolian shamans, but in exploring that theme, it takes us much wider.

We get to learn about both horse headed staffs - horbo - and the dragon headed ones. We learn how they are made, empowered and used, finding out about the true distinction between black and white shamans along the way.

The style is lively and immediate, much enriched by Nick's long experience and depth of knowledge. Speaking of horbo, he is also heart-warmingly personal, as his practice has included horbo for many years and his affectionate connection to his two staffs shines through.

The book also has useful background on Mongolian shamanism in general. Many of us are aware that both Buddhism and, much later, Communism had an impact on the traditions in that area, but here there is a much deeper, more comprehensive understanding of both the history, and how it has shaped practices in the present day.

Rounded out by sections on initiations and offerings, this book is essential reading for anyone with an interest in Mongolian shamanism - whether passing or profound.

Available from Amazon.

MY GRANDFATHER'S ALTAR: Five Generations of Lakota Holy Men

Richard Moves Camp
University of Nebraska Press
PB: 234 pages £15.95/\$16.80
ISBN: 979 1 49623 691 3
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

For forty years I have heard mention and respectful, and reverential, mention of the Chips family a family of Lakota holy people. The Chips family, or more formally the Moves Camp family, are renown for their knowledge and powerful medicine. But I have not really known much about them beyond their reputation, so this book is a wonderful read, a true voyage of discovery and sacred wisdoms.

Richard, the author of this wonderful and important book is the great-great-grandson of Wóptuh'a - Grandfather Horn Chips - the legendary holy man, perhaps best remembered for providing the Lakota prophet and war leader Crazy Horse with his war medicines of power and protection.

Grandfather Horn Chips was hugely important in the development of the Lakota Yuwipi - spirit calling - ceremony, and today, five generations later, most Lakota yuwipi people can trace their traditions - their altar - back to him. Grandfather Horn Chips was, without doubt, one of the most important Lakota spiritual leaders and medicine people of the last 200 years and this book is a testament both to him and his descendant.

The book is highly readable, although a little disjointed at times, as it skips about over the family history and I'm sometimes not quite sure what century we are in. This however is less disturbing than authentic, as when I have sat with Lakota elders and heard them tell medicine tales, the feeling has often been like that. I suspect Lakota time is not quite as rigid as Western time, and has awareness of time wider and deeper; so the book gives a little taste of sitting with an elder and hearing them speak, which is lovely and for me puts me in mind of some magical times I have spent in the past.

The subject matter of the book ranges from tales of life, to tales of medicine; and covers many facets of Lakota spirituality, from the Yuwipi to the Ghost dance.

Highly recommended if you have a feel for the medicine ways, as I do, and an interest in Lakota spirituality. If you wish to, you can read an extract from the book on this blog post: www.unpblog.com/2024/04/23/excerpt-my-grandfathers-alta

Available from Amazon etc.

Morris Rossabi
Oxford University Press
PB: 160 pages £8.99/\$8.95
ISBN: 979 0 19984 089 2
Reviewer: Nicholas Breeze Wood

The history and culture of Mongolia is complex and deep.

From the country's early origins, through the khanates of Chinggis Khan - and his conquest of much of the world, together with the khans who came after him - to the decline of the Great Mongol Empire and the jostling of Mongolia by its neighbours Russia and China in the C19th and C20th, and on to the emergence of an proud independent state - one growing in confidence - in the later part of the C20th through to its international role in the C21st.

It is a culturally rich country; one perhaps somewhat haunted by its more dominating, glorious past, and its decline; but one still with a hugely rich culture - both materially and spiritually - and a huge beautiful land that has a wonderful diverse landscape, ranging from arid deserts in the South to the wild Taiga forests in the North.

So, this book gives a potted history, easy to read, a brief introduction to the whole gamut of the cultural, historical, spiritual, political and physical landscape; a fabulous introduction to a complex subject.

Of course, the book is not about shamanism per se, but if you have ever travelled in Mongolia, or worked with Mongolian shamans, you will have quickly realised the past is firmly superimposed on the present, and it is impossible to extract shamanism from the people, the land, the history and the culture.

So, from that perspective, if you want to study and learn about Mongolian shamanism, you absolutely have to have at least a brief working knowledge of Mongolian history and culture... and this book delivers it in clear, short chunks, easily swallowed.

Available from Amazon etc.

PEOPLE ON THE PATH

*Inclusion Does Not mean indorsement.
Sacred Hoop cannot vouch for the sanity or sanctity of these listings.*

Zacchary (Zac) Crookes.

