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Spirit Talk

Shamanism, Death and Life

**Karen Kelly Interviews
Jonathan Horwitz**

KK Perhaps you could start by saying something about how the shaman works with death in both traditional cultures and in your own practise.

JH When death comes close the shaman is someone who is called in to help people to die, and to be with them and with the family at the time of death, and later on the shaman comes to help the soul to move on to its next destination.

In many traditional cultures, people don't separate things into boxes as much as we do. The connection between things is much more recognised than it is in our culture, and death is seen as a part of life. It seems that we in the West have a line that goes between birth at the beginning and death at the end. My understanding is that in a lot of traditional cultures it's not so clear cut, not so separate, probably because people are much more closely acquainted with death than we are. What I mean by that is that they don't try to avoid it like we do. Of course they don't go looking for it, taking unnecessary risks, but they

recognise its presence. And the initiation rites into adulthood often press the young person to the point where they might well wish they were dead. In our culture there is a great emphasis on being young or on looking young or trying to hold onto youth as long as possible. There's not much of a chance of that in traditional societies where people are living thousands of miles from cosmetic shops. For them, death is not something that you can hide away. You can't send your granny off to the nursing home to die. She dies at home.



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KK It sounds like that would require the shaman to have a close understanding of death themselves

JH In some cultures the shaman is a general practitioner who takes care of a lot of needs of society, from divination to healing to being someone who moves the souls of the dead person onto the Other Side. In other cultures there are shaman specialists, who may only work with one of societies the shaman's journey to the spirit world is called "the little death." But because the shaman spends a certain amount of time in the world of the spirits, she or he is in a better position to help the souls of the dead on their way. The shaman is also someone who is more likely to have more exposure to the threshold experiences of life. In traditional societies, the thresholds of life - birth, initiation into adulthood, marriage, and death - are much more recognised and honoured than they are in our culture. The shaman, often having the role as ceremonial leader, is more likely to be involved in those thresholds. Because of the shaman's ability to go the world of the spirits he is a likely person to have around.

In Western shamanism today the emphasis, when talking about shamanism and death, has been much more on the role of the shaman as conductor of souls, or *psychopomp*, as it is sometimes called. I'm a little tired of this word

"psychopomp" because it has nothing to do with human beings or shamanic practise. It's an academic word. I'd say the *escort or conductor of souls*. But for me, in our culture, a new and challenging role for the shaman - in connection with death - is to help people to learn to face death. Nowadays people go on a workshop, learn some techniques, go home on Sunday night thinking they can work with people who are dying, people who are dead, but if they haven't started to work with their own relationship to death, and really gotten into it, then they are going to bring that lack of depth, and perhaps deep fear of death, to the work they do for others, and that can be a disaster. I remember a few years ago there was a woman on the death course who assured the circle that she was all clear with death. Quite frankly, because of my observations of her during the past two years, I didn't believe her. A part of me felt like saying to her, "And what if you get home and find your nine month old son is dead?" No, I didn't say it, but one day she'll probably find out she has more work to do with death, just as I do, just as you do. We never finish learning. Shamanic work, like any spiritual work, is more than techniques.

KK So to help them to come into an awareness of death that traditional people come into naturally as a result of how they live?

JH Exactly. When I lived in Greenland one of the doctors at the hospital told me that



about a third of the deaths in Greenland were either violent or by accident. Far more than in most “civilised” countries. Which is perhaps more of reflection of what it is like in areas where there is not an ambulance or helicopter to the nearest hospital. In places where the streets are not all paved, people slip and fall and die, very suddenly and quickly. Just before I came up here I was told that the son of someone I know had just died. Motorcycle accident. Just like that, 25 years old.

Our culture puts such an emphasis on *death avoidance*. I feel one of the jobs of shamanic practitioners in the West could be to help people come into awareness of death in a natural way. If you talk about death in our culture a lot of people think that you are ghoulish. When I came back from Vietnam I was looking through a book catalogue and I saw Elizabeth Kübler Ross’s first book on death and dying. I just turned the page immediately. I thought, “Who’d want to buy that - what a horrible idea!” I had just had an over exposure to death and I wanted to get back to ordinary reality America as fast as I could, or at least to my illusion of what that meant.


KK You had obviously had a crash course in getting to know death in Vietnam. How do you suggest that shamanic practitioners start to open their awareness to that?

JH There are a lot of ways. One thing that seemed unavoidable to me when I started to practise shamanism


was that people came to me who were very, very ill. I didn’t feel it was my role to say to them “Hey, man, you are *dying!*” But at the same time, I had to say to myself that this person might be dying. So at least I was prepared for that eventuality. One thing is to admit that death is a possibility. In fact, it’s not a possibility – it’s an inevitability, we just don’t know when! Of course, I do not advise stuffing it down anyone else’s throat, but I have taken to reminding myself and other people that *I* might die at any moment.

