



## **HEALING JOURNEYS: SHAMANISM AS THERAPY**

**Ian Prattis**

**Professor of Anthropology and Religion**

**Carleton University**

**Ottawa, Canada K1S 5B6**

### **ABSTRACT**

An effective therapy for transforming deep seated traumas can be found in shamanic practices that amplify the healing process by placing it in an altered state of consciousness (A.S.C.). This essay is not merely an academic presentation of theoretical building blocks but an endeavor to understand my own healing process. These experiences enable me to construct a general model of healing which illuminates the therapeutic role of an A.S.C. I explicate the significance of breath work, then provide a meditative healing journey based on the preceding building blocks. My understanding of the healing process is in energy terms, and I consider it essential that the power and energy of creative self-healing and mindfulness are brought to bear on transforming the energy of separation and trauma.

### **Introduction**

Ignorance about the nature of our consciousness can lead to internal separation that produces illnesses, which are difficult to heal. When we are able to bring awareness to the causes of separation, deep traumas can then be released and wholeness is ours to reclaim. Of the many therapies available, I would argue that the healing aspects of shamanism open our eyes to a heightened awareness that enables methodologies of healing to surface and clear that which makes us ill – physically and psychologically. It is my belief, based on many years of experience, that the energy invoked in shamanic healing practices impacts the energy of deep seated traumas and releases them from the body and mind in a way that most other therapies cannot. This has to do with the importance of the healing process taking place within an altered state of consciousness (A.S.C.), whereby the energy of healing is amplified to the extent that it dissolves the energy of separation. Before I can convince the reader of this, allow me to provide a number of building blocks about shamanism and to clear up a number of misconceptions.

Shamanic experiences are quite natural, only our culture has become so removed from them that even our scientific observers do not possess the appropriate concepts or experience to understand them. Many of the events associated with shamanism that are labeled as anomalous have to do with the shaman's ability to move into, and through, a series of related altered states of consciousness (A.S.C.). Without a corresponding ability to enter into an A.S.C., it becomes exceedingly difficult for the scientific observer or medical doctor to understand what may be communicated. A shaman may communicate to the observer about experience and events several times removed from the reality within which the observer is located. Thus the shaman communicates S, and the observer understands it as O, thereby misrepresenting the features, structure and process of whatever the shaman communicates about. To reduce this disjunction in communication and the distortion of recorded information, requires of the scientific observer the willingness and ability to suspend disbelief and travel through the shamanic experience (or something similar) in order to code information from a different level of personal experience.

This is what this work is about. The experiences described are my own, and there is no distinction between my personal and academic interests as I wanted to clearly understand what was going on in my own healing process. For the past decade I have conducted intensive experiential research with a number of shamans in North America - in Arizona, British Columbia and Ontario. One shaman is a female Ojibway medicine woman who was my primary teacher. Her name is White Eagle Woman, and when I think of her, I am always struck by her integrity and overwhelming capacity to see into the nature of all matter. I was also taught by three other shamans – a medicine woman from the Shuswap nation in British Columbia, a male Algonquin shaman and the final teacher is a medicine man with the Apache in the American Southwest, all of whom prefer that their identity remain confidential. My understanding of the experience of each shamanic journey was always communicated to my shaman teachers and they confirmed them as accurate in terms of their view of the teachings they imparted, and the experiences they initiated. The work with these shamans was a highly privileged encounter as I was taught a great deal that was not made available to other aspiring pupils. My education in this area was consistent with my participation in the healing and meditative arts over the past thirty years.

There is a more general model of healing that underlies my understanding of shamanic experience and I intend to make this explicit so that my conclusions may be anticipated. Thus my understanding and experience of shamanic practice will be part of a general model of healing that is applicable to non-shamanic contexts. I will proceed to outline an alternative model of healing, then highlight the therapeutic role of an A.S.C. and show why I place such an emphasis on breath control, particularly in the context of near death experiences (N.D.E.). This is before I come on to the phenomenon of the shamanic journey. Finally, I will construct a healing ceremony from all the building blocks I have placed before the reader. This progression is summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: DEATH BREATHS AND DRIVERS**

1. MODEL OF HEALING
2. ALTERED STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS
3. BREATH CONTROL
4. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE
5. DEATH BREATHS AND THE  
SHAMANIC JOURNEY
6. HEALING CEREMONY

