



CHAPTER ONE



FORGOTTEN WAYS OF HEALING

“The greatest arrogance of the present is to forget the intelligence of the past.”

Ken Burns (quoted in Marshall, *Walking with Grandfather* 2005, p. 3)

“Forgetting shamanism will never work, because psychology and medicine become one-dimensional without their ancient sister. Thus shamanism will have to play a role in reshaping our helping professions.”

Arnold Mindell, *The Shaman’s Body* (1993, p. 154)

Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition (1994), defines *perfunctory* as: 1) to accomplish, get through with; 2) characterized by routine or superficiality; and 3) lacking in interest or enthusiasm. *Perfunctory* could be used to characterize a typical 10- to 15-minute doctor’s visit or a routine 50-minute coun-

selling session in the Western world. This is very different from the mindfulness, verve, and ecstatic nature that can be used to describe indigenous ways of healing. If many of today's contemporary attempts to treat physical and emotional ailments are little more than routine and moribund procedures, there will be little vitality blended into the healing equation. To initiate substantial recovery, much more energy must be infused into Western healing practices than is being seen in most offices today.

A close examination of indigenous medicine reveals there are many indispensable methods, a wide array of ingredients that meld to formulate a comprehensive healing ensemble. The chapters that follow expand on many of these elements, few of which will resemble a modern-day visit to the doctor or psychologist. For example, providing health history information on a hand-held computer while sitting in the physician's lobby is a vastly different experience from the day when a doctor attentively listened to the patient with appropriate reassuring touch. Additionally, there is a paucity of rituals being practiced in today's psychotherapy and medical offices. The rituals that are employed usually entail impersonal activities like reviewing and signing disclosure statements, advising patients of their rights, signing waivers of responsibility, or administering tests, rather than constructing meaningful sacred rituals. Both professions place an emphasis on the financial collection process. This emphasis is entirely different from the traditional African healer who doesn't discuss remuneration but willingly accepts donations that are anonymously placed beneath a mat, the amount left behind being indicative of the value the patient placed on the service provided.

In recent years it appears as though both medicine and psychology have reduced healing to biochemical formulations. We search for the absent or deficient chemical (often man-made) that will remedy an ailment or alter a person's mood. Most visits to a doctor's office result in the prescription of a tablet or capsule that will presumably resolve

the presenting problem. Sometimes it is deemed necessary to surgically remove a malfunctioning organ or growth. Pills and even surgeries often rely on a tacit placebo effect to promulgate recovery. Increasingly it is believed that a pill will contravene the unpleasant, albeit natural emotional reactions to life's inevitable vicissitudes. Depression and grief presumably require an SSRI anti-depression drug. Rumination and worry require an SSRI. Overeating will necessitate an SSRI. Repetitive anxiety-calming behaviors (OCD) can supposedly be halted with an SSRI. Premenstrual discomfort must be treated with an SSRI. Delayed sleep onset requires an SSRI. High and low sexual desire requires the same drug. You see the trend; much of what are normal, often episodic and transient behaviors must be subdued with a pill. There is little tolerance for even momentary discomfort. We don't want to spend time with life's predictable angst.

Often healers must look into the human body or brain to understand a specific malady. Today we use scopes, x-rays, CAT scans, MRIs, and functional brain imagery like SPECT and PET scans. Few Western people today believe shamanic accounts of remarkable and comparable diagnostic abilities because they are so far removed from our conceptualization of what is humanly possible. There are ancient practices in which traditional healers used their eyes to see a patient's auras or literally looked into the human body, human talents that may have once been innate and have atrophied from a lack of use over centuries. Such practices seem like magic to us, just like a PET scan may seem magical to a South Africa Venda tribesman. As humans we are too far removed from our past to remember the amazing natural technologies that were once routinely used, and still are practiced, by indigenous healers in a few remaining remote locations of the world.