Another way to open to death is to be aware of death around you, from the changing of the seasons to deaths of those around you, and to be together with people who are actively dying. My best friend in Vietnam died about 7 years after I came home in a car accident. My grandmother had died 2 years before that. Then there was a kind of pause. But when I hit my forties, suddenly someone of my own age died from alcoholism, and then another died by committing suicide, and then someone died in an accident, and then my friend with a brain tumour died. The older you get the better chance you have of someone your own age dying, it’s all part of living. If you know someone who has a serious disease I would advise spending time around that person, not necessarily trying to heal them, but just to be with them, perhaps as a teacher for you. And who knows, maybe they’ll learn something from you, too. It’s not an easy classroom but it’s somehow very wonderful at






the same time. It's one of those paradoxes. Just before coming here I got a letter from someone who came on a course in June, whose father was very ill. In the letter, he said that his father had just died and he was there with him through his death and that it was "a wonderful experience." I don't think that even 25 years ago you would have heard so many people saying that. I think that the best possible education is to open yourself up to being with a dying person.



some books that deal with death. Joan Halifax, who has been one of my teachers, has a tape set and soon a book called *Being With Dying*. She has been working with dying for over 30 years now. The book that she wrote with Grof called *The Human Encounter with Death* was the first book I read about working with people who are dying. It really opened the door for me. There are a lot of good books one can go to, books by Stephen Levine, Carlos Castaneda, Ram Dass, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Dalai Lama, or the classics like Rumi and Shakespeare, to name just a few. The daily newspaper, which I don't generally recommend, can teach us a lot about death, especially now, if we can stop to be with what we read, and not just read on. Every day twenty four thousand people die of hunger. Today – *right now!* Sit quietly and think of *that*.



But what was most helpful to me was actually looking at the simple reality that we cannot fix everything. I think a lot of people who begin in shamanic

practice – or any kind of healing work – want to fix everything, especially for other people. It's a very normal place to start. But if you stay there you are missing something because there is more to life than that. We have things that need fixing in ourselves. But some of these things in ourselves can't be fixed. But they do have to be looked at and addressed and accepted. One of these things is that we are all going to die, along with everyone and everything else we know. It's amazing, but every now and then I meet someone who tells me that it's not necessary to die. They apparently have a need to believe that. They go to great lengths trying not to die. I don't want to spend my life trying not to die. I want to spend my life living.

KK So being able to be with your own death leads you to a richer ability to be with your own life.

*JH That's the idea. And the knowledge that life won't go on forever and ever. I have been very lucky in my life. My health is pretty good, so far. For the first 55 years of my life it was very good. Now I have gotten to a place where I have certain aches and pains and some things just don't work the way they used to. The inclination is to get out and try to fix it. And that's a good idea, but there's a limit to what can be fixed. I have a bum knee. It's not *that* bad, and I do what I can to stop it getting worse, but it's not the way it was when I was twenty. Accepting that was not easy. We want to be twenty, we want*

to have that vigour. I don't *want* my hair to fall out. But the only way to maintain that vigour until the day we die is to die young. I'm never going to be twenty again, not in this life anyway. But there is more to living than the vigour of a twenty year old, though that, too, can be a beautiful thing to behold.

KK Has accepting that changed your shamanic work.

JH It's changed my entire outlook on life. And I feel it's helped me to be more understanding of other people's issues, be they physical aches and pains or emotional ones or spiritual ones.

KK What this brings up for me is Castaneda's stuff about death as an advisor or teacher.

JH I guess so.. though I couldn't speak for Carlos especially now he is no longer in the land of the living, though who knows. I think it has something to do with it. If you try to ignore your death, you certainly can't use death as an advisor. That part in *Journey to Ixtlan* where Don Juan tells Carlos, "You don't have time for such crappy thoughts" is, for me, one of the most joyful passages in English literature. Like many other people I am given to having crappy thoughts. They are my crappy thoughts and they are a waste of time, unless later they teach me something. If you are aware of your own death being just over your left shoulder, it follows that the amount of crappy thoughts diminishes, and that leaves room for other

thing - like realising where you are at that very moment.

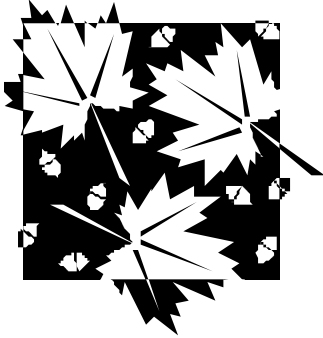
KK What I hear you talking about is a far deeper appreciation of death as part of life than I hear from many people who talk about shamanic work with death.

JH That is why I changed the name of the course I teach about this from Shamanism, Death and Dying to *Shamanism, Death and Living*. Death is part of life. This isn't about "pie in the sky," though that comes later. It's about now. It was funny because the first time I taught the course with its new title, several people came up to me and said, "I don't like the new name of the course," and in some cases they were people who are no strangers to death. But there was one person who was about to celebrate her 80th birthday and she said, "I like the new name of the course." She celebrated her birthday by inviting a whole bunch of people to decorate her biodegradable coffin. She is someone who is very aware of her death and is looking forward to it and wants to celebrate it while she is still around to enjoy it. She also celebrates every breath she takes. But by the end of the course everyone who had complained came up and said the new name was good – and fitting.

