

**The Relationship Between Spirit and Matter:  
Can Shamanism Help Us Heal?**

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The work reported in this thesis is original and carried out by me solely, except for the acknowledged direction and assistance gratefully received from colleagues and mentors.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mara Bishop". The script is cursive and elegant, with the first letters of "Mara" and "Bishop" being capitalized and prominent.

MARA BISHOP

## **Table of Contents**

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<a href="#"><u>Abstract</u></a> .....	vi
<a href="#"><u>Acknowledgements</u></a> .....	viii
<a href="#"><u>List of Tables</u></a> .....	ix
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 1. Introduction</u></a> .....	9
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 2. The Integral Relationship Between Spirit and Matter in Shamanism</u></a> .....	14
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 3. The Roots of Shamanic Spirituality</u></a> .....	22
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 4. Shamanic Healing</u></a> .....	28
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 5. Spirit Affecting Matter &amp; Shamanic Healing Today</u></a> .....	60
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 6. Prayer and Non-Local Healing</u></a> .....	71
<a href="#"><u>Chapter 8. Conclusions</u></a> .....	86
<a href="#"><u>Appendix A - Journeying Experiment</u></a> .....	94

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the relationship between spirit and matter, specifically in relation to shamanic and spiritual healing. Shamanism provides a valuable example for several reasons: shamanic healing is practiced throughout the world, the techniques of disparate cultures are surprisingly similar, and it can be used in conjunction with allopathic techniques. Shamanic healing is based on principles of animism, on entering altered states of consciousness, and on working directly with spirit assistance. The cosmologies, mythologies, beliefs about the afterlife and daily practices of shamanic cultures are discussed. Methods of diagnosis are reviewed, as are specific healing therapies, including soul retrieval, extraction, power animal retrieval, laying on of hands, and psychopomp work. Other factors that are important to successful healing, including the compassion of the healer and the power of sound and language when used by the shaman, are reviewed.

Information from scholars and anthropologists regarding the spiritual basis of shamanic healing and shamanic beliefs concerning health is discussed. The work of contemporary practitioners, both native healers and core shamanic practitioners, is examined. Scientific studies measuring the effects of shamanic healing on human bodies and bodies of water are reviewed.

The shamanic concept of living in harmony with nature is discussed in relation to the recent movement called ecological medicine. The scientists involved in this movement are investigating a view of health based on the importance of living in balance with ourselves, each other, and our environment. This is a quintessentially shamanic philosophy. By combining the ancient spiritual beliefs and techniques of the

shamans with the awareness and technical skills of modern doctors and scientists, we can begin to create a bridge between science and spirituality, between traditional healing practices and allopathic methods, and between our bodies and our spirits.

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## **LIST OF TABLES**

### **Appendix A**

Table 1: Results of Temperature Experiment with Percentages

Table 2: Responses to Temperature Experiment

Table 3: Statistically Expected Results of Temperature Experiment

## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

Is spirit a reality? This is a far-reaching question with incomprehensible ramifications for us as humans, for our culturally shared beliefs, for the way we do business, for how we relate to one another, and for how we exist on this planet. Long before we reach an answer, a host of other questions arise, each with its own pitfalls. Do we have a non-physical aspect that interacts with, affects and/or governs our physical selves? Does this spiritual or energetic component relate to God or the divine? Is it provable? Are science and the current methods of studying physical reality so different from spirituality and our belief systems centered on the intangible that the two cannot hold a common ground in today's society? Do invisible forces have an effect on healing, be it through the techniques themselves, the beliefs of the practitioners or simply the mood of the operating room or the patient? These are the issues I am exploring in this paper, and through experiments, cross-cultural studies, and examples, I

will demonstrate the relationship between spirit and matter and further explore whether shamanism can help us heal.

Shamanism is a system of living, common in ancient times and still practiced today. Some call it a religion, while others view it as a set of techniques and philosophies. It is based on principles of interaction with the spirit world. In many ancient societies, the shaman played a key role, acting as a spiritual leader, a teacher of mythology, a healer, and an artist, among other things. According to the Foundation for Shamanic Studies: “Shamans are a type of medicine man or woman especially distinguished by the use of journeys to hidden worlds otherwise mainly known through myth, dream, and near-death experiences. Most commonly they do this by entering an altered state of consciousness using monotonous percussion sound.”<sup>1</sup> Unlike most organized religions, which are based on a shared belief system to promote a moral code, shamanism’s reach extends to both the spiritual and the material worlds. Shamans were actively involved in the practical matters of daily life, like finding game or setting a broken bone.

Can spirit affect matter? For shamanic cultures this is a rhetorical question. They believe that spirit not only affects matter, but that physical reality is a mirror, a direct manifestation of the state of the spiritual realm. Asking someone from a shamanic culture to defend that assertion is like asking a scientist to defend the existence of matter or asking a Christian to defend the existence of Christ. For them it is part of the world as they know it, not only for spiritual or religious practice, but also for the mundane and ordinary tasks of living.

In his book The Marriage of Sense and Soul, Ken Wilber describes the clash between science and spirituality as germinating from a particular point in our history where we took a wrong turn: specifically when the jurisdiction of science (and by science he refers to empirical, physical science) transgressed into areas where it didn't belong, namely religion and art. This usurpation of power by scientists dramatically affected the way our culture thought about the spirit world. Anything that could not be proven by observation with the physical eye or its extension, such as a microscope, was deemed irrational.<sup>2</sup> It invalidated many types of experiences that didn't fit into science's paradigm of provability. Wilber describes three basic spheres of life based primarily on ancient Greek philosophies: science, art and morals. Science represents truth, an objective truth that rises above opinion or speculation. Art embodies beauty, or subjective aesthetic judgment. And morals or religion speaks to ethics or goodness; what it means to be human and live in relative agreement about some basic tenets for living in a healthy, fair and just way in society.<sup>3</sup>

When science began to dominate the other two areas, the worth of spiritual and aesthetic experience was devalued. For instance, paranormal experiences, miraculous cures, or any anomalous phenomena which lacked hard quantitative data to defend their existence were labeled as resulting from hype, ignorance or fraud. This split caused a shift from a culture that could simultaneously value spiritual experiences, scientific data and artistic merit to a culture that placed the scientific model on a pedestal and demeaned art and spirit. Overshadowed by the tyranny of science, much of the ancient knowledge of coexisting with the spirit world vanished.

And when science became the dominant way to give meaning to the present, something subtle but even more significant was lost: perspective. The value of looking back to ancient cultures is not to *devolve* our society to a more primitive time, but to look *forward*, to rediscover knowledge (particularly in the fields of spirituality and healing, but also in basic principles of living) that can help us *evolve* into a healthier species living on a healthier planet. This is where shamanism can play a part.

In seeking a bridge between spirit and matter, shamanism, and specifically shamanic healing, provides us with several major advantages over other worldviews or philosophies. First, shamanism was and is practiced worldwide. >From the steppes of Mongolia to the rain forests of the Amazon to the plains of North America, shamans have been practicing since the beginning of recorded time. Contemporary shaman Martin Prechtel says, “For the majority of human history, shamans have simply been a part of ordinary life. They exist all over the world. It seems strange to Westerners now because they have systematically devalued the other world and no longer deal with it as part of their everyday lives.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, shamanic and indigenous spiritual and healing practices have been methodically wiped out by so called “civilized” cultures. In Guatemala in the 1500s the Spanish destroyed the traditional temples of the Tzutujil people and built churches using the same stones.<sup>5</sup> In British Africa in the mid-1880s herbal remedies used by the indigenous people were banned.<sup>6</sup> In Russia it was illegal to have a shaman’s drum. Possessing one was punishable by death. The state of shamanic practice today is perilous, but organizations like the Foundation for Shamanic Studies are making efforts to seek out shamans who still practice their native ways to help document and preserve traditional shamanic rituals and techniques.

Second, the techniques of shamanism have remarkable similarities across diverse cultures. Anthropologist and teacher Michael Harner has studied these similarities in depth and calls the set of practices, beliefs and techniques that are common to most shamanic groups *core shamanism*. These are “universal or near-universal fundamental principles and practices of shamanism not bound to any specific cultural group or perspective.”<sup>7</sup> This macrocultural approach is especially relevant in the effort to retrieve valuable healing techniques and spiritual knowledge from the past expressly for use in today’s culture. It allows people called to shamanism to use shamanic healing techniques without being born into a particular tribe or ethnicity. Practitioners such as Sandra Ingerman, Myron Eshowsky and Tom Cowan join Harner in the quest to use ancient spiritually-based techniques effectively in a contemporary setting.

The third aspect of shamanism that warrants our attention is that shamanic healing methods can be used in conjunction with allopathic healing techniques. There are practitioners today who combine their knowledge of psychotherapy, surgery or addictions counseling with shamanic practices and achieve results. In Madison, Wisconsin, mental patients are treated using power animal or soul retrievals. In Alaska, a tribal doctor is certified to practice in a local hospital. In Arizona, a Navajo surgeon combines her knowledge of Navajo culture and practices with her medical training to put patients at ease and improve surgical outcomes.

The final reason to look at shamanism as an effective therapeutic model is that some shamanic practices are highly akin to another form of healing getting the attention of researchers in the mainstream medical field: intercessory prayer. Shamans “journey”

or travel to ask for help from the spirits on behalf of their patients. Praying for patients has been demonstrated to help their healing process. These studies will be discussed later. Prayer is an element of most major religions and, therefore, opens many doorways. If religious healing practices gain scientific validity, it will help bridge the gap between science and spirituality.

Whether through prayer, shamanic healing, or other forms of alternative, energy-based modalities, the time has come to utilize all these techniques to facilitate healing. And the case for working with the spirit world to bring health and harmony is by no means limited to the human body. It encompasses plant and animal life, water and air, ecosystems and the planet itself. My purpose in this thesis is not to prove the benefits of shamanic healing *per se*. However, I am interested in demonstrating that the spiritual wisdom embodied in shamanic healing has vast potential to impact our state of health today. I'll do this partially through scientific experimental data and partially through more anecdotal information from anthropologists and modern day practitioners. Using shamanism and shamanic healing as the primary illustration, I intend to make a case that it is possible to affect human physiology by interacting with the spirit world; that spirit can and does affect matter in real and vital ways.

**CHAPTER 2. THE INTEGRAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPIRIT AND MATTER IN  
SHAMANISM**

**The Hills are Alive**

The basic premise of shamanism is that everything is alive – with spirit. The earth we walk on, the air we breathe, the vines of the forest, the birds flying overhead, our parents and children, our ancestors, all have “spirit.” “Spirit” is used here to mean they possess a spiritual aspect that is different from, but connected to, their physical aspect. This intangible spirit is the animating force behind all things; the energy permeating everything, living or inert. In addition to the spiritual aspect of physical beings, adherents of shamanism believe there are many beings of entirely spiritual constitution, without a physical component at all. They are called gods or goddesses, sprites, fairies, devas, power animals, or spirit allies; but they are all beings who exist primarily in a spiritual form. The singular “spirit” refers to the basic power of the universe, to a monotheistic concept of God, or to the vast, impersonal universe that supports all creation. When used in the plural, “spirits” are typically beings with individuality. They may present as animals, teachers in human form, or aspects of nature, such as plant or river spirits. One contemporary shaman describes the difference between spirit and spirits in her experience:

When I need assistance in answering a question for myself or for a client, I go to my helping spirits for guidance and advice. For me the light I view as a supreme being is not an essence that speaks to me – it has no personality and does not see me as a personality. By contrast, my helping spirits have personalities and essences I can relate to.<sup>8</sup>

This faith in the existence of spirits is a fundamental principle of shamanism. Another word for this belief is *animism*: that nature has a sentient life force and all physical beings have a spiritual aspect that is related to, but separate from, their physical aspect. For example, in the *kahuna* tradition, God is in everything and everything is in God, even in things that Westerners would consider inanimate, like a rock or a tool. Each level of being, from a plant to a stream to the landscape itself has a unique spirit. Shamans traditionally asked permission of a tree spirit before cutting it down, to honor the spirit that embodies the physical aspect of the tree.<sup>9</sup> The Cree believe in *manitous* (spirits) that exist universally in the natural world. They also have faith in a “Supreme Being called Manitou or Kitche Manitou, Great Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> All the forces of nature are imbued with a life force. Joseph Campbell describes the philosophy of animism eloquently, “No consistent, clearly separating line between the natures of man and beast, such as we find in Genesis 1:26-30, was ever drawn in these mythologies; for the two were experienced as of the one life which informs all things: the earth; the mountains; the winds, sun, moon, and stars; the rivers, the forests, and the sea.”<sup>11</sup> In some cultures these elements of nature take on specific roles in relation to humans, such as protectors or guides. Among the Thompson Indians, the spirits of the sun, water, thunder, mountain peaks, the bear and the crow are considered guardians spirits of the shaman particularly.<sup>12</sup>

Although these spirits are sometimes seen with the physical eye, they are usually invisible. For many Westerners, “invisible” and “immeasurable” equate to “nonexistent,” but for shamanic people, invisible forces are often among the most powerful agents in their lives. They believe that your relationship to spirit impacts the

quality of your life dramatically. A harmonious relationship with spirit can be cultivated in many ways, including: honoring your ancestors, showing thanks to animals and plants that give their lives to sustain us, and respecting your body and treating it well. The principles of spiritually healthy living vary from culture to culture, but most groups have such guidelines for living in good stead with the spirits around them. With a few exceptions, it is believed that by following these tenets a person will live a basically healthy life. Individuals are responsible for maintaining their overall relationship with spirit, but crises and special situations do occur. These are the times when the shaman, as master of human-spirit relations, intervenes and attempts to restore health and balance.

### **The Other Worlds**

In shamanic cultures there is a world seen with physical eyes and another world perceived with non-physical eyes. It is this non-physical world, “non-ordinary reality,” or the other world, which is of primary concern for the shaman. The Jivaro of the Amazon considered this unseen world to be the “real” or “true” world, instead of the ordinary material world.<sup>13</sup> Historically, there are cultural differences to explain this concept of an invisible cosmology, but there are also many common elements. Most divide the spiritual world into different spheres, such as the lower, middle and upper worlds. Typically these realms are intersected by some kind of central axis point. Many tribes of Northern Asia describe a World or Cosmic Tree as connecting the zones. This concept of a tree, or *axis mundi*, connecting the cosmic realms is seen in shamanic cultures and mythologies throughout the world.<sup>14</sup> Other links between the worlds

include vines, ladders and even rainbows. The Celts take a less structured view of the cartography of the ethereal world. They consider the Otherworld to be a place that exists in parallel to the natural world, with portals or connection points existing in natural places. Forests, especially clearings and places near water, hold particular power. It is as if the veil between the worlds is lifted or thinned there to make entry into the Otherworld easier. Some tribes, like the Navajo, describe the cosmology of the unseen world as a web, an ever enfolding, interconnected realm of life. Aborigines in Australia refer to this other world as “dreamtime.” It is a place that the shamans visit by entering into trance, where time and space as we know it cease to exist and where all knowledge is accessible. This is also the place where human spirits go after death.<sup>15</sup>

When Martin Prechtel was asked, “What is the other world?” he replied:

If the world were a tree, then the other world would be the roots – the part of the plant we can’t see, but that puts the sap into the tree’s veins. The other world feeds this tangible world – the world that can feel pain, that can eat and drink, that can fail; the world that goes around in cycles; the world where we die. The other world is what makes this world work. And the way we help the other world continue is by feeding it with our beauty.<sup>16</sup>

The crux of the conviction is that all life, be it spirit, animal, human, or plant, is connected. The actions, thoughts, beliefs and intentions of each component of the whole affect all other components to varying degrees and even affect the universe itself. To live in harmony in this multidimensional universe one must understand not only the laws and the lands of the physical world, but the principles and terrain of the

spiritual world. As used here, “spiritual” doesn’t necessarily mean religious, but energetic or intangible.