It is a temptation to discount the effectiveness of indigenous sacred rituals when they appear so primitive to us, so unfamiliar, peculiar, and bizarre. Drumming, dancing, chanting, whistling, skin piercing, altered states of consciousness — what could all of these

things have to do with healing? To get a complete picture of medicine's evolution one must also ask the converse as well, namely, "What do our Western religious and medical practices look like to aboriginal people? Does the doctor's gown and mask, the routine cutting and removal of body parts, or the infusion of another person's blood into our body look odd or even grotesque to a San Bushman shaman? What would a remote tribesman think of our religious services with incense being swirled around, the symbolic drinking of blood, parishioners speaking in tongues, snake handling ceremonies, or collection plates being passed around to support the upkeep of massive cathedrals that are filled with statues?

Psychotherapy can appear weird to an outsider as well, especially if they haven't had certain techniques explained, like the use of punching bags, EMDR, tapping, penile plethysmography, or sex therapy techniques. Equally perplexing to a South American tribesman might be the way our judicial process is ritually conducted. Men and women wear robes and sometimes wigs; people do not face each other; an adversarial tone pervades the proceedings; victims are often denied the opportunity to speak; and guilty verdicts, fines, and the incarceration of criminals all too often are presented as potential healing remedies.

Every time period and every culture has employed its own unique ways of resolving social and health issues. By using a medical anthropologist's discerning eye we can learn that there are few absolutes in healing. Each seemingly divergent approach can be equally effective when dropped into the cultural context of the patient. With the passage of time and the homogenization of health care — for both physical and mental illnesses — many key elements of traditional healing practices have fallen by the wayside. Factors that once provided an expansive treatment regimen have been reduced to a few generic procedures and universal protocols. In the counseling setting, for example, we greet the patient, gather a social history, listen to their personal narrative while nodding, ask them what is working and what is not, perhaps suggest

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new insights and behaviors, and say “goodbye” while requesting a cash payment. A former instructor of mine, William Glasser, M.D., once cryptically remarked that there are only three things an aspiring therapist needs to ask each client if they are intending to practice psychotherapy: 1) What have you been doing? 2) Does it seem to be helping? and, 3) Did you bring your checkbook today?



Close examination of ancient healing methods reveals that very complex and time-consuming practices are employed. They certainly can't be dismissed as primitive; they reveal an amazingly comprehensive understanding of the unlimited self-healing capabilities of the mindbody unit. Historically, healing wasn't one-dimensional, as is often characteristic of modern medicine and psychology. Rather it was a multifaceted process that required, first and foremost, that the patient be brought into contact and alignment with the larger mind, the infinite intelligence of the Universe. Ancients were practicing sophisticated forms of *quantum medicine* and *psychophysiology* that at some level of understanding recognized the body's consciousness and the communication that occurs between mind and body at the cellular level. Ancient medicine focused on accessing the body's own internal intelligence, simply put, how altering a person's thoughts (changes in consciousness) can create molecules (a change in matter).

Indigenous healing practices have at least 26 essential, active, and interrelated elements that are integral to the healing process and can complement Western medicine and psychology. For a dramatic and full healing one must:

1. Sacralize (to make sacred) the setting and the healing procedures. Involve a community of supporters.
2. Involve a community of supporters.

3. Summon the spirit world.
4. Involve the Ancestors whether they are deceased or alive, relatives or strangers.
5. Invite Elder participation, often to lead rituals.
6. Invoke the power of mystery.
7. Infuse the healing process with loving kindness and compassion.
8. Encourage hands-on healing techniques.
9. Facilitate and explore altered states.
10. Use dreams for guidance.
11. Insert a dose or two of humor.
12. Work from clear and noble intentions, and provide close attention.
13. Find ways to make Nature the primary office and cathedral.
14. Use intuitive abilities to compliment the analytical.
15. Collaborate with, and involve the patient in, the treatment planning.
16. As a healer, be authoritative yet humble.
17. Employ sacred magic.
18. Emphasize reciprocity, the give-and-take that promotes healing.
19. Utilize storytelling.
20. Employ the patient's belief system, suggestion, and the placebo effect.
21. Re-story (reconceptualize) illness and trauma to interject purpose and meaning.
22. Emphasize panpsychism, interconnectedness, and themes of unity.
23. Utilize rhythm, music, prayers, movement or dance.
24. Follow a heart-driven and heart-focused healing approach.
25. Harmonize the patient with his fellowman, Mother Earth, and the Universe.
26. Continuously look for opportunities to embed recovery in rituals and ceremonies.