I think that the most important thing is to become more and more aware of your own death and to help others to become more aware and accepting of their deaths, too. One of the people on this course told me



that she just doesn't want to even think about her own death. You can't *make* people do it. When I came back from Vietnam, the last thing I wanted to think about was *anybody's* death. And still, it's very difficult for me to drive along the highway and see a cat or a dog or a fox who has been mashed by a car, or an accident where it is clear that someone was hurt badly. One of the main reasons for this is that it's such a mirror, such a reminder of our own mortality – our own death. And of course we're all afraid of an incredibly painful death, or afraid of the pain of loss another's death will bring us. And there is no denying that pain either. But there is also the acceptance of it. Joan Halifax, when talking about pain and suffering, says that pain is pain and suffering is the story behind it. There is no denying the pain but there is no need to cling to the suffering, yet at the same time there is no letting go of it until it's time to let go. Nowadays it's very modern to say "*just-let-go*" as if it were the easiest thing in the world. But if your child or husband or wife or closest friend suddenly dies you can't "oh-just-let-go-of-it". There is too much there. You can prepare, in some cases, for a loved one's death, but when they die maybe you find there is no preparation - even if you have been preparing for your own death. It takes the time it takes. You can't sit there clinging to it, and at the same time you can't push it away before its ready to leave. Perhaps the pain never leaves, but hopefully transforms into compassion. But for the person



who dies, death *is* letting go of pain.

KK *What do you do in your own life when you find yourself in that suffering place?*

JH I ask for help. I turn to my spirit teachers and helpers and ask them for help. Also I turn to people I respect in the physical world and ask them for help as well. Because the suffering is more than I have room for in my being - and that is where a lot of the pain is coming from. People say, "I could feel myself bursting from sorrow!" It gives the idea that you just don't have room enough to contain all of this. So you go to friends and ask them to share the burden of your sorrow. They can't carry it, but they can walk beside you, and perhaps they can even say something or do something to lighten the load.

KK *That brings us back to where we are at the beginning where people are rarely alone in traditional societies.*

JH Yes, and not only are they there for each other, but they also have well developed rituals to help them to come through those times. We have not gone totally away from those rituals in our own time. We do have baptisms and marriages and funerals. These are times for people to express their joy and their sorrow - whatever needs to be expressed. I've always been delightfully astounded when I have been to a funeral to see how it works so deeply on people. It's quite wonderful. My mother often remarks when she comes back from a

funeral, “It was a lovely funeral,” and then she goes on to tell why. I never understood as a boy. It’s making sense to me now. In Denmark they have a tradition of *grav øl* or burial beer, which is when the friends get together and drink beer afterwards and talk about the one who died. And in Ireland they have the wake before the funeral with the body right there in the room. What a wonderful and terrible tradition that is, but certainly a cathartic one, and centuries old. There is no denying anything and a lot comes out.

KK Talking about this is strange because it’s very coloured for me by having this cancer scare. And there was a very short period when I really thought it might be cancer. But to have that period when it could have been, suddenly it felt like my life went on hold. I couldn’t breathe. And then I felt I had to take a look at that life.

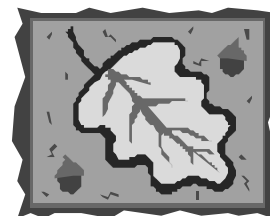
JH But in a non-ordinary way, you *did* have cancer at that time. Your life was put on hold. The world stopped. This possible diagnosis stopped the world for you and you had to look at your life. And the world didn’t start again until you were told it wasn’t cancer.

KK In a way it was a very freeing experience. And also horrible.

JH So think about the people who are told, “Yes, you *do* have cancer.” When I was out at Upaya¹ on a retreat called “Being with Dying”,

there was a bunch of women who had come together. They work at a center called Shekhinah² which is a centre for women with cancer. Everyone who works there either has or has had cancer. It’s a place for women who have cancer to go or to communicate with. A lot of the retreat had to do with really facing death. When they started talking, it was clear to hear, and see, that they were very special people. When you have been living with death not just over your left shoulder but right in front of your nose it changes you.

My spirits started me off by preparing me in a very funny way. There was a woman on one of the first workshops I ever went to who was missing a hand. A lot of people try to avoid looking at others who don’t have a hand, or don’t fit into the category of “normal.” My spirits told me to go up there and talk to her and ask her what happened to her hand. It was a difficult assignment, but I did it. She said, “I’m so glad that you came up and asked me. I’ve never had one.” She was born without one of her hands. She went on to say that she had just made a shamanic journey to ask why she didn’t have a hand. It was a little more than a co-incidence for us both. So after that I noticed that this kind of thing didn’t upset me any more. So when I went home and I saw a friend of mine sitting in a wheelchair, with all his hair missing, I



² Center for Women With Cancer – shekcenter@aol.com

¹ www.upaya.org or upaya@upaya.org

didn't avoid going up to him to ask what was wrong. It turned out he had a brain tumour and had been told he had two weeks to live. When he found I was doing shamanic work he said, "Oh, wow! I've just been saying I need a shaman to help me. Will you help me?" We did some work together and he lived for a little bit more than half a year. And that gave him time to face his death and to do the things he wanted to do before he died, so he didn't leave with a feeling of incompleteness. So I think this is another thing that Western practitioners of shamanism can do to help those who are dying: help them to look at what they want to do. And they usually say "I want to live." And then I say, "What do you want to do with your life *right now*, what do you want to do today and tomorrow?" And maybe they have never had or taken the chance to look at life like that.

Years ago, I heard a wonderful story from some friends about a man they met on their travels. He was a young man in his early thirties. When he was 25 he went to the doctor who said it was cancer and he sent him to a cancer specialist. The specialist said he was very close to death and advised no treatment at all. This is like the death sentence. This is it! Well apparently this guy had a lot of life spirit so he said, "If that is how it is, I am going to do what I want to do. I want to surf." So he sold his house, quit his job and went to Baja California where they have great surf and lived on the beach as a beach bum. Time went by and the pain

disappeared and he didn't pay too much attention because, hey, the surf was up! That was seven years before my friends met him. Doing what he wanted to do with his life, being who he was.