**Model of Healing**

In keeping with many indigenous cosmologies and eastern philosophies, I assume a mind/body/soul unity as the potential state of being fully human. The impediments to experiencing this state are a series of internal blockages and disjunctions that draw their origin from social and cultural conditioning, genetic heritage and karma. This combination of factors creates dislocations in the body and mind and prevents the mind/body/soul unity from taking shape. I regard the dislocations as the underlying cause of physical and psychological illness. When they become too great, connection to the soul is lost and intervention is necessary to restore connection and balance, and therefore health. Given this perspective, what is required in the healing process is attention to, awareness of, and

dialogue with the dislocation, so that which blocks inner unity from taking shape is identified, understood, transformed and then transcended. This process is at the core of most healing and meditative systems, and the remedies involve a process of surfacing and clearing. This has been clearly identified in the Buddhist system of thought. The fears and anxieties that lie deep in our unconscious are known as *anusaya* - latent tendencies (Hahn 1993:68). Thich Nhat Hahn remarks that:

*Because we are not able to resolve the anusaya, we repress them, and they grow stagnant and cause sickness whose symptoms can be recognized in everything we do.*

He goes on to say that:

*Buddha taught that rather than repressing our fears and anxieties, we should invite them into consciousness, recognize them, welcome them ... quite naturally they will lose some of their energy. When once again they return to our subconscious, they will be that much weaker ... they will continue to grow weaker."*

This overview of dialogue and interaction with the inner dislocations and latent tendencies, will be incorporated in the model of healing I will later derive. When we dialogue with painful material that has been repressed, we reduce the potency of that material. We rob it of the energy that can render us dysfunctional - physically and mentally - which is basically what illness is all about. My understanding of the healing process is in energy terms.

The traumas from our upbringing, in our genetic memories and from karma lodge themselves as energy in our bodies and minds, and create an internal formation described as *samyojana* in Sanskrit. Thich Nhat Hahn describes them as *fetters* or *knots* of suffering deep in our unconscious. Afflictive emotions such as fear, anger, insecurity, sadness, jealousy and attachment keep the knots of suffering in place, and this produces the disjunctions in mind/body/soul unity that cause illness. The knots of suffering:

*...are forged by confusion and lack of understanding, by our misperceptions regarding our selves and our reality. (Hahn 1993:77)*

Thus it is obvious that perception and cognition have to change, and the Buddhist methodology for this is mindfulness - self-awareness and seeing reality (both internal and external) clearly. The seeds of trauma and suffering within us often manifest as illness or

dysfunctional behavior. When we become aware of this, and aware that we also carry the seeds of mindfulness and the power of self-healing within us, then we can embrace our trauma and suffering with mindful healing. The energy from these seeds steadily reduces the energy of the seeds of trauma, so that step by step we learn to become whole and well. It is necessary to bring these seeds of mindful healing to bear on the deeply hidden distress, violence, anger, fear and control that lie within. These energies have to be transformed, not just intellectually, but by being discharged physically from the body and mind in an atmosphere that is both safe and sacred, and preferably in a state of altered consciousness. The reasons for these preconditions will become apparent as this essay proceeds.

By and large, in the Western allopathic system of mainstream psychotherapy, it is the intellect of the mind that is addressed - neither sacredness nor safety for the body and soul are considered. Thus major components of the healing equation are ignored due to differing perspectives about energy, trauma, and how the mind integrates with the body and soul. While there are increasing numbers of medical doctors who may be open to the ideas expressed here, mainstream medical practice remains firmly opposed (Winkelman 1992). The model of healing I intend to develop is one that is designed to surface and clear the energies of trauma from the body/mind so that body, mind and soul can be integrated at a different level. The strategic arena for this to take place is that of an A.S.C.

The importance of surfacing and clearing, both physically and mentally, is so one can be free of the knots of suffering and experience a deeper level of personal integration. However, the emotion and pain of old wounds and deep hurts must first of all be identified, surfaced and then released. We all have scars and emotional wounds deep within us, from upbringing, genetic heritage, and karma and this is repressed in the unconscious, as the scars and wounds are too painful for our awareness to deal with. When an event is presented to us that touches these old scars, that event acts as a trigger and starts to accumulate power, and it is this power that generates and fuels those knots of suffering and latent tendencies associated with repressed painful memories. This force increases and comes charging up from the unconscious, so that by the time it gets to conscious awareness it has the power of a runaway express train - nothing is going to stop it. And so it charges out of us. We react, go out of control, say, do and think things we often regret, for this runaway express train is necessarily directed outwards and projected onto others. This

projection process will continue until an individual achieves sufficient self-awareness to turn her critical energies inward, then the energy of mindfulness can work for her.