This philosophy of a universe connected in myriad ways – from the material to the intangible, from humans to plants, from animals to weather – represents a way of thinking that is not currently accepted in contemporary society. In fact, it is somewhat antithetical to the way people in the United States and much of the modern world approach life. We divide and conquer: in wars, in business and in personal relationships. Too often, we view the earth as a collection of resources, a supermarket of commodities existing for our use and entertainment. Some of us believe in the laws of physics or biology, but relegate the spiritual dimensions to the status of fantasy or self-delusion. In contrast, maneuvering in this web of creation, this intertwining world of spirit and nature and man, is the shaman’s life’s work. It is the relationship with this spiritual dimension that heavily influences the quality of life for an individual and a community. “In shamanism we do not use our own energy in doing healing work; we work in partnership with the spirits. The shaman is the hands and heart that the spirits work through.”<sup>17</sup>

The word “shaman” itself is derived from the Tungus (Siberian) word “*saman*” meaning “one who is excited, moved, heated and raised.”<sup>18</sup> Mircea Eliade, widely recognized as the first scholar to thoroughly document shamanic cultures and their practices, dubbed shamans “technicians of the sacred” who mediate between the world of mortals and the world of spirits.<sup>19</sup> The shaman is the community’s connection to the other worlds. Through arduous training, the shaman learns to operate effectively in both the spirit world and the every day world. It is the shaman who dances to bring the

rains. It is the shaman who speaks to the trees in the forest to learn how to make plant medicine. It is the shaman who journeys on behalf of her patients to ask the spirits to heal their bodies. Shamans play many roles in their cultures: doctors, storytellers, artists, counselors, magicians. They “are tribal people who can self-regulate their attention so as to access information not ordinarily available, using it to ameliorate the physical or psychological condition of members of their social group.”<sup>20</sup> Shamans are guides, helping members of their community to navigate life, from birth to death, in body and in soul, in dealing with the mundane and the sacred.

The shaman embraces her place within the great spiral of life on all levels. She uses her skills to bridge those levels and help bring her people a little closer to health, harmony and, ultimately, to God or the great spirit of oneness. Ken Wilber describes the map of the universe as being like a “Great Nest of Being.” “According to this nearly universal view, reality is a rich tapestry of interwoven levels, *reaching from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit*. Each senior level ‘envelops’ or ‘enfolds’ its junior dimension – a series of nests within nests within nests of Being – so that every thing and event in the world is interwoven with every other, and all are ultimately enveloped and enfolded by Spirit, by God, by Goddess, by Tao, by Brahman, by the Absolute itself.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Shamanic Journeying: Working with Spirits**

The cornerstone of the shaman’s profession is the journey. The ability to journey or travel to the spiritual dimension to work directly with compassionate spirits is what sets the shaman apart from other kinds of healers and medicine people. “The

helping spirits or the compassionate spirits are the conduits of the power of the universe.”<sup>22</sup> Shamans believe that their soul or spirit actually leaves their body while they are journeying and voyages to different levels of the spirit realm. In order to journey, the shaman enters an altered state of consciousness. The methods used to enter this state vary between cultures, but typically there is some form of repetitive percussion sound. This continuous beat is often called “sonic driving” and helps push the shaman into the level of consciousness where she can perceive the spiritual realms. The frequency of the beat is notably similar across cultures; anywhere from four to seven beats per second is the typical range. This range also corresponds with the frequency of EEG brain waves recorded in the *theta* state. The *theta* level of brain wave activity is often present when people describe mythic or deeply spiritual experiences.

The aboriginal shamans used pounding sticks, the Sami shamans used hide drums and the Hopi tribe of North America used rattles. They all shared knowledge that is arguably consistent with scientific fact. By repeating a particular type of sound, the mind responds. Can these journeys be a function of the internal workings of the shaman’s mind instead of some journey outside her body and into non-ordinary reality? Perhaps. But what the shaman is able to “see” in an altered state is often inconsistent with someone who’s just imagining. Shamans can travel long distances and return with detailed descriptions of places they have not visited in ordinary reality. In many cultures, this skill was vital to the survival of their community, and provided a practical test of the skill of the shaman. For example, in traditional hunting cultures, shamans would journey to the herds of deer or bison to locate them for the hunters. According to

Eliade, shamans played a part in “ensuring an abundance of game and the good luck of the hunters.”<sup>23</sup>

Once the shaman embarks on her journey, she typically meets one or more helping spirits. One of the primary tasks of a shaman in training is to meet and develop a relationship with spirits who are compassionate and willing to help. These spirits take many forms, including animal, human and plant. In some cultures it is common for the spirit ally to be an ancestor of the shaman. The Celts believed the fairies acted as protectors and guardians, as long as they stayed in the fairies’ good graces.<sup>24</sup> In Inuit cultures, part of the initiation of a shaman is acquiring a spirit ally and receiving the gift of inner sight:

My first helping spirit became my name, a little *aua*. When it came to me, it was as if the door and roof rose and I received such power of vision that I could see right through the house, into the earth and up into the sky. It was the little *aua* that brought me all this inner light, by soaring over me so long as I sang. Then it stood outside in a corner of the doorway, invisible to everyone, but always ready when I called it.<sup>25</sup>

Shamans are careful to show respect and pay tribute to the spirit allies they work with. Shamans honor their power animals by “dancing them,” imitating the animal’s movements as a way of engaging and showing reverence for the animal’s power. At times they wear the skins of the animal in ceremony.<sup>26</sup> Shamans work with different spirits for different purposes. For example, one spirit may offer personal guidance to the shaman or do divination work while another is skilled in healing.

### CHAPTER 3. THE ROOTS OF SHAMANIC SPIRITUALITY

In order to place shamanism and shamanic healing in context, it is helpful to have some understanding of the spiritual and religious beliefs of shamanic cultures. Questions like ‘How was the world created?’ and ‘What happens to the soul after death?’ are important, as their answers provide a glimpse into the theological mindset of a cultural group. As mentioned previously there is some debate over the classification of shamanism as a religion or a set of techniques and philosophies. Mircea Eliade, having performed some of the most extensive research into the beliefs and practices of shamanic cultures around the world is quite clear in his assertion that shamanism is not a religion. Shamanic elements are present within many religions. He contends that the techniques utilized by the shamans have evolved *from* the theological foundations of societies, as opposed to *creating* religious structures in and of themselves. He states, “shamanism always remains an ecstatic technique at the disposal of a particular elite and represents, as it were, the mysticism of the particular religion.”<sup>27</sup> Given this distinction, it makes sense that the religious beliefs of shamanic societies can vary greatly. However, there are many areas where a similar belief structure is overlaid with details of worship, mythology or ritual practice that are culturally specific. The following section is intended to provide a glimpse into some beliefs about the nature of the universe, the destiny of souls, daily practices and mythologies of different shamanic groups.

## **The Beginning of Time**

In African creation myths there is generally some form of anthropomorphic god who is believed to have created the universe and the beings on it. For the Bassari tribe of Togo this god is called Unumbotte. Unumbotte first created Man, and then Antelope, and then Snake. At the time when only these three creatures existed on the earth, only a single palm tree grew. Unumbotte gave them seeds and instructed them to “pound” the earth and plant the seeds. They did and a tree grew bearing red fruit, which Unumbotte picked every seven days. One day Snake suggested that they eat the fruit too.

Unumbotte came and asked who ate the fruit. Man replied that they were hungry and ate the fruit. Antelope said it preferred to eat grass. Unumbotte then gave each group of creatures its own food to eat; grass for the antelope and yams and millet for the humans.<sup>28</sup>

In Polynesia this creator god is known as Taaroa. The beginning of time is described in this portion of a sacred chant:

“He existed, Taaroa was his name,

In the immensity.

There was no earth, there was no sky,

There was no sea, there was no man.

Taaroa calls, but nothing answers.

Existing alone, he became the universe.

Taaroa is the root, the rocks.

Taaroa is the sands. It is thus that he is named.

Taaroa is the light. Taaroa is within.

Taaroa is the germ. Taaroa is the support. Taaroa is enduring. Taaroa is wise.”<sup>29</sup>

The Pima Indians of Arizona believed that creation happened when a man simply emerged from the darkness. He “wandered through the darkness until he began to think; then he knew himself and that he was a man; he knew that he was there for some purpose.” From his heart he pulled a large stick and used it to help him walk through the darkness. He created ants, as well, from his own body. And then he sang the world into existence: “I make the world, and lo! The world is finished. Thus I make the world, and lo! The world is finished.”<sup>30</sup> The Andamanese also have a “spontaneous birth” creation myth. They describe a big joint of bamboo floating to shore, and splitting open to reveal an infant, The First Man, whose name was Jutpu. He built a dwelling and a bow and arrow for himself and scarified himself with a piece of crystal. To ease his loneliness he created a companion out of clay that he took from an ants’ nest. This clay woman came to life and together they created more and more beings from the clay.<sup>31</sup>

Some cultures, like the Pawnee believe that it was actually the animals who were the original channels for divine communication. Chief Letakots-Lesa describes this relationship: “In the beginning of all things, wisdom and knowledge were with the animals, for Tirawa, the One Above, did not speak directly to man. He sent certain animals to tell man that he showed himself through the beasts, and that from them, and from the stars and the sun and the moon man should learn.”<sup>32</sup> It is frequently professed that shamanic powers were bestowed at the beginning of time by the Great Creator. For

the Mohave and the Yuma of North America, shamanic power is derived directly from the “mythical beings” who transmitted it to them at the dawn of the world. Through initiatory dreams the shaman actually witnessed the beginning of the earth.<sup>33</sup> There are some common themes found in shamanic mythologies about the creation of the universe, the beginning of time and the relationship between the gods and man. However, these creation stories range widely and contain many culturally specific details which prevent the definition of a “classic” shamanic creation myth.

### **The Structure of the Universe**

The shared belief about the physical structure of the spiritual worlds was touched upon earlier in discussion about the World Tree, or *axis mundi*, and the tripartite universal structure. The idea that the universe is divided into three zones connected by a central shank of some sort is one of the most consistent elements of shamanic cosmology. It affects their concepts of birth and death, of celestial communication, and even the structure of their homes. The Goldi, the Dolgan, and the Tungus believe that “the souls of children perch like little birds on the branches of the Cosmic Tree” waiting to be born, and the shamans go there to find them.<sup>34</sup> Many groups believe that in the beginning of time there was clear and open communication between the gods and human beings through the portal of the World Tree; that “human beings could easily go up into the sky and maintained familiar relations with the gods.”<sup>35</sup> It is commonly believed that man’s pride led to the closing of this celestial aperture for the ordinary person, but that certain honored beings, especially shamans, maintained their connection with the divine regions. The shamans remain able to fly

through the ‘central opening,’ to commune with the gods and spirits, while the rest of the community use the opening simply as an outlet for the transmission of offerings.<sup>36</sup>

For many shamanic cultures, the earth is a reflection of the spiritual worlds and their corresponding symbolism. This is particularly the case with the central pole as a spiritual hub. The *axis mundi* is manifested physically in many homes, either by pillars that hold the structure up or by separate poles called “World Pillars.” In Inuit cultures the pole standing in the center of their dwellings is called the “Pillar of the Sky,” for others, like the Asian Tatars of the Altai, the Buryat, and the Soyot it is represented by their tent poles. The Soyot place blue, white, and yellow cloths, representing the colors of the celestial regions, on the top of the pole. Typically, offerings are made on altars placed at the bottoms of these poles.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes these offerings were of milk, especially among the Hamitic Galla and Hadia herdsmen in Africa, and in some cases, they were of blood, as for the Galla of Kenya.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the religious ideas of the Batak originate in India. They also envision the universe as divided into three regions with a central conduit. Human beings occupy the earth. The underworld is the home of the demons and the dead. And the gods inhabit the sky, which has seven stories. This inclusion of seven celestial levels is another common theme.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Afterlife**

The belief in a seven leveled universe surfaces in the burial customs of the Jakun. When a person is buried, “a post five feet high is set up on the grave; it has fourteen notches, seven running up one side and seven down the other; the post is called

the ‘soul ladder.’ It represents the seven celestial levels that the soul must pass through.<sup>40</sup> For the Pygmies the soul departs the body through the heel at the time of death and travels eastward to the sea. The dead souls can return to their village for seven days. Once that time has passed, a spirit guides the ‘good’ to the island, Belet. To get there they must cross a switchbacked bridge over the sea.<sup>41</sup> The Sakai believe something akin to the Pygmies with a few variations. The soul leaves the body through the back of the head instead of the heel and sets off westward instead of to the east. They must also cross a bridge, but this one is over a caldron of boiling water.<sup>42</sup> The Ykut believe that both the good and bad souls go up into the sky and are transformed into birds.<sup>43</sup> It is a prevalent belief that souls go through some form of journey after dying and then through a process of transformation where they return to infancy and prepare to be born again into the world.<sup>44</sup> Joseph Campbell describes the animistic view of death and dying: “there is no such thing as absolute death, only a passing of individuals back and forth, as it were, through a veil or screen of visibility, until – for one reason or another – they dissolve into an undifferentiated ground that is not of death, but of potential life, out of which new individuals appear.”<sup>45</sup>

#### CHAPTER 4. SHAMANIC HEALING

Shamans interact with the spiritual or non-physical world in order to bring about change in the lives of the community. They act as catalysts, linking the world of the unseen to the visible and creating balance and health from imbalance or disease. Their goal is to positively impact the physical world, by bringing rain, finding game, or healing bodies. In contemporary Western culture we tend to see these two realms as separate and unaffected by one another. How can shaking a rattle and dancing actually inspire rain clouds to gather over parched land? How can drumming and singing to a person cure them of physical sickness? To date, science does not have the answer for how spirit and ritual can affect the material. Shamanic cultures do. They believe the tangible world is simply a manifestation or reflection of the unseen, spiritual world. Both worlds are part of a larger whole, aspects of reality that intersect and relate on many levels. By delving into the spiritual world and enlisting the help of the spirits who exist there, shamans attempt to create harmony and balance on the spiritual level, thereby creating it in the corresponding physical level. In other words, physical health is *directly contingent* upon the spiritual health of the person, land, or community for whom the shaman seeks healing.

Most traditional cultures profess that the condition of one's spirit and relationships to the unseen world affects one's physical state of being. Shamans were the first holistic health practitioners. Not only did they view the mind and the body as being connected, but they looked at each being in relationship with other beings. Each person stands in a matrix connected to their families, their natural environment, their

thoughts and intentions, and myriad other elements whose state of balance can affect that person directly or indirectly. The shaman takes the whole of their patient into account. They consider the condition of the body, mind and spirit of the patient when determining appropriate treatment, and work with or defer to other health practitioners as needed. The spirits actually perform the healing, with the shaman acting as facilitator. However, the shaman needs to have an understanding of the patient's life, emotional state, family relationships, beliefs and concerns to fully integrate the work of the spirits. Dr. Lori Arviso Alvord, a Navajo surgeon, writes of her experience with traditional Navajo healers and their approach towards treating their patients:

A *haatalii* (traditional Navajo healer) did not treat a person's liver or spleen or appendix –although (...) they could be perfectly aware that a problem resided in such an organ. But they did not isolate a part from the whole. Their medicine was for the whole human creature – body, mind, and spirit, their community, and even the larger world.<sup>46</sup>

In the huna tradition of Hawaii, cures are believed to be most effective when people are engaged on a physical, mental and emotional level in their own healing. “Kahuna healing involves the whole person - the Higher Self, the conscious mind, the subconscious and the body - and the person's environment.”<sup>47</sup> Their beliefs and attitudes and the extent of their engagement on all levels of the healing process are considered crucial to the success of their treatment. Patients are treated in ways specifically tailored to their complaint and their beliefs about their condition. Among these are physical massage, called *lomi, lua*, a karate-like technique used to cleanse the

emotions, and *hula*, an ancient system of body movements or dance used to facilitate spiritual development in a similar fashion to *t'ai ch'i* or kundalini yoga.<sup>48</sup>

### **Causes & Prevention of Illness**

Allopathic physicians ordinarily look for a *physical* cause for a physical illness: a virus, too much fatty food, a defective gene or hormonal imbalance. Shamans take a very different perspective when they look for the cause of illness in their patients. They view physical illness and injury as manifestations of a spiritual imbalance. This doesn't mean that when a person breaks their leg the broken bone itself is not addressed.