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Indigenous healing practices are typically carefully planned, extraordinarily detailed, and very complex. To assemble an effective healing environment the traditional healer includes nearly all of the aforementioned elements into ceremonial and ritual settings. This process involves extensive planning and hard work. Each element, as you are about to read, plays an integral role in setting the stage for a *super natural* (vs. supernatural) outcome, what the inexperienced caregiver may mistake for a miracle. Powerful healings are often erroneously labeled as “miraculous” when there is an insufficient knowledge of indigenous traditions to fully comprehend them. The mystery of these methods suggests that anything, no matter how dramatic or unconventional, can occur. In this belief system the mindbody is not limited to minor every day healing. Expecting something dramatic can lead to something dramatic. And a super natural healing that is possible for anyone is possible for everyone.

Indigenous people firmly believe that whatever malady afflicts us while living on Mother Earth, there is an accompanying remedy also found on Earth that can provide restoration to health. Simply stated, the more of these composite elements that are folded into the recipe, all of which resonate with the patient’s belief system, the more profound the results can be, especially when time limitations aren’t allowed to compromise the procedures.

A new breed of healer will be required for the troubles and plagues that increasingly confront us. The healers will be disconnected from the medieval cruelties of psychiatry and medical-minded psychologists with their lobotomizations of the connections between mind, body, and spirit. Armed with the understandings of ecology and relationship, these systematic-minded healers will utilize (rather than attack) people’s symptoms and problems and help them move forward with their lives without psy-

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chiatric testing, assessment, diagnosis, medication, hospitalization, and economic ruin.

Bradford Keeney, *Shaking Out the Spirits* (1995, p. 126)



CHAPTER TWO



SACRED GROUND

“To be in the presence of a sacred image is not to be instructed, to know something one didn’t know before, but simply to be the receiver of a transforming radiance.”

Thomas Moore, *The Soul’s Religion* (2002, p. 173)

When a person experiences a trauma like domestic abuse or a sexual assault they may lose a vital energy, a life force, their best essence, and a part of their soul. They often feel dirty or contaminated by the abuser and the abuse experience. They may feel disconnected from the Divine and from all things sacred. Understandably, traditional healers call this *soul loss*. The corrective process is called *soul retrieval*. When it is instituted, the retrieval is conducted at a sacred location and encompassed in sacred activities. It invites a reverent homecoming, a way back to parts of self that were momentarily lost, and the best parts of the victim. Soul loss can diminish a person’s physical health. Most indigenous people believe that the biggest cause of physical illness is soul loss. It follows that to recover one’s soul enables a person to recover their physical vitality too.

We lose track of the sacred and suffer from spiritual depletion when we come into contact with people I call *emotional vampires*, those persons who suck innocence and joy from us through physical and emotional trauma. Their violation of a person's bodymind — whether it occurs as a result of unwanted sexual touch or by physical violence — is a powerful method of defilement. But there are many less obvious forms of abuse that can be inflicted, including chronic psychological abuse, which can also contribute to soul theft. The emotional vampire can inflict harm in the following ways:

- Claiming to be right all the time, leaving you in the wrong.
- Routinely telling you how to lead your life.
- Trying to keep you off balance, uncertain, and feeling intimidated.
- Objectifying you; treating you like property.
- Redefining your best qualities as weaknesses, i.e., gentleness as weakness, or generosity as naiveté.
- Playing power games and bullying you.
- Acting as if you don't exist while talking to others in your presence.
- Telling disgusting stories, perhaps about you; make cutting and sarcastic remarks, as if enjoying making you uncomfortable.
- Trying to trip you up conversationally to make you look stupid.
- Always getting the last word in.
- Smirking with disdain and annoyance when talking to you, especially in front of an audience.
- Always keeping the conversation and attention focused on them.
- Startling you for their personal pleasure.