I am not saying that we should all be beach bums, but we should figure out who we are, and be that as much as possible. In the first chapter of the book by Stephen Levine *A Year to Live* he invites the reader to imagine that they have gotten the death sentence from the doctor. You have a year to live. What are you going to do with your life? He goes on to point out that, in fact, you don't have to pretend that you are getting the death sentence: you do not *know* if you are going to be alive in one year, or even tomorrow.

KK It's a world away from something I have met sometimes - the people who think that working with death is glamorous and dangerous.

JH Soul-carrying or soul-conducting is very moving work both for the dead person and also for those left behind, and the one doing the work. Going to the "Land of the Dead" is neither glamorous nor dangerous if you follow the instructions you've been given. I've had some incredible experiences doing it, and I also have seen how much it has meant for those left behind. It's deep, and it's powerful, but for me, it's not *the* deep work. It's important work, but for me the real work is about life. The deep work starts with yourself, and then it goes on to the one who is actively dying, the one



whose organs have stopped functioning, the one who is looking into the eyes of Death. That's the hard work for me, the hard work of being with the dying person who doesn't want to die, and it continues with the people left behind, who feel maybe they don't want to live anymore because someone has died. My experience has been that the spirits take good care of the souls who come to them. It's harder for those left behind. Glamorous and dangerous? No. Overwhelming? Most certainly. But the secret which a lot of people are finding out is that *all* of this work around death is amazingly rewarding. It changes you, and brings you closer to life. The so-called *psychopomp* journey is sort of the prize for doing the deep work, the hard work. It's like the swim at the end of a good, hard day's work. But the real prize is the work itself, and the closeness it brings you to life.

Jonathan Horwitz has studied and worked with shamanism for more than twenty years. For eight years he was on the staff of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies USA. He has an MA in anthropology and has taught courses in shamanism in Europe since 1986. Together with his partner, Annette Høst, Jonathan runs the Scandinavian Centre for Shamanic Studies. Details of forthcoming courses can be found under the Events listing however, two courses of particular interest to readers are Shamanism, Death and Life being held in

March 14-17, 2002:
Gothenburg, Sweden Contact:

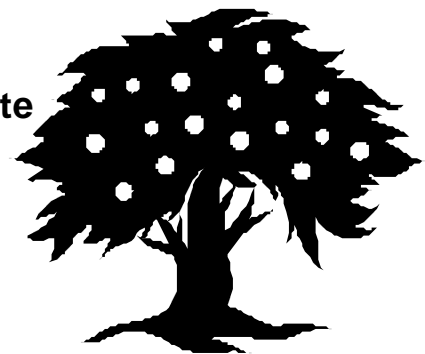
Anna Palmblad, Tel. +46 (0) 31
2931 01. Price: 1675 SEK

November 7-10, 2002:
Contact: Kathy Fried, Tel: +44
(0)208 459 3028.

Pause

Ann Micklethwaite

In the light -
There was silver
Of leaping fish,
Behind the light
Were dark shadows
Warm with sap
Tall trees swaying;
Songs of Spirit
And the land
Sung in the wind's rush;
Everywhere the flow
Of life consummate
In seasons passing,
And moon tides
Bringing a course
Of waxing and waning
In which all things
And lives have
Their beginning ending
In the greater light
Of which this was
Just a moment



Darkness Cannot Drive Out Darkness

Myron Eshowsky

“ Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate; violence multiplies violence; and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction...The chain reaction of evil--hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars – must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the darkness of annihilation.”—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In what may look like a dark time, a time of fear and confusion, is a sacred opportunity to deepen our collective learning, and be the peacemakers and healers our times yearn for. We live in a world of separation, a world whose greatest wound is the illusion of separation from the great web that connects us all. It is the task of our times to heal a long history of war, trauma, and suffering that spans the generations and whose seeds live in the soil we stand. We are asked to hold the great task of the shamans, to hold the balance of the world of the world and to work for the great work of healing the world soul. Our times ask us to redefine old paradigms of warriorship into a model of peacemaking and healing that

is strong and courageous.

On September 11, 2001 , the day of tragedies, and the days following an amazing shift occurred within the United States. The most common refrain is “everything is different now “. People are attending their respective churches, synagogues, mosques, circles, etc. at levels typically reported at the most sacred holy days. There is a sort of spiritual resurgence occurring that is largely ignored in a media consumed by fear and warmaking.

Let us have no illusions. The events and loss of life were born out hatred. Hatred is a spiritual cancer born out of trauma and suffering. It is an extreme form of soul loss that has spread throughout a wounded people. I know of no war that promotes healing and peace. These are only addressed in the aftermath of destruction. There is no peace when a loved one is loss. Even in the absence of war, the wounds of loss continue for generations. There is no peace when thousands of birds are charred to death by the acts of violence in New York City. For generations, the songs the birds sing are not heard nor the beauty of their flight admired. There is no peace when the earth is surgically dissected by repeated bombing. The holes and craters of destruction are energetically held there for generations to come. Peacemaking and healing are difficult questions for they require looking deep beneath the surface at the forces which fuel the conflicts.