Shamans contend there is a reason why that bone was broken and to find that reason they look to the larger situation of the person's life. They take a holistic approach in considering the factors that led up to the accident itself. They live the tenet that spirit can affect matter, that tangible objects (in this case human bodies) are impacted by intangible forces and relationships that coexist in the world around them. By treating the patient in relation not only to their physical bodies, but also to their energetic bodies, their psyches, their families and their community, the shaman reflects the conviction that all beings and elements of nature are interconnected and affect each other in profound and subtle ways.

A prime example of this interconnectedness is the plague that afflicted the Navajo tribe in Arizona in 1993. People were inexplicably becoming direly ill and dying at a rapid rate. Doctors scrambled to connect the cases to some common thread, something the victims shared that would lead them to a cause for the epidemic. They were not successful in finding such a link. A shaman was consulted and said an

imbalance prompted by too much rain caused the plague. This seemed ridiculous to most people, but he turned out to be exactly right. The high level of rainfall had caused the piñon pines to grow more than usual. They shed their cones and the seeds they contained. These seeds are a staple part of the diet of the deer mouse. An over abundance of mice meant excessive mouse droppings, and an increased likelihood that people would come in contact with them. A virus called the hantavirus is carried in the feces and urine of deer mice and was the source of the epidemic.<sup>49</sup>

Disease is considered an interference in the natural harmonious state that human beings are born into. Interference can take many forms: too much rain, depression, illness, or even acting disrespectfully. Åke Hultkrantz, an expert in Native North American healing, asserts, “disease and pain represent disruptions in the harmonious cosmic pattern that involves gods and spirits, people and animals, and all of nature. The medical performances aid in reestablishing the disturbed pattern, placing humans again inside the cosmic order.”<sup>50</sup>

Different factors can be at the root of an imbalance, predisposing someone to become symptomatic. Soul loss, spiritual intrusions, and infractions of cultural laws or taboos are among the most characteristic causes of illness. Western society and shamanic cultures agree that lifestyle can influence health. In the United States, many health conscious people exercise, eat whole organic foods, and avoid toxins like cigarette smoke. For some that practice includes a form of meditation, prayer or spiritual expression. For most native groups the spiritual aspect of maintaining health is vital, as is the concept of caring for the community and the natural world. “The native healing traditions teach that the health of the individual must be maintained through

daily practice of healthful lifestyles, connection to the Great Spirit and to the Mother Earth, and through service to others and to the planet.”<sup>51</sup>

In Ojibway culture, a healthy lifestyle included following ritual observances, taking baths often, making offerings to the spirits, and acting ethically.<sup>52</sup> Their sense of acting ethically included their attitude towards the game they relied on for food. Hunters thanked the animals killed; taking only what was necessary to supply the tribe with food, and utilizing as many parts of the animal as possible. To maintain the favor of their animal spirit they abstained from eating the meat of that animal.<sup>53</sup> Infractions of these spiritual principles were believed to cause illness. Even the fear and guilt associated with infringements of cultural taboos were thought to cause illness. They believed the acknowledgment of guilt could sometimes bring about spontaneous recoveries, similar to the Catholic sacrament of confession conveying forgiveness for sins.<sup>54</sup>

Tela Star Hawk Lake describes this concept of illness resulting from many causes, some physical and some spiritual:

Cancer could be caused by radon in a person’s house, pesticides sprayed on fruits and vegetables, dyes in pastries, antibiotics and hormones injected in meat, mercury in fish, certain negative minerals in the water, toxins in the air; and even from smoking. But cancer could also be caused by desecrating the Earth, trespassing upon sacred grounds, causing spiritual violations against the Natural Laws and the Great Creator’s laws; or by our own thoughts involving hate, jealousy, fear, guilt and shame.<sup>55</sup>

In all of these examples there is one common thread. Spiritual health is vital to physical health. Lewis Mehl-Madrona is a physician and professor who works extensively for the integration of Western and indigenous healing methods. He describes the body's physical state of strength as being contingent upon a person's spiritual and emotional health: "... it is the individual with a compromised spirit who invites illness and infection. Feelings of spiritual emptiness, depression, and doubt generate conditions that encourage internal cellular breakdown...When the psyche doubts, the cells becomes sluggish. Disease can ensue."<sup>56</sup>

### **Diagnosis**

In all forms of medicine, when a patient comes to a healer with a complaint, a diagnosis must be made before a therapy is prescribed. For shamans, as well as many modern physicians, this phase of treatment involves talking with clients about their physical symptoms, as well as their emotional state and the significant circumstances of their lives. However, there is a key difference between a shamanic and allopathic practitioner's approach to diagnosis. A fundamental aspect of diagnosis for the shaman is their discernment of the energetic basis of the patient's condition as perceived in an altered state of consciousness, or a shamanic journey. The ability to enter this altered state and delve into dimensions other than the material is crucial to the shaman's success as a healer. In traveling to other worlds they engage their helping spirits for the purpose of healing and divination. This is the shaman's unique gift and entails a high level of responsibility to their community.

The ability to “divine” or “see” an illness is an important part of the diagnostic stage of treatment. In Chile and Argentina, shamanic initiates among the Araucanian Indians pray particularly for “internal vision” in order to diagnose illness.<sup>57</sup> Chumash shamans analyze the quality and color of a patient’s aura, to determine the nature of their condition. They call it “Chumash x-ray.”<sup>58</sup> In a similar analogy, Michael Harner describes the Jivaro shaman’s ability to “see into the body of the patient as though it were glass.” The Jivaro dwell in the Ecuadorian Andes and ingest an extract of the ayahuasca vine, a hallucinogen, in order to access the knowledge necessary for diagnosis and healing.<sup>59</sup> The Ojibway shamans, *jessakid*, are chiefly diagnosticians. Among the most common ceremonies performed to reach a conclusion for a patient is the Shaking Tent ritual. During the Shaking Tent ritual the shaman is isolated inside a tent or tipi and communes with spirits to find the cause of an illness. This ritual, performed in a variety of tribes, is particularly taxing for the shaman as it often involves being bound for extended periods of time. In addition to diagnosis, the intention is also to draw the sympathy of the spirits and facilitate healing.<sup>60</sup>

### **Spirit Allies**

It is important to remember that in shamanic healing the spirits actually perform the cure. In the Amazon region it is the “invisible, life-creating *maninkari* spirits...who talk to Ashaninca shamans in their visions and tell them how to heal.”<sup>61</sup> Shamans are conduits to the spirit realm. They allow the power of the spirits to come through them in order to facilitate healing. Acting as a catalyst in this way can be taxing and even dangerous to the shaman, especially when working with the healing technique of

extraction. Shamans can actually be possessed by harmful spirits they have removed from patients, and can also take on their patients' illnesses. This is why the role of the spirit ally is so crucial. The relationship between the spirits and the shaman must be strong and consistent. The shaman puts herself in dangerous situations in order to facilitate healing. The spirits protect her and allow the healing to happen without sacrificing the shaman in the process.

During some types of healing work the shaman actually merges with her helping spirit, embodying the abilities of the spirit in physical form. Often the merging occurs after the shaman has put on a costume depicting the spirit she intends to embody. Dancing, singing and imitation of the spirit (particularly animal spirits) are prevalent in this type of ritual. The following example describes a Zuni ceremony of merging with the spirits:

The Beast Gods are summoned by dancing, rattling, and drumming, and the dancers work themselves into a frenzied condition in which they imitate the actions and cries of the animals. Those dancers assuming the personality of the bear may even wear actual bear paws over their hands. But this dance of the Beast Gods is more than simple imitation, since the Zuni dancer, like a North American Plains Indian doing an Eagle or Buffalo dance, is striving to go beyond imitation to become one with the animal...Likewise, a Zuni dancer wearing a mask of one of the *kachina* gods is doing more than impersonating the *kachina*. Transported into an altered state of consciousness by the dancing, drumming, rattling and

whirr of bull roarers he becomes for the time being the actual embodiment of the spirit which is believed to reside in the mask.<sup>62</sup>

### **Extraction, Laying On of Hands & Psychic Surgery**

Shamans work on many levels, and even the “physical” techniques they use are typically based in spiritual manipulation or treatment. One of the most common ways for a shaman to treat a patient is to perform an extraction. Terms for this genre of healing vary, including laying-on-of-hands and psychic surgery. The methods also vary; however, the basis of the technique, the removal of a foreign spiritual intrusion or energy from a patient’s body, is fairly consistent. Extractions are routinely used to treat physical conditions such as infections or tumors. Shamans work with their hands, sensing and manipulating the patient’s physical and energetic body. Typically they begin with a diagnostic phase. Using hands or another tool to scan the body, shamans detect energetic vibrations in the patient’s body, and ascertain where there is an interruption of the natural state of balance in the patient’s energy field. Many cultures believe this disruption is caused by a “spirit intrusion,” an entity that is attached to the patient and causes harm. Some shamans see this intrusion as a repulsive creature or substance in the patient’s body. Comparable to a surgeon removing a cancerous growth or opening a blocked passageway, the shaman eliminates the source of disease or illness.

As in all healing work, shamans work in close collaboration with their spirit partners while performing extractions or surgery. Sometimes these helping spirits actually sit in the shaman’s mouth, especially when a shaman is “sucking” the harmful

spirit out of a patient. This is dangerous work for the shaman and their confidence in the spirits is absolute. “Shamans ingest and transmute poisons by being completely merged with their helping spirits. In this way the shaman is not hurt, for the spirits take the toxins and transmute them.”<sup>63</sup> The intrusion is sucked into the shaman’s mouth, neutralized by the helping spirits, and then spit out. This way of eliminating disease can induce severe physical reactions in the shaman, including retching and vomiting.

In an Ojibway extraction “the medicine man swallows the hollow bones in such a way that the last one protrudes from his mouth. Through this bone he tries to suck the disease out. He vomits all the tubes out into a basin of water. There, visible to all bystanders, the bones float around together with a small feather or other object, such as a worm, which represents the disease.”<sup>64</sup> Other methods for extraction include sucking, biting, sweeping with feathers, inducing vomiting, and “verbal exorcism,” as among the Tlingits of the Pacific Northwest.<sup>65</sup> Some shamans employ tools to assist in the extraction process. Commonly used tools are feathers, eggs, and quartz crystals. Contemporary shaman Brant Secunda was trained in the Huichol Indian tradition in Mexico. He uses a feather “as an antenna” to “hook” in to the energy field of the patient. He also incorporates prayer, a common element of shamanic healing.<sup>66</sup>

Physicist Dr. Fred Alan Wolf is interested in shamanism and shamanic healing from a scientific perspective. He traveled to the Amazon and took part in a ceremony conducted by Peruvian shaman, Jorge Gonzalez-Ramirez, in Tarapoto. He was suffering from a headache and was successfully treated shamanically using a “kissing-sucking-healing” technique:

He took some of the perfumy liquid that he carried with him in his mouth and spat it on my head. He then put his lips on the top of my head as if to kiss me there, then sucked on my head, drawing the liquid up into his mouth. He turned to the side and spat it out on the ground. He repeated this specifically at a place on my forehead, and then around my sinus regions at my brows... between the kissings and suckings he chanted his healing song.<sup>67</sup>

Essie Parrish, a traditional Pomo “sucking doctor” described locating an intrusion:

Way inside the sick person lying there, there is something. If you put tissue over something, you could see through it. That’s just the way I see it inside. I see what happens there, and I feel it with my hand. I don’t place my hand myself; it feels like someone - the disease - is pulling with a string. And then it touches it. I use my hand and a rattle, and let the voice of the rattle tell me what is happening in the person’s body. I also sometimes use a feather, sweeping it gently through a person’s energy body feeling for the intrusion.<sup>68</sup>

In another method of working, a shaman named Rolling Thunder “poked his client’s skin with an eagle feather until there was a noticeable wincing of discomfort. Rolling Thunder placed his mouth over that point and proceeded to cup the area with his hands, suck it with his mouth and spit copious amounts of a dark red fluid into a

pail.” According to this shaman, the fluid represents the client’s illness. Usually the fluid is tobacco juice or animal blood. Sometimes it is even the shaman’s own blood.<sup>69</sup>

As mentioned earlier in this section, healers often embody the spirits with which they work. While in that merged state, miraculous healings can happen, whether they are visible or invisible. Joao de Deus, a Brazilian healer, performs hundreds of such healings each week. He merges with one of 30 or more spirits that work through him to perform healings. Sometimes these sessions include a visible surgery, where an incision is made in the patient’s flesh and a tumor is removed, and sometimes the work is purely on an energetic level. In both cases patients rarely feel much pain although no anesthesia is used. He has cured hernias, untied a woman’s fallopian tubes and performed heart surgery without making incisions or entering the patients’ bodies in any way (both of these results were verified by x-ray by the patients’ allopathic physicians). He has also scraped cataracts off a man’s eyes, healed the crushed spine of a paraplegic, enabling him to walk, and cured a blind man. Joao is so completely embodied by the spirits he works with that he has no recollection of the miraculous healings he performs.<sup>70</sup>

### **Bringing the Soul Home**

For many groups, including the Pacific Northwest Salish, “...the intrusion diagnosis refers to cases of bodily afflictions – wounds, aches, sore spots, and similar things – the soul or spirit-loss diagnosis focuses on mental disturbances of some sort.”<sup>71</sup> The concept that fragments of a person’s psyche can splinter off during times of crisis or pain is ancient and pervasive. “Soul loss” can result from severe physical or

emotional trauma or injury. Although soul loss is essentially a self-protective reaction to a frightening event, it can cause grave consequences. By not being entirely present in the body during crisis, a person's psyche is shielded from the full impact of trauma. They can be detached or numbed to the complete effect of their pain. However, if that detachment lasts longer than the span of immediate danger it is not healthy and can result in a variety of symptoms, including depression, addiction, immune deficiency disorders, lack of will or power, loss of energy, and the inability to engage productively in one's life.<sup>72</sup> Modern psychology's term for soul loss is "dissociation." Soul retrieval is the shamanic technique used to heal the effects of soul loss:

The shaman is indispensable in any ceremony that concerns experiences of the human soul, as such, that is, as a precarious psychic unit, inclined to forsake the body ... This is why, all through Asia and North America, and elsewhere as well (e.g. Indonesia), the shaman performs the function of doctor and healer; he announces the diagnosis, goes in search of the patient's fugitive soul, captures it, and makes it return to animate the body that it has left.<sup>73</sup>