Australia (Brisbane)
Male shamanic practitioner (Core and Traditional), ordained Ngakpa Tantric practitioner, and initiated non-indigenous Paqo practitioner of Andean mysticism. An experienced healer and teacher, with over a decade of experience, blending these traditions together. He is still constantly studying, adapting, and deepening his practice, knowledge and techniques.
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A professional artist with over 30 years' experience. My work centres on lived ritual and relationship with land, ancestors, and spirit, in conjunction with handcrafted artworks. For 20 years I created an annual public ritual honouring the dead in a civic cemetery. I offer ancestral lineage healing, spirit-mediated compassionate depossession, psychopomp and memorial shrine making, alongside teaching, consultation, and co-creation of ritual regalia, sacred tools, and shrines.
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THE MONGOLS: A Very Short Introduction

your location and needs. I specialise in all forms of PTSD ancestral-line work, psychedelic therapies and integration. I worked as a mental health nurse for 30 years. I'm currently a counsellor with Mind [mental health support] in Somerset. NMC and BACP registered. Fully supervised and insured.

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(07507) 377 005

Knowing Healing Hub **England** (Hertfordshire)

A true holistic healing centre dedicated to bringing traditional and alternative forms of treatments and rituals. We offer high-quality healing sessions, courses and workshops. Experience authentic and time-honoured spiritual and healing practices in a welcoming, grounded environment, led by the next generation of spiritual and shamanic practitioners, trained within an unbroken Mongolian lineage.

www.knowinghealinghub.co.uk
knowingthh@gmail.com
(07957) 700 835

Leticia and Quinto **England** (Sussex)

Two 'wise elders' who offer individual shamanic healing, couples counselling, ancestral trauma clearing, shamanic ceremonies and residential workshops. Also full astrological life path readings.

letinto@gmail.com
(07956) 155 105

Lisa • Juniper Spirit shamanism **England** (West Midlands)

A Reiki master teacher, shamanic practitioner, and daughter of a South Korean martial arts teacher (founder of Sul Ki Do). Trained with Liam Browne and Taggart King among many other teachers of the healing arts. Combining Reiki with Core shamanic methods, crystals, readings, cacao and Japanese-style Reiki training in person, or online.

www.facebook.com/share/1HkDEJd6ab/
lisagwangsankim@wordpress.com
www.instagram.com/lisagwangsankim

Louise Dalziel Cheval • South Devon Shamanism

England (Devon)

Offering one to one Shamanic healing - power loss, soul loss and divination. Bi-monthly drum circles. Introductory shaman's way workshops and other further workshops.

www.southdevonshamanism.co.uk
louisecheval@yahoo.co.uk
(01364) 649 157

Natasha Saltzer • Little River Spiritual Centre

England (Sussex)

Natasha trained for nine years with the Northern Drum Shamanic Centre. She leads 'Way of the Wildflower', a one-year shamanic practitioner training with an optional second-year immersion. One-to-one sessions, monthly circles, 'Rainbow Lodge' ceremonies, and retreats in the UK and internationally. Weaving shamanic and Christic initiatory practice within primordial, experiential earth-based spirituality.

www.natashasaltzer.com
natasha@natashasaltzer.com

Pleasure of Spirit Lodge

England (Somerset)

Regular community and brotherhood purification lodges, apprenticeships, gateway ceremony opportunities and pipe teachings are available.

No monetary charge for sweats or pipe teachings; donations to cover costs only. Affiliated with the Deer Tribe Meti Medicine Society.

jspeirs@btinternet.com

Pretani Wisdom Traditions

England (Yorkshire Dales)

Rigorous, historically grounded animism rooted in the land and traditions of the British Isles. Drawing on a degree in Celtic Studies, archaeology, and three decades of animistic practice, guiding students through seasonal cycles of transformation aligned with the four directions. The work challenges romanticised narratives, restores depth to ancestral memory, and offers initiatory pathways that cultivate sovereignty, resilience, and embodied relationship with place.

www.pretani.uk
sam@pretani.uk
(07767) 981 066

Rob Calcutt - Urban Healer

England (London)

Urban Healer is a queer-led sanctuary for misfits and outsiders, established in 2009. I work with individuals and groups, in person, online, and through self-guided courses. I offer breathwork, gong journeys, shamanic drumming, and divination, as grounded tools for reset and reconnection. My work supports those navigating change, recovery, and personal evolution. Try the free taster on my website and begin your life review today!

www.urbanhealer.co.uk
rob@urbanhealer.co.uk
(07810) 267 778

Sacred Essence

England (Coniston, Lake District)

A spiritual and holistic shop, offering crystals, incense tarot cards, palo santo, white sage, shamanic ritual tools for balance, clarity and protection and gifts since 2006. We have supplied ethically sourced products for meditation, energy healing and spiritual practice, connecting ancient wisdom with modern mindfulness.

www.sacredessence.co.uk

Shamanic Healers Circle **England**

Offering accredited shamanic healer training and a supportive professional community rooted in ancestral wisdom and ethical practice. As accredited members, we uphold high standards of integrity, providing practitioner membership, CNHC registration pathways, approved training routes, and a monthly online 'Shamanic Café Circle', creating space for support, sharing, and ongoing self-development.