There is not enough space in this article to look at the complexity of factors affecting the world. We must understand that the issues calling for healing are deep and require our strongest effort. In one sense, we are being asked to heal a history of thousands of years of disharmony from earth honouring ways. When George W. Bush called the fight against terrorism, a crusade, it was clear this word touched a deep wound in the Middle East psyche even though the Crusades were long ago. History is in the soil throughout the world and it is bubbling up from the deepest layers asking for healing.

In a story I heard many years ago told by Caroline Myss, she spoke of a place in the Ukraine where the Nazis gathered up all the Jews into the local synagogue and set it on fire killing all who were brought there. Years later, a complex of nuclear reactors were built there at Chernobyl. It was on the site of death that a bigger fire occurred. Of all the nuclear reactors there, the one on this place of history was the one that melted down.

A history of attempting to control the earth and all who live on her has come to haunt us one more time. For the Hopi, this is the time of the two worlds. A time when there are those who continue to support destruction and the illusion of control and those who attempt to live in harmony on earth. In my own journeys about what is going on and how to respond, I found that my guidance was leading me in directions I did not expect. I know many who

have been called to compassionately help the departed ones who were killed in the tragedies including the Arab men who hijacked the planes. There are many beautiful stories to be told here.

In my first journey, I was taken to the site in New York City of what had been the World Trade Centre and saw a dark figure man conducting souls into a black hole. I was told that one world is serving the dark and that to serve peace, healing and Spirit was the anecdote. My main spiritual teacher of the upper world said emphatically, "Beware, Satan will present himself as a peacemaker". I should add that the Aramaic roots of the word Satan is "adversary of God" and is used to describe anyone who works to create destruction and disharmony. Subsequent journeys have been consistent in their message.

Each in its own way showing that the Earth is pure, powerful, sometimes harsh and volatile during times of change, but wise and life giving abundant. She will survive no matter how we as spiritual beings live in the Middle World. I was told watch the weather, watch for earthquakes and volcanoes for this would be the way the Earth will heal this time if humans don't.

This is not to promote visions of gloom and doom. I think its clear that the regenerative force of the Earth is known and strong. It really is a time of how do we as spiritual beings respond. When

an animal is on the road and a headlight comes, it often gets caught up in the headlight and doesn't move. It becomes road kill. In this time of fear, this is how many people are responding. They are locked into the fear and can't move. What we give attention and focus to is what we give life to. I have heard Native American elders say recently that people need to remember their feet rather than focus on the headlight. It is to say to remember we can move, we are connected to the earth and the greater web, and in that connection we can act. In this way we can move beyond our fear.

Over the years of using shamanic understandings and methods to bring peace and healing, I have learned some basic principles that I apply in each situation, even though all of them are different. They are as follows:

- In all peacemaking work, it is important to work from a place of non-attachment to outcome. Consistently, I have found that the way these conflicts work their way out is unique and often unexpected. Ethically, there are concerns to not misuse power or cause harm to different parties. The range of resolutions can be from a shift in the energies and perceptions of how the conflicted parties perceive the issues to major miracles: the "bolts out of the blue".
- No peacemaking can occur without stepping into the spiritual shoes of each

aggrieved party in order to have full understanding and compassion for what is involved. I think of shamans who wear the clothes of their clients in order to understand more fully their illness. In other words, it is necessary to understand the stories and truths of each position.

- In every conflict the issues are much deeper than they appear on the surface. There is a spiritual field that influences the conflicting parties. Hidden from our normal way of perceiving, a complexity of issues calling for healing energies. Some of these are personal issues calling for healing such as soul retrieval, power retrieval, or extraction. Some are the influences of history and the ancestors: issues left behind or in the history of a place that are influencing us as spiritual beings, waiting for spiritual resolution. Ultimately, none of these issues are personal, but rather relational in a spiritual context. None of us is separate from them for we are all connected in the greater web of life and thus all of them are collective issues that affect all life. Recognizing the patterns of connection and what is needed to restore balance and harmony is the work that is calling to each of us to be done.
- We must recognize that words have power and all of us must in our own ways create a language of peace and healing in our words,

our stories, our art, our dances, and our songs. There are some issues so overwhelming that our words must affirm this is true but in the realm of Spirit all is possible, everything is healable. Again, I emphasize what this will look like or how this should be is work of non-attachment.

Sometimes what is forgotten in this work is that we as humans have tremendous influence on life in the Middle World. How we work with the powers around us and how we influence and are influenced by these powers is the key issue of this time. I end with a paraphrase of the guiding prophecy of the Waitaha people, a peace oriented shamanic culture in New Zealand.

“ Walk in the shadows, hide in the waters, move in the mists, step behind the rainbow to save the taonga (treasure). Protect our ancestors. Hold the truth close and warm it with brave hearts, for pain will consume the land and the circle of our dreams will be broken. And it will seem lost beyond recall.

Kia Koha! Be Strong! And the day will come when the taonga will be revealed once more. And we will walk tall with the knowledge in the kete (woven basket) and find joy in the colours of the rainbow. And the fires of truth will burn into the hearts of all the people of the land. And they will find the trail of gentleness and peace. Kahuri te Ao—the world turns. And the circle of our dream

time takes a new shape for a new dawn. And the people of all colours join to bind what was broken and live in hope.”