To retrieve a patient's soul, the shaman journeys with the intent of finding the lost soul parts and reuniting them with the physical body. After identifying a spirit as a fragment of the person's soul, they often communicate with it to determine the nature of the situation that caused its departure. Particularly in neo-shamanic rituals, practitioners confirm the willingness of the soul to return to the body. The shaman then journeys back, holding the lost soul-parts, which are blown into the patient through the top of the head, then through the chest. Shamans from the Haida, and most likely the Tlingit,

groups in Alaska fasted and went into the woods to find the roaming spirits. They would use “soul catchers,” hollow bones used to capture the soul fragments. These soul catchers are often made of bone or shell. The Tsimshian shamans of British Columbia used a soul catcher of hollow bone carved with representations of animal spirits.<sup>74</sup> Quartz crystals are sometimes used in soul retrieval ceremonies. Among the Salish, soul retrievals are often performed during the Spirit Canoe ceremony. In this ritual an assembly of people sit together forming the outline of a canoe. They symbolically row the boat, transporting the shaman in search of the lost soul. After the soul is found the oarsmen return the spirit canoe and the shaman blows the soul part into the patient’s body. Power animals are also retrieved during the Spirit Canoe ceremony.<sup>75</sup>

There are many variations of the mechanics of this technique, but the intention of bringing wholeness and integrity to a person’s psyche or spirit body is universal. If the patient has had complete soul loss he is technically dead, his soul having crossed over. In some of these cases the shaman chases after the soul, venturing into the land of the dead himself in order to return the soul, and life, to the patient. Morgan Moon, a Plains Indian shaman who died in 1944, recounts such an experience. A young boy had been sick, died, and was returned to life by means of a soul retrieval. During this experience, the shaman symbolically dies. “When I [die] my soul [goes] to the world of the departed to hunt the boy’s soul.” When he came back he described finding the boy’s soul on the other side of the mountains playing with other dead boys, and that he had a difficult time persuading him to come back.<sup>76</sup>

Sandra Ingerman is considered the foremost Western expert on the soul retrieval technique. To determine the appropriateness of conducting a soul retrieval for

contemporary patients she recommends permitting the patient to self diagnose.<sup>77</sup> She describes the soul retrieval technique, and then typically relies on the clients' sense of their own condition to determine the appropriateness of doing a retrieval. There are some characteristic accounts that indicate soul retrieval should be considered as a treatment option. For example, when a patient says they "have never felt the same" since a particular event, or they don't feel "fully present in their body" or they feel like "a part of them is missing." Ingerman also emphasizes that what is returning to the patient is actually "neutral essence." Describing the "soul parts" as separate beings with a story to tell is only for purposes of explaining the events and issues surrounding the soul loss to the client. She also stresses that events depicted in journeys are commonly metaphorical, intended to convey information that is specifically relevant to the client, but not necessarily literal.<sup>78</sup>

Soul retrieval can have profound physical and psychological effects, and may provide one of the most effective bridges between traditional shamanic healing and contemporary psychology. Despite obvious differences in philosophy, the two modalities share a common belief that people who have suffered severe crisis often respond holistically. The psychological and spiritual anguish that survivors of accidents, abuse or illness have endured is sometimes far deeper than physical wounds might indicate. Since shamanism and psychotherapy concur that a person's psyche often responds to acute pain by avoidance and separation from the self, it is plausible that soul retrieval can complement Western psychotherapy in a holistic plan of treatment. In Journeying: Where Shamanism and Psychology Meet, Dr. Jeannette Gagan investigates the factors involved in blending these modalities effectively. One

branch of psychology, *transpersonal psychology*, shares much with shamanism: the exploration of states of consciousness, concern with cosmology, unity and transcendence of the personal perspective, and validation and work with intrapersonal and transpersonal experiences, particularly of a spiritual nature. Adherents of different branches of psychology vary in their level of comfort with shamanic techniques. Empirical therapists tend to disregard the spiritual elements of psychology, while Jungians, humanists and transpersonal therapists typically feel at home engaging the spiritual realm in their practice. Gagan asserts that they are all engaging, either intentionally or unintentionally, in some shamanic-like practices, drawing on the psyche and the realm of their patient's spirit in healing work. The most effective treatments call on the deeper levels of the patient's mind and soul to work together to bring about balance and healing. She says, "The meeting of shamanic spirit and psychological mind animates the heart of holism."<sup>79</sup>

### **Power Animal Retrieval**

Similar to soul retrieval, power animal retrieval captures a resource that the patient was missing, restoring vigor and balance. However, instead of a fragment of the psyche, a power animal retrieval reunites the patient with an animal spirit. This spirit ally provides security, assistance, and guidance. Loss of power exhibits in an assortment of ways: lack of success, chronic bad luck, being accident prone, or feeling depleted and without energy. Most shamanic cultures incorporate the belief in guardian spirits in animal form. The Salish shamans of the Puget Sound region commonly link the loss of a guardian spirit or power animal to a patient's misfortune or illness.<sup>80</sup>

To retrieve a power animal, the shaman typically undertakes a journey to the lower world and asks if a power animal is willing to connect with the patient. They wait for one to appear, and for it to present itself four times. Often the spirit is asked directly if it is a power animal for the patient. Once identified, the spirit is brought back and blown into the patient through the top of the head and chest, as in a soul retrieval.<sup>81</sup> Power animal retrieval reconnects patients with their own spiritual resources for guidance and protection. Once reconnected with their guardian spirits or power animals, people are often more easily able to tap into their own intuition and innate healing abilities.

Working with the power of animal spirits has a beneficial impact on people in contemporary cultures today. Myron Eshowsky is a contemporary practitioner of core shamanism and a therapist practicing in a community mental health facility in Madison, Wisconsin. He was working with a 47-year-old woman with a rare liver illness who showed a variety of symptoms, including “yellow skin, severe edema, red dots of burst blood vessels covering her whole body, severe exhaustion (walking up five or six stairs necessitated hours of rest)” and depression. After one year of treatment there were no significant results. Myron instructed her to journey to meet her power animal and explains the experience as follows:

One year of treatment had yielded no improvements. Because I did not know what else to do, I had her do a journey to meet her power animal. She had a delightful experience doing this.

In the journey, she found herself at a beautiful pond. There she was met by a large dog. She learned that this was her power animal and

asked his assistance in healing her illness. He instructed her to take off all her clothes. She lay down by the pond and a beam of light, filtered through a crystal in the sky, flooded her body in a rainbow of colors. The dog then licked her entire body. She came back from her journey saying she had more energy than she had felt since getting ill.

Two days later she called and said that the swelling in her body was reducing, the yellow hue to her skin was leaving, and the red dots were disappearing. Two weeks later, the doctors reported that her illness was in complete remission. The doctors could not explain the change and cautioned that a relapse could happen... For the past several years, I regularly get a card from her stating another year has gone by without a relapse.<sup>82</sup>

Eshowsky believes that connecting with our animal spirits can be an important part of the healing process, facilitating a rejuvenation of our own spirit through the power of the animals. “Whenever I think of how we are going to heal as wounded animals on this Planet, I can’t help but think that connecting to one’s own power animals and learning from them is a crucial link in healing the human spirit.”<sup>83</sup>

### **Plant Medicine**

Shamans and traditional healers in most cultures utilized plants to treat the sick. The use of medicinal herbs and plants had a spiritual as well as a physical component. Indigenous healers’ vast knowledge of the healing properties of local flora may be their greatest contribution to “modern” medicine to date. It is an area of traditional healing

more easily accepted by doctors and scientists with a contemporary Western perspective, as the properties of the plants can be observed and tested scientifically. Native North Americans used indigenous plants extensively for healing. Mosses and fungi were used to dress wounds, sweetgrass acted as a protective amulet, and calamus root was given for stomachache.<sup>84</sup> Dr. Arviso Alvord describes the Native Americans gift to the medical world:

Their contributions to pharmacology alone were staggering, as Western medicine had adopted many Indian cures. Quinine, used to treat malaria, had been brought to Western attention by the indigenous people of Peru; a bark from an evergreen tree was given by the Hurons to the French explorer Jacques Cartier to treat scurvy; Indians taught Europeans how to use the bark of the willow to cure pain – which eventually led to the development of aspirin.<sup>85</sup>

Often the discovery of healing plants was made in a scientific fashion, through close observation and trial and error. By watching animals' behavior – whether they ingested a plant, avoided it, or sought it out when ill – the shaman could deduce some potential medicinal uses of a plant. Sometimes they acted as guinea pigs and experimented on themselves. In these ways the shaman can be considered the first scientist.<sup>86</sup>

However, the basis of the use of plants in healing usually has a spiritual component, as well as the more easily documented physical one. And although the tangible nature of plants promotes healing in and of itself, the spiritual nature of the plant is of primary interest to shamans. They believed the spirit aspect of the plant actually prompted a healing response. Often the curative properties of plants were

revealed through journeying or communicating with the plants directly. Biologist Lyall Watson describes the shamanic approach to identifying healing plants in Madagascar. He describes the vast number of plant species on the island and how healers have to choose the exact species, the specific part of the plant to use, the season in which to pick it, the method of preparation and the ailment it can treat. He believed they must have been assisted somehow in gleaning the medicinal gems from this enormous pool of choices. “The help it seems comes from the plants themselves. When Watson asked traditional healers how they know an extract from the leaves of a local flowering plant picked in the spring, is good for what they call “milky blood,” he always gets the same answer, ‘Oh, it’s easy,’ they say, ‘we ask the plants.’” The effectiveness of this method was demonstrated to Watson when he realized that “milky blood” was leukemia and the Madagascar periwinkle that the natives use to treat it is the same plant from which a major pharmaceutical company derives substances used in their medicines, also to treat leukemia.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to plants and herbs used to treat specific ailments, shamans held some plants in especially high esteem because they were deemed sacred and induced a heightened state of awareness and knowledge when ingested. These plants were actually considered to be spirit beings that communicated with the shaman and imparted wisdom and information used for healing. Many of these sacred plants, such as ayahuasca and datura, had hallucinogenic properties. Nevill Drury distinguishes the sacred use of particular hallucinogens from other types of uses:

These plants do not simply modify mood but are capable of producing dramatic and often profound change in perception. Colours are

enhanced, spirits may appear, the sacramental plant appears god-like to the shaman who has invoked it ceremonially, and perhaps a cosmic bridge or smoke tunnel appears in the shaman's vision, allowing him to ascend to the heavens. In every way the sacred plant is a doorway to a realm that is awesome and wondrous, and the undertaking is not one which is taken lightly...(T)he ritual use of hallucinogenic plants is not recreational but *transformative* – one undertakes the vision-quest to 'learn' or to 'see.'<sup>88</sup>

### **The Shaman as Psychopomp**

Responsibility for their patients does not stop when the patients die. Shamans are active in assuring the peaceful existence of a person's body and spirit while they live, and are equally concerned with the state of their soul after death. By acting as psychopomp, literally "conductor of souls," the shaman guides recently deceased or confused souls through the landscape of the spirit world safely to their appropriate resting place. The premise is that a person may become lost or confused after death, unsure of what has happened and unable to negotiate the world in the new state in which they find themselves. Shamans, having lived with one foot in ordinary reality and one foot in non-ordinary reality, are familiar with the state of existence that is nonphysical. They are able to help steer lost spirits in the right direction, allowing them to move into the next phase of existence peacefully and with as little trauma as possible. Shamans are particularly adept at this role of post mortem escort because they've often faced their own death during initiations. Their excursions deep into the spiritual terrain

have brought them to worlds the average person sees only after their physical life is over.

Among the Manacica of South America, the shaman dons the role of psychopomp immediately after the funeral has finished. For them, “The road is extremely long and difficult; travelers on it go through a virgin forest, climb a mountain, cross seas, streams, and swamps, until they come to the shore of a great river, which they must cross by a bridge guarded by a divinity. Without the shaman’s help, the soul could never make the journey.”<sup>89</sup> The role of the shaman as psychopomp is analogous to that of a midwife. The “shaman acts like the antipode of the midwife. The midwife sees to the birth of a new soul. The shaman deals with the death of the soul.”<sup>90</sup>

Holger Kalweit, a German ethnopsychologist, asserts that practically all of the shamanic traditions in the world have reference to the shaman working in this capacity. He states that the ability to travel in the “afterlife realm” is one of the most universal requirements for a shaman. He also notes that near death experiences are documented to be the catalyst for a shaman’s calling among many cultures, including the Oglala Sioux, the Kenyan Kikuyu, the Siberian Yakut and the Indonesian Mentawai Islanders.<sup>91</sup> He goes further in crediting the shamans’ proficiency in psychopomp work, “In light of the revolutionary findings of recent research into the nature of dying and death, we can no longer look upon tribal religions and their ideas about the World of the Dead as limited conceptions. [Rather] the shaman should be considered as a most up-to-date and knowledgeable psychologist.”<sup>92</sup>

Psychopomp work is performed today within the context of therapeutic mental health treatment. Myron Eshowsky has documented many cases where this traditional technique has proved effective in treating mentally ill patients. In one case, Eshowsky was treating a difficult psychological case, a woman with a history of schizophrenia, drug addiction, severe auditory hallucinations and multiple suicide attempts. Many psychotropic medications and other forms of treatment had been tried with minimal success. She had a three year old son with whom she was very close. One day, when she was at work, her boyfriend murdered her son. After his death she became psychotic and had to be hospitalized immediately. She was delusional and insisted that her son was not dead. She repeatedly attempted suicide. Here is the story that Myron told of her condition and the shamanic work he did as a psychopomp to aid in her treatment:

My graduate student noted that no one had ever tried to help her grieve her loss — mostly she had been confronted again and again with the fact that her son was dead. In my own mind, I wondered if a spiritual understanding would lead to a different approach in this woman's case. I had my student learn more about the murder of the young son, in particular, where it had occurred.

I told my student I was going to do an experiment and I would tell her when I had done it. The student was to then tell me if she noticed any difference in the woman's mental status. I journeyed to see if the young boy's soul had not yet left the Middle World. I found him in the house where he had lived, calling for his mommy. He was quite frightened and I spent much time calming him down. He told me many

details of what had happened (details previously unknown to me, which I later was able to confirm). Then doing psychopomp work, I was able to help his soul leave the Middle World.

The results were staggering. My student reported that her client, by all parties' reports, had stopped talking to or about her son. It was as if a cloud had been lifted from her and she had awakened. The suicide gestures stopped and over time she was able to live in a group home and work part-time in competitive employment. With counseling, she began to grieve the loss of her son. The traumas she had endured had made it hard for her to survive without a great deal of community support. I have never met this woman. I do know she has had a stable life over the last few years without a recurrence of her troubling symptoms.<sup>93</sup>

This is a prime example of how traditional techniques, even if considered odd or unfounded to scientists or allopathic doctors, can facilitate healing for people today in non-tribal cultures. In his work in Madison, Eshowsky reports that in working with many clients with "acute episodes of psychotic break" two-thirds of them had immediate relief from auditory hallucinations. And over half were able to function without psychotropic medications or major community support interventions."<sup>94</sup> Statistics such as these warrant a closer look at the potential role traditional shamanic healing techniques have in a psychological therapeutic model.