The antithesis to this type of emotional abuse is to discharge toxic vampire energy by treating victims as sacred people of the Earth. Recovery is about noting the strong parts of you that have weathered

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the storms. It entails nurturing pain like a seed until it transforms into something different, bigger, and better; something that ultimately can nourish the body and soul. Recovery involves feeding the innate best qualities of a person. As healers we create the fertile garden for this work, but the patient nurtures and grows their flowers.

There is an old Indian tale in which a conflicted grandson asks his grandfather an important question: “There are two wolves fighting within me. One of them is angry and hateful; the other shares and is kind. Which one will win, grandpa?” The old man answered, “The one you choose to feed.”



Bringing the sacrosanct into the healing setting was always a part of ancient medicine. Developing a sacred posture was understood to be a requisite factor to acquire and maintain good mental and physical health. Shamans have always been the technicians of the holy, lovers of the sacred. In Western society, however, we value the separation of religion from healing practices. When a therapist or physician tries to bring their brand of religion into healing it is frowned upon, especially when it has a proselytizing quality to it that doesn't respect the patient's spiritual side. The fields of psychology and medicine have carried this demarcation to the extreme, however, keeping virtually all things sacred outside of the healing environment. We have created offices that are mechanically and technologically oriented, but without spirit. The ancient ones offer us a renewed awareness of the value of the sacred. We must examine these old ways and reconsider inserting this type of medicine into our patient's lives, and do so in ways that have deep personal meaning for them. This process is *sacralizing*: it hallows the healing experience.

A Peruvian clinician and *curandero* (traditional healer), Oscar Miro-Quesada (Webb, 2003), believes that the majority of social and

psychological issues experienced by his patients are actually *spiritual emergencies*. The term was first introduced by Stanislav Groff, a Czech psychiatrist, who was convinced that many mental health maladies (e.g. mid-life crises, depression, neuroses, etc.) were actually the results of a lack of meaning in people's lives. Miro-Quesada reframes recovery from these conditions as potential "spiritual awakenings" rather than as pathological conditions. Patients can find purpose and meaning in the experiences and not feel pathologized or condemned by societal norms or professional labels. Miro-Quesada also maintains that a spiritual emergency can be likened to a potentially heroic shamanic initiation, the beginning of something very positive in a person's life. He further contends that approximately 70 percent of Western-diagnosed forms of psychopathology, if treated from this paradigm, would simply run their natural course with the patient being *shapeshifted* into a new and more satisfying spiritual world. By addressing "problems" from a reverent posture, I have noticed patient's defenses fall away and they often experience a visceral shift. It is like an inner quieting that sets them on the road to recovery, allowing sudden and marked personal transformations.

Counseling and doctoring, when reverently discharged, are far more than money generating and reputation enhancing careers. In aboriginal cultures healing is conceptualized as a sacred ministry. The traditional healer feels a sacred obligation to support his fellow tribesman. He regards the creation and holding of sacred space as his most important duty in healing ceremonies. Almost always a shaman will commence treatment with a chant, a song, a blessing, a cleansing ritual, or a prayer intended to create a reverent tone. The suffering person will resonate with the spirit of sacred rituals when conducted in an acknowledged spiritual setting, and will be lifted up by the enlivening and hallowing of the healing processes.

Spirituality can be defined as *purposeful belonging*. When individuals recognize they are integral parts of something much bigger than their individual selves and, at the same time, note how they are joined

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in a meaningful life purpose with others, it can be said that they are spiritual. A ceremonial healing can bring these qualities of the spiritual life together, and as we will see later, ritual activities subsumed within ceremonies help to activate reverent feelings with all of their accompanying powers.