Myron Eshowsky has studied shamanism for 30 years and has been a teaching faculty member of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies USA for 10 years. He is currently the director of the Centre for Community Healing, which is a core shamanism based training programme for troubled teens in Madison Wisconsin.

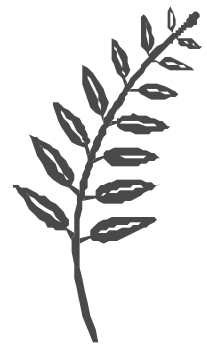
Letter to the Editor

Dear Spirit Talk,

I found the last issue very interesting and thought provoking. There are two points in particular I would like to comment on.

The first is what Annette Høst has to say about 'Urban Shamanism'. Urban literally means of the town or city. Now I agree that, in the British Isles at least, apart from possibly the very tops of the highest Scottish mountains, there is nothing that could be considered untouched by human hand. But the same goes for the South Western desert of the U.S.A. and the Steppes of Siberia. Wherever there are human societies, including shamanic ones, the land is not 'untouched'.

But Annette says 'removed from the raw earth, nature'.



Surely not in Copenhagen? Certainly not in London, Nottingham, Hong Kong. Not to mention the many places in the world that are both 'western post-industrial' and non-urban example, or the South Downs. What is it that we are standing on? There are still trees, still birds, more foxes than in the 'country'. Our food may be shrink-wrapped on supermarket shelves but it has come from the earth. It has to have done so. There's nowhere else for it to have come from. Of course, our awareness of this may be lacking - but that is simply a cause for education. Yes, I know that 'armchair shamans' exist. But I don't feel that being one is inevitable in our culture.



As to the other aspect of 'Urban Shamanism' that Annette mentions, the psychologising of shamanism - well, some people are just happier, more within their 'comfort zone' if they can believe that 'it's all in my head'. However, in my experience, these people are not in the majority.

Of course, we all tend to see our own experience as the norm, and perhaps I have been uncommonly lucky, but the vast majority of my ordinary reality teachers (including Annette), friends and students see shamanism as a deep and serious spiritual path. For the most part it has to be up to those of us who teach to present shamanism as a valid spiritual path. If we don't show that it can be then students may not realise it for themselves. Occasionally there will be those who want their

spirits to be in their subconscious. Some people are happier viewing their power animal as a totem on the level of an astrological sign - "I'm a Libra, I'm a Chinese Tiger, I'm a Wolf person" - and some want their spirit Teachers to be their 'Higher Selves'. We can't change them and eventually they either leave shamanism for something less challenging or they find a teacher who is not so dogmatically certain that the spirits are real. Either way, there's nothing we can do about it.

The other thing I'd like to comment on concerns Carol Proudfoot's article. She says that no one way of shamanism is wrong.

While not wishing to put myself in the camp of those who 'need to decide that these other folks are not doing it in the right way' and having no more desire to institutionalise shamanism than has Carol Proudfoot, it is possible to say that shamanism includes certain things. Carol herself says that universal features of shamanism are

- the journey of the soul to other realms
- retrieval, when necessary, of the wandering soul.

Later she stresses the importance of place and land. To these I would add

- interaction with the spirits
- relationship with our spirit helpers. This goes back to what I was saying above. You don't have a

relationship with a sign of the zodiac.

I am getting phone calls and e-mails regularly from people who enquire about Advanced courses. They don't want to do an Introductory course because 'I have been a shaman all my life'. These are usually people who neither know of the existence of spirits nor who understand that there is a possibility of journeying. One woman recently introduced herself to me as a shamanic healer. She cannot journey, does not accept that journeying or soul loss are possible and does not believe in spirits, only in a Universal Spirit. She channels healing energy to her clients. I am not prepared to say that what she does is wrong. Nor am I prepared to say that it is ineffective. I am prepared to say that it is not shamanism. Nor can I agree with the Pagan Federation that shamanism is a branch of paganism in which the participants, who are all called shamans, use drumming and smudging in their otherwise wiccan rituals.

Shamanism has become a popular word of late. In Spirit Talk maybe it doesn't need to be defined - we may differ in the details but we know what it is. We should be aware that some of the people who call themselves shamans are doing very different things.

Jane E. Shutt,

The North Yorkshire Shamanic Centre (see workshop listing for details of forthcoming workshops).

UK Drumming Groups



One way of connecting with other people who are working with core shamanism is to join a drumming group. Most groups meet monthly or more frequently and meetings include journeying, dancing and healing work.

The following drumming groups are open to new members

London Open Drumming Group

Karen Kelly 01223 562838

Cornwall/Devon

Rowan 01364 642139

Herefordshire

A Davis 01568 615837

Pembrokeshire

Jan Wood 01559 371215

Scotland

Sarah Currier 07980 855 801

Warwickshire

Frances Ommaney 01926 881772

Yorkshire

Chris Mark and Jane Shutt
01751 417795

For a worldwide listing of groups, see the drumming circle listing at Shamaniccircles.org

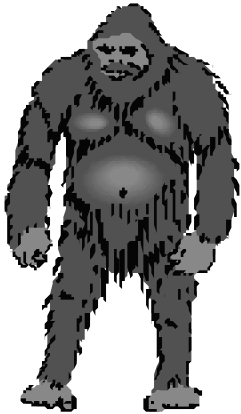


The Yeti: A Winter Story

Shenoah Taylor



At a meeting of the London Open Drumming Group in Autumn 2000, we journeyed for a story to help us through the winter. This is the story I was given by the yeti who really is big and broad and full and laughing and who has given me many fabulous lessons in singing and stomping my way into living a full life.