## Ceremonial Healing

Shamanic healing work is so steeped in ritual that it almost doesn't make sense to talk about healing ceremonies in a separate section. However, since specific rituals have been used repeatedly over generations it is worth noting that there is a spectrum of ritual work in traditional shamanic cultures. Individual shamans have their own rites, songs, dances and incantations, but there are also cultural rites that remain fairly consistent when performed by *different* shamans of the same tribe. The Snake Dance is often used in Cherokee healing ceremonies.<sup>95</sup> The Ojibway Shaking Tent ceremony and the Lakota Yuwipi ceremony have some similarities. The shaman is isolated or tied up generating attention from the spirit world intended to bring healing to the observers.<sup>96</sup> The songs of the Blessing Way ceremonies of the Navajo are used to bring peace to veterans returning from wars. It "cleanses them of *ch'i indis* or their recurring dreams of spirits of the dead." Other Blessing Way ceremonies are performed for young girls when they reach puberty.<sup>97</sup> Rituals to offer honor elements of nature, like the wind and rain, help enlist the assistance of those forces, which can be vital to crop growing and the water supply. Performing ceremonies and offering gifts to ancestral spirits encourages them to remain close and help guide their families. The Tamang people, a culturally Tibetan group living in Nepal, have a ritual, or *puja*, performed with the intention of the participants actually embodying the spirit of a deceased ancestor.<sup>98</sup> Ceremonies are not usually performed by rote or following a script. There are some songs or dances that are consistent, but leading a ceremony involves being highly attuned to the spirits. It is the active connection to the spirits, the focus and

concentration of the shaman and the participants that create effective healing ceremonies.

Ceremonial work is not usually an aspect of the clinical medical system as we know it today. There simply isn't time. The model under which most doctors are working demands they use their time with each patient "efficiently," diagnosing quickly and accurately with input mostly from observation of the patient's physical body and analysis of test results. But there are physicians who recognize the benefits of ritual healing work and use ceremony both outside and within clinical settings. Navajo surgeon Dr. Lori Arviso Alvord draws on the power of ceremony in her work. She has witnessed the benefits of incorporating the spiritual world of her patients' religious and life philosophies into her work in hospitals. She also recognizes the power of a group's intention to affect the health of a member of their community. She describes one Navajo healing ceremony she attended:

All the people were there to help the girl get well – and she must be aware of the power of their collected presences around her, I thought. She could feel, see and smell the Yeibechei medicine. It was hypnotic: the repetitive chants, the smell, swirl and sting of woodsmoke, the rattles and rhythms of the drums, the appearance and disappearance of the groups of dancers. In spite of my medical training, I knew that being surrounded by one's family and greater community for nine days, and seeing dancing gods smudged with gray ash, bringing healing chants from the dark mesa beyond the bonfires, would have a very positive effect on her condition, whatever it may be. Ceremonies are magical and

powerful things. A spiritual intensity and an energy surrounds the healing ceremony that is almost completely absent in Western medicine.<sup>99</sup>

Dr. Lewis Mehl-Madrona has been a physician for over twenty years. He has a strong clinical and research background and is working to integrate indigenous and western healing modalities. He believes that “Ceremony creates the magic that allows healing to happen. It doesn’t much matter which ceremony, as long as both the healer and the supplicants believe in it.” He asserts that ritual and ceremony used in modern medical treatment are especially powerful in returning a patient to health: “Ceremonial treatment methods are the most powerful I have encountered. Time and time again I have had the experience of working for weeks with a patient to change a situation, or improve a physical symptom, almost without results. Then we would do a ritual together, and an immutable problem would transform literally overnight.”<sup>100</sup>

### **The Healing Power of Sound**

>From the beginning of recorded time people have contended that words and sounds have tremendous power to create and heal. The New Testament of the Bible relates that God said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>101</sup> Some traditional Latin American cultures believe the world was actually sung into existence by the non-ordinary realms, created out of nothingness from the vibrational tones of sound. As Martin Prechtel relates: “The Mayans say that the other world sings us into being. We are its song. We’re made of sounds, and as the sound passes through the sieve between this world and the other world, it takes the

shape of birds, grass, tables – all these things are made of sound.”<sup>102</sup> Vedic and shamanic chants have been used throughout the world to invoke healing. In ancient Egypt some words were never spoken because of the conviction that they were so powerful that physical change beyond human control would manifest upon their utterance. This faith in the power of language is expressed across cultures and across philosophies. In fact, according to Robert Gass, one of the definitions of the word healing is “to make sounds.”<sup>103</sup> Through singing, storytelling, chanting, toning, speaking and praying, shamans and practitioners of different philosophies around the world bring harmony and health into the lives of their patients. Of the many tools shamans employ, their faculty with words and sound is attributed with some of the greatest curative power. Shamans sing to call in their spirit helpers, to describe their journeys, to celebrate and honor the earth, and to convey words of hope and joy to sick and despairing patients. The act of vocalizing also helps shamans separate from their egos and slip more easily into the realm of non-ordinary reality. It can facilitate trance states and other altered states of consciousness. The rhythmic drum and rattle beats used when journeying are hypnotic; shamans are *driven* to the other worlds, riding on the beat of the drum.

Specific songs are used in ceremonies for different purposes. Shamanism was often taught as an oral tradition. Shamans in training spent long years memorizing and practicing ceremonial songs. Particular words and songs are used to treat specific illnesses. Michael Harner talks about “word” doctoring among the Sami people of Lapland and Norway, where they used specific phrases to heal conditions such as headaches.<sup>104</sup> Shamans also have their own power songs that present to them in

journeys and bring them strength when sung. *Arcanas*, magical songs used by the *ayahuasquero* shamans in Bolivia, are sung to weave “magical protections” and *icaros*, or medicine songs, are used to heal.<sup>105</sup> The medicine songs of the Kung! Bushmen are believed to have a “supernatural potency” called *ntum*. Dancing to rhythmic clapping and chanting was believed to activate the *ntum*, which they feel as a “physical substance in the pit of their stomach.”<sup>106</sup> Navajo healing rituals typically involve singing over the person to be healed. The songs often express the mythology of the origin of the ritual and the rules for performing it. Hundreds of songs may be included in just one ceremony. The Blessing Way ceremony alone has over three hundred songs. The singers need to be highly skilled, as it is believed that singing the song incorrectly can actually harm the patient.<sup>107</sup>

In her practice Sandra Ingerman uses the idea of a power song to help clients reconnect with their own center and strength:

Today many people complain of feeling a lack of power in their bodies and in their lives. I have found through my own spiritual practice that by singing any one of my power songs, I not only feel expansive, but also get a concrete feeling of tremendous power, felt as life force and energy filling my body. I advise my clients and students who complain about depression and powerlessness to sing a power song of their creation. It works every time.<sup>108</sup>

Contemporary and traditional shamans share the viewpoint that as humans we hold a tremendous influence over our world, that through the use of our voices and language we can affect that world for better or worse. In a sense, we create our reality

by the way we describe it. We bring our health into existence by our belief and expression of the state of health. Ken Wilber states this concept eloquently. “Language does not merely report the world, represent the world, describe the world. Rather, language creates worlds, and in that creation is power.”<sup>109</sup> The power he refers to is well understood by shamans. They take great pains over the choice of words used in healing rituals; they take care to leave patients with hope and faith in their own healing. Ingerman describes this as planting seeds of hope rather than seeds of fear. In doing soul retrieval work, the story of what the shaman saw on the journey and the way it is conveyed to the patient is as important as the work done on the non-physical level. In many journeys the shaman feels the trauma and pain experienced by the patient in the events of their past. If the shaman returned from the journey and focused on the painful incidents instead of the healing and rejuvenation that had taken place, the patient would also focus on their painful past, missing the opportunity to move out of that state and into a more healthful and balanced mind-set. In this way the shamans helps mold the reality of the patient, and this responsibility is not to be born lightly. Shamans are consistently indebted to the spirit world for empowering and trusting them to practice in an honorable, careful and nurturing way. They pay that debt in many ways, especially through song. Prechtel describes this symbiotic relationship as linked to the power of sound to nurture and sustain all worlds. “Human beings, with our own sounds, can feed the other world in return, to fatten those in the other world up, so they can continue to sing.”<sup>110</sup>

## **The Vital Role of Love and Compassion**

Love and compassion are fundamental elements of spiritual healing work. At its very basis shamanic healing is dependent on the benevolence of spirits who take pity on human beings. Whether they are ancestral spirits, or just kind ones, they are not obligated to act in partnership with humans to bring harmony to our planet and the creatures who dwell here. They do it because they are loving. Shamans must be compassionate to act as conduits, allowing healing power from the spirit world to be transferred to this one. They must be motivated by genuine empathy and humaneness for their healing partnership with the spirits to remain strong.

Part of creating a space where healing can take place is for the shaman to venture outside herself - to step outside her ego. The shaman's experience as a human enables her to relate to the pain and suffering experienced in this world. However, her challenge is to wed that genuine personal understanding to power which comes only from moving entirely outside of herself. Ingerman describes her personal experience with entering this profound state while doing shamanic healing work: "...my energy feels so expansive I can't imagine any building that could contain it, and I am in a state of egoless divine love. Some shamans burst into tears as they sing because of the love that is coursing through their heart."<sup>111</sup>

This principle of loving interaction is ubiquitous in spiritual healing work, not exclusively in shamanic work. Prayer of all denominations is based on the power of selfless, compassionate intention. Dr. Ron Roth, a spiritual healer and former Catholic priest, refers to Jesus' non-judgmental attitude towards healing his people: "(T)his quality of unconditional love is the most important attribute we can bring with us to our

healing work – whether for ourselves or for others...”<sup>112</sup> Larry Dossey describes what he believes allows long-distance and other non-local healing work to be successful regardless of the denominations of the participants. “I believe the vital ingredient is *love* – a state of caring and compassion that is so deep and genuine that the barriers we erect around the self are transcended.”<sup>113</sup> Lawrence LeShan, a pioneer in the area of spiritual healing, conducted experiments with “psychic healers.” The most successful outcomes seemed to be predicated on the healer’s ability to “merge” with the client in an attitude of “love and concern.”<sup>114</sup>

Without love the shaman, or any other spiritual healer, is simply practicing a technique. Techniques are not enough to affect deep change. Love is the fundamental substance of spirit. Love is the fuel on which humans transport themselves into a state of harmony and compassion, a state where they can heal themselves and their fellow inhabitants of the earth, indeed the earth itself. Wilber expresses his belief in how love is the key to finding our true spirits and indeed Spirit itself:

From the time before time, from the very beginning, the Good, the True and the Beautiful were Spirit whispering to us from the deepest sources of our own true being, calling to us from the essence of our own estate, a whispering voice that always said, love to infinity and find me there, love to eternity and I will be there, love to the boundless corners of the Kosmos and all will be shown to you.<sup>115</sup>

## **CHAPTER 5. SPIRIT AFFECTING MATTER & SHAMANIC HEALING TODAY**

As we've seen, shamanic healing techniques, although based in ancient knowledge and customs, are still being practiced today. Some practitioners work within the social context of a tribe or cultural group. For others it is through what some have labeled "neo-shamanism," or a practice like Harner's core shamanism. Increasingly, modern shamanic practitioners are looking to integrate their knowledge of ancient healing techniques (whether culturally based or not) with contemporary healing modalities, such as psychotherapy or even surgical practice. I believe these practitioners hold a key to the evolution of healing today. Their philosophy is not regressive, meaning a romantic desire to return to pre-historical times and use only indigenous knowledge, forsaking modern medicine. It is progressive in the attempt to glean the most effective elements from each healing paradigm and merge them into a synthesized whole that is greater than either standing individually.

### **Modern Native Healers**

Dr. Lori Arviso Alvord has evolved her healing practice into an integrated system of modern and traditional techniques. As a Navajo, she is familiar with Navajo healing traditions, but decided to focus on modern methods and became a surgeon. In the process she lost touch with many of the lessons she learned living in a Navajo community. Subsequently, she became a typical mainstream physician, caring for the bodies, but not necessarily the psyches or cultural predilections, of her patients. She decided she needed to find a common ground, a place where she could help her

community with modern medicine in a way that respected its beliefs and integrated them into the healing process.

Working from within the hospital system she brought in traditional methods where they benefited the patients. She discovered that patients had better clinical outcomes when they were seen by a *haatalii*, a Navajo shaman. In her area in Arizona, the Indian Health Services facilities are accommodating traditional healers and shamans in hospitals and some are even building *kivas* or holy ceremonial rooms right into the hospital.<sup>116</sup>

In one powerful scene she describes a medicine man performing a ceremony in a hospital room filled with high tech equipment:

In his hand the *haatalii* held a feather and a bowl of sacred water. He began to sing. Amid the brand-new computers with their readouts of heart tracings, the oxygen equipment that fed patients vital gases, and the IV bags that dripped nourishment and medicine into patients' veins, among the new, special ICU beds and the most high-tech equipment in the whole hospital, the ancient man walked. He stepped over to the row of doctors and waved an eagle feather. Over each of our bodies, he twirled the feather and then sprinkled us with water. His voice rang out, rhythmic and atonal, that familiar sound of Navajo chants, a series of glottal stops and resonating notes that seemed to come from deep inside. I remembered this healing sound from the furthest reaches of my childhood. This ceremony medicine could make it possible for Navajo patients to feel safe being treated in the new ICU.<sup>117</sup>

In recognition of the value of traditional healers working with their native populations, the National Institute of Mental Health has begun financing the training of medicine men in *Diné'tah*, the place of the Navajo people.<sup>118</sup>

Rita Blumenstein practices traditional medicine in Alaska. She is the first certified tribal doctor to practice in Southcentral Foundation's Traditional Healing Program and has an office in the Anchorage Primary Care Center. The hospital requires that a doctor become certified before practicing on site. Typically that certification is based on education, postgraduate training, test scores and a doctor's malpractice history. Blumenstein is not an M.D.; however, the Southcentral Foundation's elders' council certified her based on the gift of healing she has had since childhood. She has worked with herbs and through laying on of hands for as long as she can remember. Her first memory is of healing her mother of infected wounds from dog bites. She described feeling compelled to put her hands on the wounds. A "tired feeling" crept up her arms to her shoulders, at which time she shook her arms out, dispelling the fatigue, and put her little hands back on her mother. She worked with only her hands until her mother was well. The Southcentral Foundation allowed her to practice part time and with no formal title. Over time she worked on developing the program, training other healers and attending conferences. Eventually the Alaska Native Medical Center's Joint Operating Board drafted a tribal-healer job description, which determined which practices could be performed at the facility. A friend described her uses of touch to heal a man with severe abdominal pain. She touched the man's belly and diagnosed him with bleeding ulcers. After following her prescribed treatment, the man's ulcers went away.

Rita straddles the ancient and modern worlds of healing. She provides a model for advancing the state of cooperation between traditional and allopathic models. Bob Chaney is a psychologist at Southcentral Foundation's Primary Care Center. He allows his patients to use both modern and traditional healing techniques. He comments on Blumenstein's impact on the way healing is perceived. "I think what she reminds us of is the world functions really as a whole. Our body functions as a whole."<sup>119</sup> There are plans underway to employ more tribal doctors at the hospital.