www.shamanichealerscircle.com
info@shamanichealerscircle.com
(07824) 568 863

Shamanic Healing with Rose **England** (Hampshire)

Each shamanic healing session is a ceremonial journey, guided by Spirit and attuned to your unique needs. A combination of shamanic techniques: power animal retrieval, divination, cord cutting, soul retrieval, energy body healing, psychopomp work, spiritual parasite and entity removal, and the removal of negative energy and blockages through shamanic extraction, alongside shamanic subconscious repatterning to change your restrictive subconscious thought patterns.

www.roseautumn.com
healing@roseautumn.com

Shamanka

England (Dorset)

Shamanka is a beautiful journey to the heart of women's shamanism...its inspiring, transformative and life changing, its dedicated to the recovery of women's shamanism and ancient mysteries.

www.shamanka.com
dominic@middlepiccadilly.com
(07776) 184 967

Shenoah Taylor • Shamanic Voices **England** (London)

Introductory courses in shamanism, monthly journeying group - one month online, one month face to face in London. Introductory courses in seidr, monthly online group working with different aspects of seidr, residential seidr and nature based courses.

www.shenoahataylor.com
shenoah@shenoahataylor.com
(07941) 544 961

Walkers Between The Worlds **England**

Celtic and ancestral shamanism of the 'Sister Islands' of Britain and Ireland with Caitlín and John Matthews. Since 1990, we have been offering a full shamanic practitioner training, from beginner to professional level.

Foundation and Intermediate Level courses run every year; Advanced level courses and above cycle round over five years, and include supervision and support.

www.hallowquest.org.uk
www.hallowquest.org.uk
igerna9@gmail.com

Wolfindark

England (also in India)

Shamanic and animist interventions, rituals, and ceremonies based on indigenous traditional Sagh'ic practice. Events are held annually in Glastonbury, Delhi, and Bangalore.

Online and phone consultations are available for the creation of personal and tailored spiritual healing protocols and ceremonies. Services include exorcism, tulpaic guardians, ancestral unbinding, sin eating, and bone casting. Also training in Sagh'ic practice.

www.wolfindark.org
cufasaich@gmail.com

FoxFire Foundation

Germany (also in England)

Since 1988 the FoxFire Foundation (formerly FoxFire Institute of Shamanic Studies) has offered community-based work focused on building and healing relationships, creating safe practice and supporting people who have experienced challenges while participating in shamanic activities and events. Offering training and supervision for practitioners of all levels, Individual and group. FoxFire is led by Alexander Alich who traditionally trained in the US Southwest for 25 years.

www.foxfire-foundation.org
contact@foxfire-foundation.org

Bhola Banstola

Nepal (Also in Europe)

Himalayan-Jhankri shamanism wisdom teachings and pilgrimages. Both in-person and online teachings worldwide and immersive journeys in the Himalayas. Short courses and extended retreats in traditional shamanism with a traditional Nepali Jhankri-shaman.

www.BholaBanstola.com
www.nepalushamanism.com
www.shaman-nepal.com
bhumi1008@outlook.com

Daniel Garber

USA (Pacific Northwest Rainforest)

North American Earth-based shamanistic spirituality (no fee) thehíla iyóyanpa wič'hóni yuhá máni [I walk in the way of Love, Light and Life]

wizard.garber@gmail.com

Drake Bear Stephen

USA (San Francisco Bay Area)

I am a Transpersonal Hypnotherapist and shamanic energy medicine practitioner and Teacher specialising in self-empowerment, past life journeys, energy medicine, and LGBTQ+ issues. I practice a new blend of spirituality called Shadritch: shamanism, druidry and witchcraft.

www.drakeInnerprizes.com
drakebearstephen@pacbell.net
+(1) (925)348 3336

Creynni Wellbeing CIC

Wales (Wrexham)

Connecting with the Awen; the river of inner, natural and universal wisdom within and around us. Awenydd shamanic practices, in allyship with the earth, offering drum circles in Wrecsam, sacred site connection in Cymru, seasonal meditations, audiobooks, one-to-one sessions and a four-year training.

www.linktr.ee/creynni
+(44)(0)(7472) 266 952

Kate Freyja McLoughlin • Heart Rites

Wales (Pembrokeshire)

Offering shamanic healing ceremonies for individuals and groups, practised in traditional ways, drawing on Himalayan and Southern Siberian practices. Also, somatic healing, one to one mentorship, and ritual dance workshops and courses.

www.heart-rites.com
katefreyja@gmail.com

Nicholas Breeze Wood

Wales (Pembrokeshire)

Trained and experienced in Northern Asian and Himalayan shamanism, and Native American Plains medicine traditions. Nick is also an ordained Ngakpa, a type of Tibetan Buddhist lama who specialises in Tibetan Buddhist magic and ritual. Regular open Native American pipe ceremonies once a month.

www.facebook.com/Nicholas.Breeze.Wood
Nick@sacredhoop.org