Prayerful meditation has been touted as a healing force. It may, under certain circumstances, assist a person in recovery from psychological or physical maladies. What isn't effective, however, is a desperate imploring of a god(s) to rescue and heal someone, a pleading incantation for his or her recovery. God is much more than an external superhero, a cosmic bellhop, or a personified being that runs favors for the indolent. God, as understood in most indigenous cultures, is an ever-present divine and restoring force that runs through all people. To summon up the god-like healing powers latently resting in every patient, it isn't productive for them to languish in a mental state of desperation. In contrast, when the afflicted person imagines himself as healed while nestled in the company of other persons whose loving attention is similarly focused on his healed state, this type of support more likely produces the desired results. While angst is inclined to dissipate our healing power, holding images of being recovered fortifies us.

Carefully selecting and thoughtfully assembling a healing site is one of the first requirements of indigenous healing. Choosing a sacred location where healing ceremonies have been conducted for hundreds if not thousands of years can set the stage for a super natural event. Participating in a lengthy pilgrimage to the site gradually prepares the minds of each participant for a powerful event. The time spent in travel suspends them in a lengthy period of positive expectation. Opening sacred space in the healing setting is a way to further sacralize an environment before commencing specific healing activities.



EXERCISE: “Creating Sacred Space”

Using the basic elements — fire, water, wind, and earth — is helpful in creating sacred space. Lighting a bonfire, or even a candle, can intimate that the transformative power of fire is about to occur in someone’s life. Immersing a person in water is a ritual that has been used continually in Christian baptisms and is also a part of Zimbabwean Shona shamanic ceremonies. Sprinkling products of the Earth into the wind -- like cedar, corn meal, or tobacco — can serve as an offering of reciprocity before commencing a healing ceremony; first we give. It isn’t vitally important to follow the exact rituals of an indigenous culture when opening sacred space. What is important is the spiritual meaning the rituals hold in the patient’s personal cosmology.

Reading a spiritual passage, singing a favorite song, or greeting the Seven Directions can all be used to invite the sacred into a healing circle. Most shamans begin ceremonies with an invocation; the Q’ero of Peru blow their prayers for the patient through coca leaves. I have seen bay leaves and other plants used as substitutes. What is important is the plant’s significance to the person being healed and the intentions behind the prayers. Importantly, the patient should be involved in the design of the rituals as their active participation not only affords them respect, but their input also tells us much about their belief system, and the entire process activates the inner healer.

EXERCISE: “Cleansing and Purification”

Offerings are often made to Creator in Native American healing ceremonies. The patient may participate in group activities when the smoke of smoldering herbs is wafted over everyone’s bodies and into the sacred healing space. Hands or feathers can be used. This ritual symbolizes the purification of bodymind, allowing growth and recovery to commence in a cleansed environment. *Smudging*, as it is called, is a first step ritual

at most native healings. It can signify a fresh start. Some aboriginal people say this type of prelude to healing makes a connection with Creator as the smell of burning tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar, or sage is appealing to the gods. When an individual becomes accustomed to this type of sacred ritual, simply the smell of the plants can shift the patient's mental state to that of positive expectancy.

EXERCISE: “Creating an Altar”

Before commencing an important group meeting, a therapy session, or a community-supported healing, it is almost always helpful to set aside sufficient time to create sacred space. One way to do this is to assemble a sacred altar. A table — round to represent equality, or four-sided table to symbolize the four directions — can be placed in the center of a group of people who have gathered. Some people prefer a small cloth on the Earth or on the table. Each person is encouraged to contribute a personal item that holds sacred significance for him or her. The symbolic objects are laid out for the duration of the ceremony, some may even be left with the patient.