Tela Star Hawk Lake is a Native American shaman practicing on her tribal lands in northwestern California, near the Pacific Ocean and the Klamath River. She works with many healing methods, including herbal remedies and healing ceremonies. She describes one case where she helped cure a relative of alcoholism. She used herbal treatments, including mugwort, in a sacred sweatlodge. She performed rituals for her every evening and consulted with the spirits about "her sins and violations, inherited sins, and crimes she had committed against Nature, her people, the Creator's Laws, and against herself." She also worked in a counseling capacity to help the woman talk about her life circumstances, the "sins" she wanted to confess, and ways she could live a healthier life in the future. Within a month the woman was seemingly healthy and not actively using alcohol, she had a new job, new home, new friends and was becoming active in the traditional spiritual and cultural activities of her tribe.<sup>120</sup>

### **Core Shamanic Practitioners**

In the Piedmont region of North Carolina, shamanic practitioner Marcia Herman-Giddens has helped many people as a shamanic practitioner. Several of her

clients agreed to talk with me about their experiences working with Marcia and other shamanic practitioners. Susan (name has been changed) had recently lost her mother after years of acting as her primary care giver. She was deeply grieving and felt she needed to turn her attention to her own health after almost 20 years of caring for her ill parents. She worked with Marcia and another practitioner in upstate New York. Through the soul retrieval process and with some intense ceremonial work, Susan felt more aware that she'd "lost" herself to her mother, who had Alzheimer's and required a great deal of care. She worked with Marcia to design a ritual that involved using a fire circle to help Susan further her healing by releasing any attachments she had to others. Susan said, "just being a participant in the ritual in and of itself was healing."<sup>121</sup>

Extraction work was also part of her experience with shamanic healing. A married couple, both shamanic practitioners, worked on Susan together, each using different techniques to diagnose her condition. They had no knowledge of Susan or her physical ailment, but both returned and independently mentioned three areas of concern, Susan's left hip and thigh, her right ear, and her head. These corresponded exactly with where Susan was experiencing pain or had a chronic condition. After the extraction, she felt the most dramatic change in her hip area. "My leg and hip felt a whole lot better almost immediately." She described that she felt no pain for up to a week and then significant improvement for a few months after. Another therapist who was treating Susan's hip condition remarked excitedly upon her return, "What have you been doing? Your hip has opened up!" Unfortunately, the problem worsened again later, which Susan attributes to neglecting to care for the area.

Another client of Herman-Giddens is also a psychotherapist. Kathryn MacVicker went to Marcia in a dire state of health. She became ill and deteriorated so rapidly that she needed to be hospitalized. The physicians couldn't figure out what was wrong with her and there was serious concern that she might not survive. After feeling as if she was losing control of decisions regarding her treatment, she decided she needed to try a different approach to healing. She refused all medications and against the doctor's advice, she left the hospital and went home to work on healing herself. Kathryn felt she needed to "call her spirit back" and reconnect to her own sources of healing. A friend suggested that she see Marcia. Marcia did a soul retrieval and an extraction during their first session. Kathryn says her "health dramatically changed from that session. My whole immune system kicked in." For Kathryn, this powerful experience confirmed that she wanted a team of health providers, not just physicians, but shamanic practitioners, homeopaths and other "alternative" therapists. She continued to work with a variety of techniques, including Western medicine and medications, to treat her condition, which was eventually diagnosed as a combination of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme's disease. Kathryn jokes, "I wouldn't go to the hospital now without my shaman! It's essential."

She knew nothing about shamanism before the session, but felt such remarkable physical changes after doing shamanic work that she realized some of her own patients might be helped as well. Kathryn has an interesting perspective on shamanic healing and traditional therapy. Being trained as a nurse and a psychotherapist, she knew the strengths and the limitations of that approach. After her personal experience in shamanic healing, she believed there was an opportunity to give her clients a new

option. She talked with a few of her clients whom she knew well and knew were open to exploring alternative techniques. One of those client's, Brenda (name has been changed), survived a horrendous trauma and had been working to regain her balance ever since. Her husband tried to kill her by slitting her throat and her wrists. Brenda lived in terror that he was going to try to kill her again, since he was released from prison a short time after the attack. Marcia worked with Brenda and performed a soul retrieval. One of the most beneficial aspects of the healing for Brenda was that Marcia was able to describe details of the night of the attack, details that no one else knew. Brenda was deeply impacted because it gave her evidence that she was not alone. She had struggled with loneliness, depression and a sense of isolation for many years. By knowing that spirits or guardians were there with her, or simply that "someone" was there with her that night, Brenda was able to gain a renewed sense of protection and strength. Kathryn worked with Brenda in their therapy sessions to process this new healing. Her therapy moved to a new level. MacVicker quotes Sandra Ingerman as saying, "there is only so far you can go when there's nobody home." By having more of her essence or energy available, Brenda was able to heal at a deeper level. The therapy was only going to take Brenda so far, Kathryn said, until we had those pieces of her back. "It's blended beautifully," MacVicker says, referring to the integration of shamanic healing and traditional psychotherapy in Brenda's treatment.

Kathryn presents the option of shamanic healing to a select group of clients for whom she feels it is appropriate. Kathryn describes the shamanic work to clients before bringing them to Marcia, letting them know that it doesn't "feel weird"; that for her it felt "very normal." This preparation may help her clients be in a relaxed and open state

once they see Herman-Giddens. She cites depression as a good example of an illness that may respond well to shamanic healing techniques. “Depression is so widespread in this culture, especially with women, and I think a lot of those issues have to do with real soul loss.” However, she relates that many of her clients with various conditions could have been helped by doing shamanic work. Working as an intermediary between these two modalities gives MacVicker a unique perspective. After doing shamanic work, she saw a “tremendous need to process, to focus on what came back and not to focus on the trauma any more.” She was able to reinforce what new qualities of energy came back for her clients without getting stuck in the trauma itself. “We can deal with who you are with this new piece, that whole welcoming home of this new person, a whole complete person.” Kathryn has actually stopped practicing as a traditional therapist, except with the clients who are doing shamanic healing work as well. It became too restrictive for her. “Traditional psychotherapy is really limited. People get stuck. It is great hooking it with shamanism.”<sup>122</sup>

I’ve described some of Myron Eshowsky’s successes in using traditional shamanic healing techniques in the modern mental health system. Within that system he has had “hundreds of opportunities to apply ancient knowledge to modern problems.” He described it as a “proving ground for returning shamanism to the community setting.” Eshowsky is sensitive to the diversity of the U.S population. Some of the immigrant populations are more accustomed to working with traditional healers than with Western medical doctors. This can cause a significant level of apprehension, as these people do not feel safe or comfortable working with methods that they don’t understand or are not familiar with. For example, many Mexican-

Americans work regularly with *curanderos*, local traditional healers. Eshowsky describes working with one Mexican-American mother of three who had cancer. Even though the doctors were telling her that her condition was treatable with radiation and surgery, she didn't believe them. These cures did not exist in her consciousness as treatments that would make her well. She believed that an evil spirit was punishing her. She agreed to work with Myron because her therapist explained that he worked with spirits to facilitate healing. He had her do a journey and speak to a power animal. The spirit animal told her that she would get well by working with the American doctors. Eshowsky also did extraction work and Harner Method Shamanic Counseling with her. She was transformed from a woman who was actively seeking her death, who had no will to live and no hope of a cure, to someone who "became alive with energy and stopped giving up." Her cancer was cured.<sup>123</sup>

### **Working on Water**

Shamanic and ritual healing work can affect bodies of water as well as human bodies. Sandra Ingerman has recently focused her attention on transmuting toxins in polluted water. She intends to put traditional shamanic techniques and other spiritual methods into action to heal the planet. Appropriately, she is beginning with water, the foundation of all life. In order to glean quantitative data from her work, she designed an experiment to test the level of toxicity of the water to be treated before and after she and a group of fellow healers performed their healing ceremonies. She used deionized water contaminated with ammonium hydroxide. Ammonium hydroxide is a common pollutant that comes from decaying vegetable matter or as a by-product of human or

animal waste. When ammonium hydroxide was added, the water became very alkaline. Plain, uncontaminated water has a ph of 5.5. After the ammonium hydroxide was added the ph level jumped to 12. The water was poisonous to drink in that state. Her group worked for days, journeying and preparing for the ceremony to attempt to transmute the water. During the ritual, they used drumming, rattling, chanting and singing. The water was tested again after the ceremony was complete and the ph level had gone down to a 9. Water with a ph level of 9 is safe to drink. These results are remarkable.

Without physically touching the water they were able to clear it of a deadly toxin, changing water from a level that might kill you to one that would just taste bad. In this experiment spiritual techniques had a dramatic impact on a physical body, in this case a body of water. The human body is mostly water. If energetic methods of healing can produce such exciting results in restoring water to health, it is not much of a leap to assert that they can do the same for a human being. The shamans' ability to affect water through ritual and intention was used here to clean polluted water. The *kahuna* healers use a related concept. They take ordinary water and imbue it with healing properties by "focusing *mana*" out of their hands or through their breath while visualizing a healing image. Experiments conducted at McGill University investigated the use of water "charged" by a healer. In this case the healer held bottles of water for a certain period of time each day. Plants watered from those bottles grew significantly better than those watered from the "uncharged" bottles.<sup>124</sup>

## **Affecting Body Temperature Using Shamanic Journeying**

For my research I designed an experiment to determine if the physical body can be affected by shamanic journeying in a measurable way that can stand up to scientific examination. The experiment and the statistical analysis of the results are described in detail in Appendix A. Essentially, I asked a group of experienced shamanic journeyers to participate by taking a 15-minute journey. Roughly half the people were assigned to the test group and half were assigned to the control group. They each took their temperature before journeying. Both groups took a journey to seek a power animal or teacher. The participants in the test group asked that spirit to raise their body temperature. The participants in the control group did not ask for anything. They each took their temperature again upon returning from the journey. The results were noteworthy. There were 49 people in the test group and 38 in the control group. In the test group 65.3% had an increased body temperature upon returning from the journey, compared to only 34.2% of the control group. Temperature decreased 26.5% of the time in the test group and 39.5% of the time in the control group. There was no change in temperature for 8.2% of the test group, but for 26.3% of the control group.

According to the statistical analysis, the results of this test are highly significant. The likelihood of the body temperature outcomes from this experiment occurring randomly is .498%. In other words, the experimental results would occur purely by chance in slightly less than five cases out of 1,000.

## CHAPTER 6. PRAYER AND NON-LOCAL HEALING

For the shaman, a healing journey is simply a request to the sacred realm for help. It is essentially a prayer to the spirits to assist in whatever way is appropriate. It is a passive healing technique in that the shaman is not actually manipulating the patient's physical or spiritual body in any way. The shaman journeys, asking for healing for the patient's particular condition. They then leave the course of treatment and the outcome to the spirits, supporting them as needed. In many instances, the healing journey is comparable to prayer, with the shaman acting as supplicant, pleading with the spirits to take pity on the patient and help them.

In recent years prayer, and a variety of similar non-local healing methods, have been studied in rigorous scientific studies in hospitals around the country. Larry Dossey has categorized these methods as "Era III" healing. "The hallmark of Era III is what I refer to as nonlocal mind. In Era III, we rediscover the ancient realization that consciousness can free itself from the body and that it has the potential to act not just *locally* on one's own body...but also *nonlocally* on distant things, events and people, even though they may be unaware that they are being influenced."<sup>125</sup>

These techniques do not involve the manipulation of the patient's physical body and typically are utilized without the patient being present in the same space and time as the practitioner. Dossey asserts, "Era III is the breeding ground of miracles. They are usually mediated through some manifestation of non-local mind – through intercessory prayer, for example, or following dreams and visions or a sense of contact with an ineffable 'other.'"<sup>126</sup> Prayer studies have been conducted using healers/prayers from a

wide range of religious and healing traditions, including Baptists, Catholics, Buddhists and Jews.

At San Francisco General Hospital in 1988, cardiologist Randolph Byrd conducted an experiment involving patients in the coronary care unit. He tracked 393 patients who were in stable condition at the start of the experiment. Of the 393, 192 patients were prayed for by home prayer groups formed of Protestants and Roman Catholics. Another 210 patients were in the control group and not prayed for at all. The members of the prayer groups were given the first names and descriptions of the patients they were to pray for. The only instruction they received was to pray each day. The results were fascinating. Patients in the group that were prayed for were five times less likely to require antibiotics, three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema, and none required endotracheal intubation (an artificial airway inserted and attached to a ventilator), while 12 in the control group did.<sup>127</sup>

At the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine the ancient healing technique of *qigong* was used in an experiment to measure the results of distance intention on the physical body. They used a complex biochemical reaction as their subject. It works in phases and involves the contraction of muscles that line the blood vessels and intestinal tract. The result of this process is the production of energy that is needed for muscle tissues to contract. The *qigong* practitioners treated the tissue samples while standing 2-5 feet away from the test tubes. Each sample was treated for six minutes. “In all nine trials, the *qigong* masters were able to modify the biochemical reaction by an average of 15 percent, which is an effect size seen in many clinically significant biological reactions

in the body. The odds against a chance explanation of the outcome were less than one in twenty.”<sup>128</sup>

In the MANTRA project at Duke University Medical Center doctors and researchers utilized a variety of non-local healing techniques and healers from a full spectrum of religious backgrounds. They “combined high-tech cardiology and intercessory prayer, music, mental imagery, and touch.” The MANTRA project (which stands for Monitoring and Actualization of Noetic Training) employed Carmelite Sisters in Baltimore, Buddhist monks in the Kopan Monastery in Nepal, and Nalanda Monastery in France. Prayers were entered on the Virtual Jerusalem website and written prayers were inserted into cracks in the Western Wall of that city according to ancient Jewish custom. Silent Unity, an interdenominational Christian prayer group in Missouri, Baptist, Moravian, and Church of Abundant Life congregations in North Carolina all participated in praying for patients undergoing angioplasty. Patients in the test, or “prayed for,” group fared 50 to 100 percent better than the control group, which did not receive prayer. The experiment didn’t include enough subjects to make “statistically firm” conclusions, but the exciting results of the pilot project were so encouraging that a larger 1,500-patient trial is expected to start soon at five centers: Duke, the Durham VAMC, Scripps Clinic in San Diego, the Washington Heart Center and Baptist Medical Center in Oklahoma City.<sup>129</sup>

Shamans were specifically included in Dr. Elizabeth Targ’s study on the effects of distance, energetic healing on AIDS patients. Based at the California Pacific Medical Center she coordinated healers from eight healing traditions, including Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Native Americans, shamans, and graduates of bioenergetic

and meditative healing schools. The healers had an average of seventeen years experience in their field. They were instructed to treat a different person each week on a rotating basis. Targ asked the healers to focus their mental energies on a patient's health and well being for an hour a day, six days a week, for ten weeks. The results of the experiment were significant. Patients who received distant healing intentions had undergone significantly fewer new AIDS-related illnesses, had less severe illnesses, were hospitalized less frequently, required fewer days of hospitalization, had fewer doctor visits, and also reported significantly improved moods.<sup>130</sup>

In a Journal of Scientific Exploration article exploring collective consciousness, a group of researchers outlined the following definitions of consciousness in relation to nonlocal mind.

1. Consciousness in *nonlocal*. It extends beyond the individual. It cannot be confined to specific points in space, such as brains or bodies, or specific points in time, such as the present moment.
2. Consciousness is an ordering principle. It can insert information into disorganized or random systems and create higher degrees of order.
3. Consciousness is not the same as awareness. The ordering power of consciousness can occur completely outside of awareness, such as in dreams.
4. Both individual and group consciousness can insert order or information into the world, and can extract information from the world as well.
5. Coherence among individuals may be expressed in the ordering power of consciousness. Coherence may be expressed as love, empathy, caring, unity, oneness, and connectedness.