The yeti comes and he is big and broad and full and laughing and he says . "Let me show you the way to be, let me show you the way."

We dance down to the village the people are there. They are laughing and smiling and in their midst is the yeti, he is big is life itself. They are dancing round him and he is laughing he is stomping and the earth shakes, the people are falling The people open up and he dances out of the circle, he dances into the forests and earth is awakened and the trees are falling to let the light through to the forest floor, that the old may die and the new may be reborn.

He is dancing and he is singing and his voice is booming through the land, his voice is heard and the spirits come and dance in the vibrancy of the sounds. They dance on the rhythms and bless the land and peoples for they are happy to

hear the blessing of the earth.

The Yeti is laughing and full of life, he is full to overflowing and stomps and sings and stomps and sings until the earth is resonating with the sound of life.

He stomps in the fields to plough the earth and the earth sighs a sigh of freedom that it has been blessed by one who is themselves. He stomps and sings and stomps and sings and the heavens open to hear the sounds of joy, the people praise the skies, the earth for the abundance that they have found. And life goes on with people in their power.

But there are those who forget that they are part of the circle. They stand outside and feel the earth shake and deny the earth its blessing, they stand outside and see the trees fall and deny the earth its renewal, they stand outside and hear the noise and deny the spirits their songs. And they whisper. "What is this, it is nothing that we need, for the shaking and the falling trees are things that would be better still. And the singing gets on my nerves, for whoever heard a song that sings the world round, it's just a noise, it has no meaning, it has no reason for being, and that big fat yeti gets in the way, stomping and singing and causing us problems, we would be far better without him, we would be far better with just ourselves, who needs the spirits!"

And the whispers travelled round and people heard and people listened, and other people started to stand outside



the circle too and when the yeti came they told him that he was causing problems for them, the falling trees were dangerous, the shaking earth caused them to fall, the churned up fields were full of mud and his singing was just a hateful noise.

The yeti was bereft, for if he was not to dance and stomp and sing and laugh what else was there for him to be.

But not wanting to be where he was not he walked away with saddened heart and he forgot to sing, he no longer stomped and the laughter was gone from his life and he was diminished and he became so small he crawled into a cave and slept through many winters dreaming dreams of times gone by when he was singing to the sky.

And as the spring awoke the earth the people stirred for the land was bereft, the crops did not grow the forest was dark and frightening and the spirits did not come to bless them and they too were diminished.

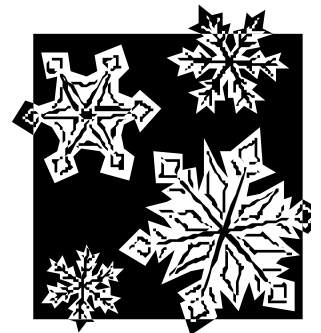
Many moons later the yeti stirred within his cave and the tiny being whose heart was heavy walked out onto the earth and as he wandered small and lonely he heard the whispers of the people who were talking of things past, of the times when the earth was full, of the times when the yeti danced and stomped and brought the spring and the spirits with his singing.

“And do you remember,” the people said, “the time when Yannis went through the ice on

the lake and yeti put his finger out and pulled him clear, and do you remember the cold, cold winters round the village fire, when yeti would come and we would snuggle in his fur to keep out the night and we would tell stories, and he would sing and the spirits would come to listen and bless the people. How we miss those days, how we miss the booming voices through the valleys that stirred the earth and awaked the spring, how we miss the singing and stomping and laughter of the yeti for we are diminished without him.”

And as the yeti heard the stories that were told, his heart began to beat once more with knowing that his life was full, and he began to sing and stomp but he was so very tiny now that no one heard. No one heard but the spirits. And as he sang and stomped and sang and stomped all through the spring and summer the earth once more began to breathe, and the spirits once more came to bless the people and as he sang and stomped he grew and the people saw it too. And they welcomed yeti home and he grew until he was big and broad and full and laughing.

And his stomping shook the earth and the people standing once more in the circle fell and laughed too. And his stomping awakened the earth and felled the trees and ploughed the fields and his laughter boomed across the hills and the spirits came to hear him singing and blessed the land and the people for the yeti is all things, he is life itself.



A Day In The Country:



A ritual for the foot and mouth outbreak

Macca

I had been told to perform a ritual to help to heal the earth after its many ravages by humans and the latest foot and mouth crisis in particular. The idea was to spread the power out from a particular point, where it would meet other power points, spread from these and so on.

The place revealed to me was called White Leafed Oak. It is at the place where the borders of Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire meet. It is also the centre of a decagon of equidistant points, two of which were Stonehenge and Glastonbury Tor.

On the 24th June, I had arranged to meet with friends from that area and others had been invited to support us. Ideally I needed 10 people, 9 arrived but luckily a magpie made p the tenth so off we set.

We had found a white leafed oak on the map and could see it was in the middle of a badly affected area. As we meandered down the ever-narrowing country lanes, every gatepost and footpath was blocked with the sign "closed due to foot and mouth". It was not looking good. Then we located the spot. Twenty feet from the road was a gateway.