Moving the conversation in a clockwise direction, participants speak briefly about the significance or symbolism of their contribution. An animal fetish, charm, or an indigenous amulet may be offered, especially if it represents the patient's guardian animal. Another person might add a religious item, such as a cross, but only if it is in keeping with the patient's belief system. A rock from a far away healing site (I have used stones from the Sacred Valley of Peru) may bring the spirit of that sacred place to the healing. A feather, soil, spring water, bread, bear fur, or flowers all can bring additional meaning to the ceremony. With each addition to the altar, the gathering takes on increasing meaning and power. Spirit is almost palpable and the body-mind is readied for change.



The presence of Elders or spiritual leaders can add to the reverent tone of a ceremony. Their attendance alone signifies that a serious event is taking place. In their company the patient is reassured that he is on a wise and well-traveled path, that he has the guidance of knowledgeable persons. The Elder's experience links everyone to the past, to time-tested traditions that guide the patient in the direction of a good outcome. Spiritual leaders can bring an understanding of *right relationships* to ceremony, connecting and harmonizing the patient with all other beings of the world. Further, when an Elder comes dressed in traditional ceremonial attire, the power of the gathering can transcend most any Western doctor visit or psychotherapy session. Short of a very formal ceremony, there is always the option of inviting respected seniors to a regularly scheduled counseling session, especially when their presence alone can add to a devout tone or if it is important to have them bear witness to the significance of what is about to happen. Often Elders tell sacred tales that create a reverent atmosphere while hinting at healing possibilities.

Native Americans refer to rocks as “grandfathers.” They are ancient beings with long memories and stored wisdom. Not only are rocks considered a life form with consciousness, but they are regarded as being sacred too. So, in the absence of an Elder community figure attending a healing ceremony, all the participants can be invited to bring rocks with them, which, literally and symbolically, add ancient truths to the gathering.

Traditional Koyukons of the Canadian Northwest believe that all things on Earth are endowed with a divine ember of *Distant Time* and that they all share a common ancestry – a spiritual kinship. This belief makes it almost impossible for them not to feel reverently connected to everything in their natural surroundings. In the Koyukon worldview, everything in the natural world – trees, snowflakes, stars, flowers, peo-

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ple, or stones — continuously bear witness to a shared past in their own unique way. This perspective keeps everyone aware of their link to what has preceded them and what has yet to come. “Past” events cannot be relegated to history, but are forces that directly affect the present and the future. From this perspective, it is difficult to carelessly live in the moment without sacred regard for one’s obligations to the unfolding of repetitive life patterns. There is a divine wisdom permeating all things and all times. Who among us can put individual interests before the grand scale of sacred cycles?



In treating the victims of crimes and abuse we recognize that much of what they underwent may have been abhorrent or reprehensible, so it is a natural corollary to bring opposite and corrective forces to the therapeutic setting, namely the sacred. The reassurance that is felt when invoking sacred ways can establish an environment where vulnerability may be safely risked and a transformation is likely to occur. The sacred carries the magic, that numinous quality that lifts us beyond the ordinary, moves us beyond previous limitations, and links us to deeper meaning in an often violent and hurtful world. Similarly, because immoral acts were part of the abuser’s world, logically it would follow that spiritual activity could provide a roadmap out of their morass as well. This implies that psychotherapy — more specifically shamanic psychotherapy — must be courageous enough to pass moral judgments on individual human conduct without, at the same time, shaming the person who has fallen.

Healers are encouraged to serve as moral consultants. They can help to develop a moral compass in the patient, and not be limited to being psychological advisors (Doherty, 1995). Their respectful promotion of virtue and ethics must transcend mechanical techniques and theoretical formulations that are deemed *best practices*. Their emphasis must be

on the world community, the moral nature of the Universe, and not just the wounded individual before them. From this stance one quickly learns that what we fear and hate has likely held residence inside most of us at some time in our lives. Everything seen in the external world has an inner counterpart. Through this lens, addressing interpersonal hurt and crime can benefit healers by bringing them back in touch with their own shadow side. In this way, all of us can grow.

“It is from understanding that power comes...for nothing can live well except in a manner that is suited to the way the sacred power of the world lives and moves.”

Black Elk (*Black Elk Speaks*, p. xxix)