6. Consciousness can affect humans and nonhumans alike. Even inanimate objects can “resonate” with and respond to human consciousness.<sup>131</sup>

These guidelines define some interesting concepts as related to healing prayer. Prayer is founded on the idea that we are greater than our bodies; that our consciousness, our intention, and our focused efforts can affect the material world, without being limited by space, place or time. These guidelines refer to group consciousness as “coherence”; that as a community we can work in unity, through love and caring to affect the people and the world around us. This is a particularly inspiring and empowering concept. And the last point, about inanimate objects resonating with human consciousness, is interesting. Shamans have used tools in healing for ages: crystals, medicine bags, wands, and drums. These objects were infused with power that could be transferred to a patient upon contact to facilitate their own healing. The idea of physical objects acting as a conduit to deliver healing power is ancient. For millennia shamans and folk healers have blessed talismans and charms of various sorts before giving them to the sick person, in the belief that they are able to mediate the healer’s wishes.”<sup>132</sup> The traditional medicine bundle of many Native North American tribes contains a variety of items believed to help in healing. A bundle may include feathers, bones, herbs, sacred plants, fetishes or crystals among other things. Quartz crystals are considered among the most powerful objects employed by shamans for healing. It is considered to be a spirit helper in its own right and is used by many tribal shamans, including the aboriginal Australians, the Yuman-speakers of southern California, and the Jivaro in South America.<sup>133</sup>

Intermediary objects are used in prayer healing as well. In Reinventing Medicine, Larry Dossey describes the experience of a girl named Lisa who was in an auto accident that fractured her neck and injured her spinal cord. She was not expected to live through the night. The parishioners in Lisa's family's church created a prayer cloth for her. Each person held the cloth and prayed for healing for Lisa. The cloth was passed around the congregation. Lisa had the cloth attached to her body the whole time she was in the hospital and wouldn't allow it to be removed. Each day Lisa got a little better. Several times she asked for more prayers for specific things, such as improved breathing. A girl who wasn't expected to live through the night, and probably shouldn't have survived the ambulance ride with only a thread of spinal cord attached, survived. Her healing has been a long process. Four years later she is breathing and eating normally and is able to walk a few steps at a time. She is attending college independently.<sup>134</sup>

The beauty of the results achieved through prayer is that so many healing traditions are being examined with such similarly successful results. As discussed earlier, spiritual healing work is based less on employing a particular technique or philosophy than on drawing on the love, compassion and intent of the healer. In most cases, this work is about people calling on a higher power - spirit, God, or the patient's higher self - to help one another. The results of these studies clearly indicate that somehow, someway the spirit or focus of one person can affect the physiology of another. They indicate that spirit can indeed affect matter, as shamans for thousands of years have professed.

## Chapter 7. Harmony and Ecological Medicine

Closely related to the idea of love as vital to the healing process is the concept that living in harmony and balance is vital to maintaining health. Native cultures around the world express the theory that as individuals we are parts of a whole, and that what we do, think, say and feel impacts the other parts. This interconnectedness relates not only to humans, but to nature as well. In fact, to many traditional thinkers, living in harmony with the natural environment is one of the key elements of living a virtuous life. This harmony is essential for the health of our bodies, our spirits, and our land. Most Western cultures have become detached from the common sense notion that our actions affect our environment. As creatures dependant upon the environment for sustenance on all levels, we will ultimately be affected by the way we live in relation to that environment. We don't seem to be making the connection between the desecration of the land, air and water to the deterioration in some significant areas of our health. And when we do make the connection intellectually, it seems extremely difficult to make the necessary changes as a society to bring the relationship back into balance, to care for nature as we'd like to be cared for ourselves.

To many shamanic cultures, nature *is* us. To paraphrase a rather crude expression, don't defile your own home. Where much of modern society has taken a wrong turn is in viewing nature not as a home, but merely as a supplier of raw materials. In order for true personal and planetary healing to occur, this attitude must change. We must realign with the notion that being in harmony with nature is as vital for healing as being in harmony with ourselves. And given that the notion of *personal* harmony affecting health is not an accepted principle in many allopathic practices, we have a long way to go.

In the Navajo tradition there is a phrase called “walking in beauty.” For them beauty is the equivalent of harmony. It means that for life to be beautiful it must be balanced; people must relate in a respectful way; people must respect all aspects of the world, from the physical to the spiritual, from the leaf on a tree to the Great Spirit. Dr. Lori Arviso Alvord describes the life view of her people:

(There is) a worldview in which everything in life is connected and influences everything else. A stone thrown into a pond can influence the life of a deer in the forest, a human voice and a spoken word can influence events around the world, and all things possess spirit and power. So Navajos make every effort to live in harmony and balance with everyone and everything else. Their belief system sees sickness as a result of things falling out of balance, of losing one’s way on the path of beauty. In this belief system, religion and medicine are one and the same.<sup>135</sup>

This belief in the health effects of cosmic harmony or disharmony is shared throughout much of the culture of the North American Indians. Healing ceremonies are seen as the antidote to a state of disharmony. Shamanic rituals are considered the primary way to reinstate balance, and therefore health, to an individual or community.

Some scientists today are looking at living systems across the globe and recognizing the interconnectedness that surrounds us and has been ignored, or at least unrecognized, in most arenas of our society today. These people assert that to truly understand the nature of the universe from great to small (which is after all the goal of empirical science) they must consider systems larger than those observable and

predictable to us as individuals. There are greater orders than those of our own devising. Science can play an important role in attempting to understand the nature of those systems, but will be called upon to step outside of itself to think more holistically.

There is a growing movement among doctors, environmentalists, and scientists that links the health of the human directly to the health of the environment. This concept is called ecological medicine, “a loosely shared philosophy based on advancing public health by improving the environment.”<sup>136</sup> It purports that the harmony of a whole ecosystem, from a community to planetary level, is crucial for the well being of the individual. It is distinctly in line with some ancient philosophies of health we have been discussing. Some of the alarming causes for the mobilization of this group include increased levels of dioxin in the environment and in the human body that can be linked to the burning of plastics. Pesticides are possibly causing the die-off of other species. For example, spraying malathion to kill mosquitoes may have caused a huge number of lobsters to die in the area. Shocking numbers of people are dying in hospitals each year from drugs that are *properly prescribed*. And the inherent toxicity of many medicines, such as the compounds used in chemotherapy and their by-products, are of serious concern.<sup>137</sup>

Some of the basic tenets of ecological medicine are:

- The first goal of medicine is to establish the conditions for health and wholeness, thus preventing disease and illness. The second goal is to cure.
- The earth is also the physician’s client. The patient under the physician’s care is one part of the earth.

- Humans are part of a local ecosystem. Following the ecopsychological insight that a disturbed ecosystem can make people mentally ill, a disturbed ecosystem can surely make people physically ill.
- Medicine should not add to the illnesses of humans or the planet. Medical practices themselves should not damage other species or the ecosystem.<sup>138</sup>

Carolyn Raffensperger is the executive director of the Science and Environmental Health Network (SEHN), an organization focusing on the responsible use of science, particularly as related to environmental and public health. She talks about scientific bias and the phenomena of the scientist affecting their own experiments, despite following strict scientific guidelines for objectivity. She realizes the attitude of the observer affects that which is being observed, and, more importantly, affects what questions scientists are asking. She doesn't see this as a bad thing, but rather an opportunity to shift the way we think about science, especially in relationship to the environment. "A scientist who loves this Earth is more likely to be biased in such a way that the research targets the right questions and the Earth itself offers wise answers."<sup>139</sup>

This concept harkens back to the days of the shaman, but it does more than that. It calls us to look at the concept of harmony and our relationship with the ecosystems in which we live. It challenges us to ask different questions about our own health and relationships with one another. An interesting mirror to looking to the environment as cause for human illness is to look, as many Native Americans do, at the environment as

a manifestation of our own health. This is not actually a different approach, but a rich way of viewing the symbiotic relationship of the health of the planet and the beings who live on it:

(The Native American) medicinal system has always stressed that the soul's processes are seen as being reflected in the outer world. A fire is burning on the mountain. A person is in agony. An awareness comes and dissipates the agony – and rain comes to quench the fire. These events are seen as related. The fire and the rain provide direct messages about the internal workings of the person.<sup>140</sup>

This is a truly holistic way of viewing health and ecology: looking to the earth as both a reflection of our own inner state and as the source for the co-creation of our cure.

I believe our most plausible hope for reversing the rampant environmental destruction and engaging a deeper level of personal healing lies with the unity of science and spirituality. We are a culture of extremes. We are in a cycle where materialism and technology predominate; however, alternative spirituality and healing methods are becoming mainstream in the United States. Doors are opening, allowing more of us to look at healing in new ways. Spiritual or energetic healing techniques are but one part of this picture. To change the modalities of healing currently utilized in contemporary culture, we must foster a cooperative effort between scientific leaders (allopathic physicians to environmental researchers) and leaders in alternative healing and spirituality (shamans to pastors). In an article about science and spirituality, Nancy Myers acknowledges the powerful role that scientists have in our society and also where

they are reluctant to step forward as leaders to catalyze the necessary changes in our way of thinking about health and the environment:

These days, many articulate scientists are able to run down the litany of coming disasters, but when it comes to inspiring transformation, they often falter. At this point, they tend to call for help from religion, whether they consider themselves religious or not. A new religion is needed, or an old one, they say, to reconnect the human soul with the sacredness of its habitat. Religious fervor is needed to turn humanity from its evil, destructive ways, to fuel the crusade for the preservation of the Earth. Couldn't someone else please take the lead on this? <sup>141</sup>

She calls to humanity to “change its way of thinking” to an attitude of “reverence, awe and love; a new passion for all of life. What is called for is nothing less than the old triumvirate of faith, hope and love: faith in an awesome scheme of things, grander than ourselves; hope that it’s not too late for us; and passionate love for our lovely habitat.”<sup>142</sup>

This is a radical redirection for modern civilization, but not so for many shamanic and indigenous cultures. There is wisdom in other worldviews, particularly in relation to healing and living in harmony, which can serve to help us re-model our current way of life into a healthier one. In comparing models it is important not to idolize past eras or philosophies, elevating them to a point of undeserved glorification. Indigenous cultures had and continue to have their problems. Contemporary society has many wonderful qualities and opportunities that I, for one, would be distressed to live without. My intention here is not to suggest that one modality or philosophy is a

panacea, but to examine how elements of traditions rejected by our popular culture could potentially help us solve some of the health-related problems with which we are wrestling. Wholeness, peace, harmony, health, balance, prosperity and love - not many of us would disagree that these are worthwhile goals to strive toward. In order to achieve those goals, we need to look at where the imbalances are - where have we fallen out of harmony, where do we feel fragmented or disconnected? The scientists supporting the efforts of ecological medicine are asking these questions. Shamans, too, ask these questions when treating the populations they serve. Martin Prechtel said, "Shamans deal with the problems that arise when we forget the relationship that exists between us and the other world that feeds us, or when, for whatever reason, we don't feed the other world in return."<sup>143</sup> He is referring to the spiritual world, but his intention is equally applicable to the physical world that is this Earth.

Environmental scientist Peter L. deFur eloquently explains the role of the scientist within the web of life, and what he has observed about the natural world's mysteries:

There is so much more to high-quality scientific work of any sort than simply knowing the facts and the methods. Scientists must be creative and inspired to do their best work. Einstein recognized this need and the limitations of strict objectivity, especially when it comes to society and science. Objective science only carries us so far; other ways of knowing need to be tapped in order to fill out our humanity in the science we do.

As an environmental scientist, I know Chief Seattle's words, 'all things are connected,' to be true because I find evidence of the connections. The loss of wetlands in the upper part of a watershed will have some effect downstream on the rest of the system. But the very connectedness of all life is what challenges me so. Not all the evidence is easily explainable or at all predictable. Somehow the system reacts differently than we expect; life systems adapt. How is it that life does adapt? What makes life so adaptable and why is so much of this Earth still a surprise to us as we seek to understand it?

One answer to these questions is that living systems are always changing in ways that we are not able to predict. We are not able to anticipate outcomes because we just don't know enough - yet. Another explanation is that life adapts and forms patterns as a result of inexplicable characteristics of life. Call it a life force or spirit. The web of life is only partly understandable on an intellectual, i.e. scientific level. Another part of the web of life is understood on another level, a spiritual level.<sup>144</sup>

This spiritual level of understanding is what shamanism brings to the table. In order to bring our lives into harmony we need to acknowledge, even if we cannot fully grasp, that the inhabitants and ecologies of this universe are related in multitudinous and mysterious ways. The arrogance that characterizes our species must be transformed into an attitude of reverence and respect for all things, all beings, and all levels of existence. Living in harmony is simple in concept, but complicated in implication. In

order to understand what living in harmony means, we must have a balanced attitude about our place in the web of life and then have the courage as a society to explore new paradigms and make necessary changes. In looking ahead to finding a sensible way to marry traditional and modern philosophies and techniques, the goals of the ecological medicine movement provide an important key. I bring this concept up here in relation to spiritual medicine, not because the principles of ecological medicine are fundamentally based in spirituality, but because they are grounded in the concept of holism. This is the essence of what a mature healing paradigm should be about. Whether called complementary, alternative, traditional, spiritual, ecological, or any number of other terms, a new paradigm in healing must consider the body of a human as well as the body of the planet, the spirit of the people as well as the spirit of the earth.

## CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSIONS

Can spirit affect matter through specific techniques or simply the power of love? Can our thoughts and intentions heal our neighbors? Can the spirits intervene and work their healing magic through a human being? From a scientific perspective there is enough data to answer “maybe.” From the shamanic or spiritual perspective the question is simplistic and the answer is “of course.” We’ve seen numerous examples of healing through non-physical means: native Alaskan shamans healing with their touch; prayer groups improving hospital patients’ conditions; and purifying water through ritual and sound. Shamanism is one model, not only of healing, but of *being*, that demonstrates how to incorporate the power of the spirit world into our everyday lives. There are many other models that can do the same. The critical step is to open our eyes to the unseen, to be willing to lay down our mechanistic view of the world and at least consider that there are invisible forces at work in the universe. What is there to risk? According to the shamans, the spirits *want* to help us. My sense is that even *considering* the existence of an unseen world that holds incomprehensible energy and power is frightening to many people. It contradicts a worldview that many of us have held on to tenaciously for a long time, a view upon which we’ve based our decisions, our hopes and dreams, our very lives. The possibility of being incorrect in that view is justifiably unnerving. But maybe there is a model of reality that is not only more accurate, but more nurturing. One in which we can use love as a tool. Where we are

empowered to generate balance in our lives, and where our appreciation of the spirits and the earth and sky are reflected back at us.