Not only was there no sign on it, but it was open almost inviting us in. As we entered the field, there spotted a huge oak tree for us to do the work under. Magic!

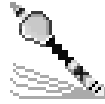
Everybody relaxed, whilst I set things up. I marked out the ten points with a compass and placed a staff topped with a crystal (a beautiful one from Peru, gifted to me by a friend) at its centre. As I placed the staff on the ground, I found myself saying "Behold Excalibur". Ex caliber, out of measurement, this had come. It didn't have to be a sword as long as it was phallic. I had been asked to bring my chalice as well, which would represent the womb. But this was no forceful ravaging thrust; this was a gentle consensual coming together to form a special unity for fecundity and procreation

Everybody now joined the circle at their designated points. I called in my spirits and rattled us all together. Then everybody called in their own spirits and rattled and drummed for power. When everyone had received enough power they turned outward and sent it out across the land. The rest is now up to the spirits.

At the end I filled the chalice with water, from a natural well source, and offered each I turn a drink with the words. "I and my spirits and the Earth thank you for coming." Despite the noise we made, we were not disturbed during the work.

We all felt that it had gone well, only time will tell.

Forthcoming Events



November

30- 3 The Shaman's Journey Basic Workshop Jonathan Horwitz

During this basic course, participants will be introduced to some of the core ideas and methods used by shaman around the world, including Northern Europe, for thousands of years. The main emphasis of the course will be on the shamanic journey to the other, non-ordinary reality to gain power and knowledge for oneself and others.

Venue: Cardiff
Contact: A. Lorraine
Tel: 0292 089 0437
Price: £95

January

4-6 Doorway of the Drum Basic Workshop Chris Luttichau

Participants will get a basic understanding of the nature of shamanism and its cultural basis, as well as practical techniques.

Venue: Cornwall
Contact: Lu Wray
Tel: 01736 796660
Price £130-£150

11-13 Soul Retrieval

Chris Luttichau

Retrieving lost soul parts is a major, shamanic healing practice. There will be teachings on how to find a lost soul piece, how to bring it back, and how to integrate it as well as an introduction to the cultural; and spiritual background to soul loss and retrieval.

Venue: Cornwall
Contact: Lu Wray
Tel: 01736 796660
Price £130-£150

20-21 Shamanic Healing II

Jane Shutt & Chris Mark

Venue: Yorkshire
Contact: Jane and Chris
Tel: 01751 417795
Price: £90 (Inc food and accommodation)

25-27 The Shaman's Journey Basic Workshop

Jonathan Horwitz

See Nov course for details.

Venue: London
Contact: Kathy Fried
Tel: 0207 459 3028
Price: £95

29-3 Core Shamanic Counselling Training I Jonathan Horwitz

Shamanic Counselling is a spiritual counselling method based on classic shamanism. The aim of shamanic counselling is to put people into contact with their own spiritual power by teaching them the basic techniques of the shamanic divinatory journey.

Venue: Gloucestershire
Contact: Kathy Fried
Tel: 0208 459 3028



Price: £495

Editorial

What an autumn... The events of 11th September have shuddered though the consciousness of the Western world like a tsunami and now we face war in the Middle East. Sometimes it feels like these events have swept everything away in front of them. And surely huge shifts like this have a massive impact on the world in which we live and on ourselves as individuals.

For me these mark a time to pay attention, not only to the outer world, but also to my inner self. It isn't about healing the world; it's about us as human beings taking responsibility for where our own lives are out of balance. From that place we can then look at how our imbalance affects the world around us and act accordingly. The Universe is showing us a great mirror, all the time. In that mirror we see reflected back to us all that we are. We see the beauty and the pain and terror.

This autumn for me has been a time for looking into that great mirror and then turning inwards and looking deeply into my own life. I am not separate from those who hijacked the planes any more than I am from those dropping bombs on Afghanistan or those who died in the World Trade Centre.

In the week of the planes being crashed, I found myself

in the centre of a conflict with two old friends. The details are irrelevant. I had been journeying about what I could do about the implications September 11th. I was shocked when my spirit teacher's first words were why was I worrying about conflict in the outside world when I was not attending to the conflict in my heart. Why was I not bringing the balance and calmness I was praying for in the outer world to what was happening in my personal life.

Since then I have tried to see what is happening in the Middle East and across the world as a teacher, not (or not only) about mankind but about *me*. There are things I can see clearly in the great canvass of the World that I simply can't see in my own life.

It has challenged me to take responsibility in a new way. I have found that I have withdrawn from most outer things to pay attention to these teachings. It is not easy.

I'm sharing this because I see this time as a huge wake up call. In the weeks after September 11th, I received lots of emails about prayer for the war, many of them wonderful emails. But it struck me that few people seemed to be talking about the wake up call we have all received, to wake up into our own lives.

Editorial Policy

Spirit Talk is a grass roots networking newsletter for people interested in and working with core shamanism.

What draws us together is our work with the spirits: the focus of Spirit Talk is therefore on personal experience and the gifts of our spirit kin rather than being tied to any one tradition or teacher. Let this newsletter be a shining thread that draws us closer.

Disclaimer

Spirit Talk does not knowingly publish any material that is inaccurate or libellous. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editor. Whilst making every effort to be accurate, the editorial team will not be responsible for any errors omissions or inaccuracies appearing in Spirit Talk.

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