Let's look again at the relation between science and spirituality for a moment. The polarities that exist between hard-line scientists and hard-line fundamentalists seem daunting to bridge, and indeed they are. But the bridge we need may be more elegantly created from the mid point instead of the two opposite banks. We need to look to our center, to the growing group of scientists who are willing to explore relationships in the natural world that they can't measure or grasp as yet. We need to look to the expanded section of spiritual healers and practitioners who are interested in bringing their practices into the mainstream, even if that means using some unfamiliar guidelines for determining validity, like scientific testing. Ken Wilber explains how spiritual experiences need be examined in ways that don't deny their essential qualities but provide a more scientifically structured method of investigation. In order to bring many forms of spirituality and alternative healing out of the realm of the suspect for society at large, moving in this direction is important. He states:

Authentic spirituality, then, can no longer be mythic, imaginal, mythological, or mythopoetic: it must be based on falsifiable evidence. In other words, it must be, at its core, a series of direct mystical, transcendental, meditative, contemplative or yogic experiences – *not sensory and not mental*, but transsensual, transmental, transpersonal, transcendental consciousness – data seen not merely with the eye of flesh or the eye of mind, but with the eye of contemplation.<sup>145</sup>

It is also important, however, to remember the goal of integration. Creating a spirituality that is scientific is not the answer. Creating science based on faith is *clearly* not the answer. Creating partnerships between people and philosophies that respect both science and spiritual is a potential answer. Dr. Carl Hammerschlag describes this concept precisely. “What we see as science, the Indians see as magic. What we see as magic, they see as science. I don’t find this a hopeless contradiction. If we can appreciate each other’s views, we can see the whole picture more clearly. To heal ourselves or to heal others we need to reconnect magic and science, our right and left brains.”<sup>146</sup>

Shamans have traditionally been at the heart of their communities, acting not only as healers, but as leaders, artists, and teachers. In many indigenous cultures they were the scientists. Communities relied upon them for locating food, remembering the creation stories, bringing the rain, healing the sick, and guiding the dead. In many ways the shaman is an excellent model of the holistic healer. “Shamans are caretakers and represent a devotion to service that needs to be revived and maintained if the torn fabric of our culture is to be mended and transformed.”<sup>147</sup> Shamans look not only to the body, but to the land, the sky and the spirits to ascertain where the causes of imbalance and disease lie. In Madison, Wisconsin, shamanic techniques are being used to help people in “hospice care; psychiatric inpatient facilities; drug and alcohol treatment settings; outpatient mental health; medical hospital; juvenile treatment facilities; jail; and the school system.”<sup>148</sup> If these techniques are being utilized in such a diverse range of settings with significant success in Wisconsin, why not throughout the country and the world? A more pertinent question is, “How can we combine these techniques with the

miraculous medical advances that science has given us?” E. F. Torrey describes four components of successful healing:

1. A shared world view that makes the diagnosis and naming process possible.
2. Positive personal qualities of the healer that facilitate the client’s recovery.
3. Client expectations of recovery that assist the healing process.
4. Specific techniques, materials, and healing procedures that are appropriate to the illness and conducive to recovery.<sup>149</sup>

These four components are relevant regardless of what healing modality is being employed. Based on this theory about what actually prompts a healing response, we need to focus as much on the belief system of the patient, and the rapport developed between patient and healer, as we do on the specific techniques utilized. These elements have always been important in shamanic healing. One of the challenges in combining traditional and modern techniques in an ethnically and religiously mixed society is that the healer must treat clients from so many different belief systems. This makes it hard to establish a “shared world view” as Torrey suggests, which in turn makes it more difficult for doctors to develop the trust necessary for patients to believe in the techniques used and expect a positive outcome from treatment. In talking about a new paradigm of healing that incorporates different models, it is not only the healers who will need to adapt, but their patients as well. It is the healer who must lead the way, either by developing knowledge of their clients’ beliefs about healing or by educating them to the benefits of the philosophies and techniques being employed on their behalf in treatment, or, ideally, both.

At least on paper, the medical establishment has expressed a willingness to make efforts in that direction. In 1980 the American Medical Association published a “revised code of ethics and gave physicians permission to consult with, take referrals from, and make referrals to practitioners without orthodox medical training.” This initiative cleared the path for doctors to initiate cooperation with non-allopathic practitioners, such as shamans, herbalists, and homeopaths. Thus far, it seems shamans and native healers are more willing to integrate modern medical methods into their practices than doctors are willing to consider the use of traditional methods in theirs.

There has been worldwide recognition of the validity of traditional healing techniques. In the western world we tend to forget that the majority of the world lives very differently than we do. The World Health Organization stated that 80-85 percent of the world relied on healing modalities *other than* the allopathic model. They set about encouraging and “training native health auxiliaries, midwives and indigenous healers.” In 1997 they adopted a resolution encouraging governments to assign due importance to the use of traditional systems of medicine.<sup>150</sup> A branch of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is actively researching non-allopathic methods of healing, and considering the issues related to integrating these methods with the current medical model. In 2000, NCCAM’s director, Dr. Stephen E. Straus, stated their goal concerning the merging of traditional and modern modes of healing. “We want to talk to the community directly. We want to build the trust of the American people to prove we are open to good ideas and also build trust within all aspects of the medical profession.

What we must show are results from diligent research. This is ancient medicine, but a new science.”<sup>151</sup>

Basically we need to look to those of us – scientists, healers, teachers, parents, and politicians – who are willing to consider the vastness of where we live and the vastness of who we are in new ways. It doesn’t mean creating shamans out of biologists or physicians out of pastors. It does mean that we need to open our minds, and more importantly to open our hearts, to the wisdom of other traditions. Right now our culture is heavily weighed toward validating scientific data and dismissing intangible or spiritual experiences. This is unfortunate, not because science is any less valid than spirituality, but because we need to be in balance, both as a society and as individuals. We are out of harmony as a planet. The aborigines believed that long ago the world was in “dreamtime”; that everything was spirit and that dreaming spirit caused the emergence of materiality on the earth.<sup>152</sup> If they are right, we’ve so wholly accepted the material world that spirit created that we have forgotten its source, and therefore we’ve forgotten our own source as well. Professor John E. Ikerd eloquently describes spirituality from his view as a scientist:

What is this thing called spirituality? It is not necessarily religion. Religion is simply one of many possible means of expressing one's spirituality. William James, a religious philosopher, defined religion as ‘an attempt to be in harmony with an unseen order of things.’ ... This definition embraces a wide range of cultural beliefs, philosophies, and religions.

We as humans are a part of an unseen order or interconnected web that defines the oneness of all things within a unified whole. We may attempt to understand it and even influence it, but we did not create it nor can we control it. Thus, we must seek peace through harmony within the order of things beyond our control. This harmony may be defined as ‘doing the right things.’ And, by ‘doing the right things’ for ourselves, for others around us, and for those of future generations, we create harmony and find inner peace.<sup>153</sup>

This is an essentially shamanic philosophy for living. In his expression of the mysterious nature of reality, Dr. Ikerd is bringing us full circle back to an age when this was the mainstream philosophy. I don’t know if people living in that age would do any better in welcoming information about a new and different paradigm for living their lives. Would they accept the scientist’s explanation for their sickness or their weather patterns? I suspect they would be as reluctant as we are today. It is not in human nature to embrace the possibility of being wrong or holding an incomplete view of reality. Often we would rather have the “right” answers than the truth. I believe truth lies closer to the absence of “right” answers. In healing today there are many mysteries: people heal miraculously, people die inexplicably, new diseases appear, and existing ones mutate. We are now standing firmly in the scientific end of the spectrum. Ironically, we have in fact placed our *faith* in science. Faith can be a wonderful thing, but it can also be blinding. If we believe absolutely that one model of healing is the “right” one, how can we contemplate the merits of another? We need to take a macrocosmic view and actually implement some of the basic principles of science: gather all the

information available, experiment with different methods, consult the experts from different fields and backgrounds, and see what works. It really is that simple. Our society has expanded and evolved into a brilliant tangled web. No physician or shaman today holds the answer to healing this planet and ourselves. We need the wisdom, experience, knowledge and sensitivities of both groups to unite us in a truly holistic exploration of how we can be healthy. Wilber says, “ If we listen very carefully, from within this infinite wonder, perhaps we can hear the gentle promise that, in the very heart of the Kosmos itself, both science and religion will be there together to welcome us home.”<sup>154</sup>

## APPENDIX A - JOURNEYING EXPERIMENT

In addition to the academic research done in preparation for writing this paper, I also conducted an experiment to collect some quantitative data on the effects of shamanic journeying on the physical body. The empirical research portion of the thesis involved defining an experiment that was simple enough to provide clear and reliable data. I decided to use body temperature since it is an uncomplicated measurement. I then identified a group of people experienced in core shamanic journeying who could participate in an experiment to measure the effect of journeying on their body temperature. My intention was to start with a very basic bodily statistic, a measurement that was easily taken and difficult to misinterpret, and then attempt to influence it through the use of shamanic journeying: to affect the physical body through a purely spiritual technique.

I solicited participants from several groups: people with whom I have attended core shamanic workshops, people listed in the Foundation for Shamanic Studies journal, “Shamanism,” as leading core shamanic drumming circles, and a few people who came forward after hearing about the study or whom I knew personally in some other core shamanic context (such as participation in a drumming circle). I included people with at least one year of experience. I did a mailing containing a letter explaining the nature of the experiment, detailed instructions, a participant information sheet (specifying that the person was in either the control group or the test group) and a self addressed stamped envelope for them to return the signed instructions sheet and participant information sheet to me. Examples of these forms are provided at the end of this

section. I sent out approximately 95 requests. Many of those were sent to people who hosted drumming circles and were therefore able to distribute them to other qualified people. Participants responded from 18 states in the U.S., including California, Connecticut, New Mexico and Iowa, and also from Puerto Rico, Guatemala and Italy.

Subjects were randomly assigned to either the test or control group by alternating which participant information sheet was included in the packet I sent to them. Participants were instructed to journey to a power animal or spirit teacher using the core shamanic technique. Journeyers in the test group were to ask the spirit to raise their body temperature. Control group participants were instructed not to ask anything. Both groups took their temperature immediately before journeying and immediately upon their return. Certain precautions were taken to assure that the subjects' body temperatures were not affected by factors other than the journeying. For example, they were to stay in the same position wearing the same clothing or coverings that they would when journeying for 15 minutes prior to embarking on their journey. They were asked to abstain from food, drink, gum and cigarette smoking for 15 minutes prior to the journey.

There were likely some influences outside my control that could potentially have affected the experiment or skewed the data. First, there was an element of self-selection. Although I only asked qualified people to participate, a sub-set of those people actually *chose* to do the experiment. Their interest and desire to take part may have influenced the results in some fashion. The other possible concern with this experiment's design is that the directions were given second hand. I wrote explicit and detailed directions that were to be handed out to each subject. Participants signed the

participant information sheet and instructions sheet, indicating that they complied with the instructions, but since I was not physically present for most of the journeying I cannot verify with certainty that everyone did comply with the instructions. I did exclude some responses from the total pool on two grounds: several people had less than one year's experience, and a group of people explained that they drummed just before journeying without waiting the 15 minutes for their temperatures to stabilize as per the instructions. Ideally this experiment would be conducted in a controlled environment under close supervision, but the logistics of organizing such a group meeting were extremely prohibitive, if not impossible.

A total of 87 forms were returned to me. Of the 87, 49 of those were from participants in the test group and 38 were from participants in the control group. The following table shows the breakdown of the results of the change in temperature before and after journeying for the two groups, and the relative percentage of each category to the two larger groups.

**Table 1: Results of Temperature Experiment with Percentages**

<b>Total Test Group Responses:</b>	<b>49</b>		<b>Total Control Group Responses:</b>	<b>38</b>	
		<b>% of Test Responses</b>			<b>% of Control Responses</b>
Temperature Increased	32	65.31%	Temperature Increased	13	34.21%
Temperature Decreased	13	26.53%	Temperature Decreased	15	39.47%
No Change	4	8.16%	No Change	10	26.32%

In analyzing these results, the primary question I asked was “Is there a significant difference between the control and test groups in the number of temperature increases, decreases and no-changes?” If the answer to that question was “no,” I would deduce that in this experiment the journey did not have a significant effect on the participants’ body temperature. There are many possible explanations for a negative result in an experiment like this, which is treating a subjective and often mystical subject with a controlled and clinical approach. One potential cause is that shamanic healing is done when someone is in need. Journeys are not typically taken lightly, nor solely out of curiosity. Shamans journey with a purpose, and their compassion and sense of urgency could affect the results they achieve. If the answer to the question of the significant difference between the two groups is “yes,” we can deduce that in this experiment the journey did indeed have a significant effect on the participants’ body temperature. Therefore, a spiritual technique undertaken with a specific intent did produce the desired effect on a physical body. Spirit affected matter. There are possible extraneous factors not accounted for and follow-up studies would need to be done to attempt to duplicate the results of the experiment, but the indication is that an intangible effort affected the tangible human body in an easily measurable way.

Statistical analysis attempts to analyze an event to determine the probability of that event happening. A Chi-squared analysis is used to ascertain if events are happening independently of one another. A Chi-squared analysis was used on the count of subjects that experienced body temperature increases, decreases and no-changes after the required journey.

**Table 2: Responses to Temperature Experiment**

<b>Total Test Group Responses:</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>Total Control Group Responses:</b>	<b>38</b>
Temperature Increased	32	Temperature Increased	13
Temperature Decreased	13	Temperature Decreased	15
No Change	4	No Change	10

Results of Chi-squared analysis: Chi-squared = 10.60466; degrees of freedom = 2; probability = .00498

According to the statistical analysis, the results of this test are highly significant. The likelihood of the body temperature outcomes from this experiment occurring randomly is .498%. In other words, the experimental results would occur purely by chance in slightly less than five cases out of 1000. So the answer to my original question is “yes.” These results indicate that something noteworthy has happened. We cannot say without a doubt that the shamanic journey was the only cause for the outcome of the experiment. For instance, we did not take into account a participant’s emotional state or belief in the possibility of journeying affecting body temperature. However, we can say that, based on measurable criteria, this experiment provides a strong suggestion that shamanic journeyers can produce a change in physiology.

Based on this analysis, we can make a projection of the expected results generated purely by chance. If the body temperature outcomes had occurred randomly then the following counts would have been expected with a probability of 99.4%:

**Table 3: Statistically Expected Results of Experiment**

<b>Expected Experimental Results</b>		
	<b>Test Group</b>	<b>Control Group</b>
Temperature Increases	25	20
Temperature Decreases	16	13
No Change	7	6

Given the promising results of this experiment, a logical next step in charting the effects of shamanic journeying on the physical body is to conduct a similar experiment where the subjects work in pairs. In this experiment, the people in the test group would journey to raise a partner's body temperature, instead of journeying to raise their own. This is actually a more valuable set of data to collect for several reasons. First, in the experiment I've already conducted people must know which group they are in (test or control) in order to journey with the correct intention. This introduces a series of potential effects on the results they achieve: their desire to "succeed" in their task, or possibly the opposite desire to skew the results, the power of suggestion, and the human capacity to regulate bodily functions (which seems to vary greatly), among others. By having the passive or non-journeying partner unaware of the intention of the journeying partner, many of these potential consequences are eliminated. Besides, at the heart of shamanic healing work is the ability to alter *other* people's physical or emotional state. I've begun some initial pilot experiments with this idea.

### Instructions for Experiment: Journey to Raise Body Temperature

- ◆ No food or drink (including gum, cigarettes etc.) for 15 minutes before taking first temperature reading.
- ◆ Stay in the same room, in the same approximate position and with the same degree of clothing or covering on for 15 minutes before taking first temperature reading.
- ◆ Use the same thermometer for both readings.
- ◆ Take temperature and record on Participant Information Sheet just before journeying.
- ◆ Journey to a power animal or teacher and ask them to raise your body temperature if you are in the *Test* group. Journey to a power animal or teacher, but don't ask them to do anything if you are in the *Control* group. See the upper right corner of the Participant Information Sheet to determine which group you are in.
- ◆ Journey for 15 minutes.
- ◆ Take temperature again immediately upon returning from journey and record on Participant Information Sheet.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form and the signed Participant Information sheet by March 31, 2001 to:

Mara Bishop  
206 East Woodridge Drive  
Durham, NC 27707

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 919-419-1074 or at [mara@wholespirit.com](mailto:mara@wholespirit.com)

**Participant Information Sheet**  
**CONTROL / TEST GROUP (One group specified per sheet)**

***PERSONAL INFORMATION***

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Journey \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of years doing core shamanic journeying \_\_\_\_\_

***EXPERIMENT INFORMATION***

- 1) TEST or CONTROL group (Circle One) (See the top of this page to determine which group you are in)
- 2) Starting Temperature \_\_\_\_\_ (Fahrenheit)
- 3) Ending Temperature \_\_\_\_\_ (Fahrenheit)
- 4) Did you take an Upper World or Lower World Journey? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Did you go to a power animal or teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Did you have any bodily sensation while journeying? \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Was there anything conveyed in your journey that seems particularly noteworthy in relation to this experiment?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Please describe your journey on the back of this page.**

Please return this form and the signed instruction sheet by March 31, 2001 to:

Mara Bishop  
206 East Woodridge Drive  
Durham, NC 27707

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 919-419-1074 or at [mara@wholespirit.com](mailto:mara@wholespirit.com)

≤ If you would like me to send you the results of this experiment, please check the box.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## NOTES

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