Anger and fear are convulsive, reactive emotions triggered by the repression of deep hurts and wounded feelings into the unconscious. One must, as Jung points out, make the unconscious conscious by becoming aware of what lies underneath anger, fear and other forms of distress. Thus one must identify the deeper hurts, feel them, understand them and then release them. The process of identifying, feeling, understanding and releasing requires an acute candor and honesty with oneself. The part played by conscious awareness and mindfulness in this process is of paramount importance because once one acknowledges and touches the hidden emotional wounds, then they can be surfaced and released from one's body and mind. When that is done, anger, fear and their derivatives - violence and control - have less raw material of hurtful emotion to latch on to. The energy of trauma gets weaker and the knots of suffering unravel. This may also occur without specific identification, as the continual practice of mindfulness and self-awareness, through meditation and self-healing, erodes the energy that sustains our illness and dysfunctional patterns. To heal ourselves and to journey to our true nature is to know that there is a core of Divinity that is inherently within us. However, our suffering and limited consciousness close the access routes to our true nature, and we remain ill, separated, and in a state of disease with ourselves.

There are two things to do in order to open the doors. We look deeply into our suffering in order to release it, and at the same time take steps to expand our consciousness. When our consciousness is limited, we hold tightly on to our suffering and retain all our old patterns and dramas that are dysfunctional. On the other hand, when we take the brave steps to expand our consciousness, through meditative practice, then the suffering and knots are not so tightly held. The warp and weft of our consciousness "tapestry" expands, becoming loose and free, so much so that the hooks and tendrils of our suffering and disease have less and less to hold on to. The roots of trauma can persist only in ignorance and with the assistance of afflictive emotions. Once they are brought to awareness, and due attention is directed to the afflictive emotion, they then wither away and become inoperative. Denial of the deep emotional wounds is highly dangerous, as denial provides

the opportunity for anger and fear to strike from within, in the form of out of control reaction.

So if one finds that one is angry or fearful, the first step is to identify the deeper emotional pain and distress that anger or fear is reacting to. The next step is to place this awareness within the appropriate meditative and healing practice. The pain of abandonment and of feeling unloved are common emotional wounds that we all experience in some dimension of our lives, yet we cover them up with angry and fearful reactions. To go beyond the anger and fear one must first of all surface the emotional distress, then clear it from the body and mind. This means giving up on the denial of feelings and having the courage to recognize the presence of emotional wounds within one. This is not easy to do, as there is a tendency to bury our wounded feelings under a mask, and so we hide from the blackness that lies underneath our public face. Yet the deeper the blackness is buried, the more likely it will manifest itself in chronic illness or explode into compulsive acts of self-destruction and violence. Thus it is imperative that we become consciously aware of all that constitutes the hidden blackness, and this often requires the support and guidance of a good therapist, shaman or spiritual teacher. The recognition of that which is repressed as being part of ourselves, is the first and most crucial step in surfacing and clearing. It is a step in learning to be what we are without pretence or artifice, and requires that we dig out all the hidden compulsions and repressions by becoming aware of them. It is a most crucial understanding, to clearly see ourselves, and our internal patterns, and to be mindful of them. The most effective arena for this process of surfacing and clearing to take place is that particular A.S.C. associated with meditative and shamanic practices.

## Figure 2: MODEL OF HEALING

### ASSUMPTIONS:

1. MIND : BODY : SOUL UNITY
2. BLOCKAGES FROM CONDITIONING, GENETICS AND KARMA CAUSE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ILLNESS
3. ANUSAYA : LATENT TENDENCIES  
} ENERGY IN THE BODY
- SAMYOJANA : KNOTS OF SUFFERING
4. SURFACING AND CLEARING
5. A.S.C. AS ARENA FOR HEALING

### **Altered State of Consciousness (A.S.C.)**

The classic description of an A.S.C. was provided by Ludwig in 1966, where he identified a number of characteristic factors. These include: alterations in thinking, disturbed time sense, loss of control, change in emotional expression, body image change, perceptual distractions, change in meaning, sense of the ineffable, feelings of rejuvenation and hyper-suggestibility (Ludwig 1963:13-17; Price-Williams and Hughes 1994:2). Charles Tart (1969:2), gives a more encompassing definition of an A.S.C. as a state in which the individual:

*...clearly feels a qualitative shift in his patterns of mental functioning, that is, she feels not just a quantitative shift (more or less alert, more or less visual imagery, sharper or duller, etc.) but also that some quality or qualities of his mental processes are different. Mental functions operate that do not operate at all ordinarily, perceptual qualities appear that have no normal counterparts, and so forth.*

These definitions indicate that we are dealing with a dramatic cognitive and perceptual shift of which the individual is fully aware. Furthermore, Bourguignon (1973) and others maintain that the capacity to experience an A.S.C. is part of the psychobiological heritage of our species. In other words, it is a universal feature innate to *homo sapiens* that is expressed in culturally variable ways. There is a major implication here. Mainstream medical science refuses to recognize that this is so (Winkelman

1992:121,123). This raises some interesting questions about the Western allopathic medical system and its assumptions about healing, particularly as scholars such as Weil (1972) and Siegel (1989), claim from their research that there is a species-wide innate drive to experience A.S.C. (Price-Williams and Hughes 1996:2). One implication may be that mainstream Western medical science is flying in the face of what we are biologically programmed to experience.

Eliade's ground breaking work on shamanism (1964), referred to A.S.C. as archaic techniques of ecstasy. Scholars from Peters and Price-Williams (1980), to Winkelman (1992), Harner (1990), and Wolf (1993), have all identified the A.S.C. as the most important element of the shaman's healing repertoire. One of Wolf's hypotheses (1993:287) is that shamans perceive reality in a state of altered consciousness, which they do in fact control. Peters and Price-Williams (1980:398-399) refer to the ability of the shaman to induce and exit from an A.S.C. at will. While in an A.S.C. the shaman sees self and clients in a mythic light - a different and broader conception of reality - and it is in this context that healing takes place. The aspect of control, however, is that the shaman also remains in the ordinary reality of waking consciousness so that an effective process of monitoring is also at work while the shamanic journey - for shaman and clients - takes place. Grof has referred to this as "dual consciousness" (Grof 1993). The imagery of the shamanic journey has similar psychotherapeutic effects as Jung's notion of "active imagination" (1960), and other techniques (Singer 1974), in that the imagery creates a situation whereby a dialogue is initiated by the client with archetypal material from his or her own unconscious.

My view of the internal dialogue with different figures that appear in the shamanic journey is that this is a communication with archetypal material that facilitates individuation. The shaman, on the other hand, tends to see them as objective events (Peters and Price-Williams 1980:405), not unlike the methodology proposed by Jung for active imagination (1960:185). It should be remembered that Jung frequently referred to the collective unconscious as the "objective" psyche. In other words, the appropriate attitude towards the inner images, events and dialogues is to treat them, as von Franz (1976) argues, "as-if-they-were-real" (Peters and Price-Williams 1980:406). The shamanic journey is about mediating between different levels of consciousness and integrating them, so that the

conscious mind is expanded to become aware and in control of what were formerly unconscious processes.

So how does one get into or induce an A.S.C.? The diverse procedures used by shamans to induce an A.S.C. can be referred to as drivers. They range from rhythmic drumming and the use of sound in chants, sacred songs, and percussion instruments (Olsen 1975), to the repetitive motor activity of dancing, to the use of symbolic imagery (Noll 1985); fasting, meditation (Gellhorn and Kiely 1972), physical austerities and sensory deprivation (Mandell 1980), to the use of hallucinogens and other psychoactive drugs (Siegel 1989). Drivers are used in combinations, and the intent is to alter the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious parts of the human mind (Winkelman 1992:119). Winkelman shows that cross-cultural research on the psychophysiological effects of the various drivers supports the contention that a common set of psychophysiological changes in brain functioning occur (Winkelman 1992:95). In other words, each driver reinforces the effects of other drivers, and they all zero in on that part of the brain which pushes the mind into an experience of an A.S.C.

**Figure 3: ALTERED STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS (A.S.C.)**

1. QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE SHIFT IN MENTAL PROCESSES
2. PART OF OUR PSYCHOBIOLOGICAL HERITAGE
3. DIALOGUE WITH ARCHETYPAL MATERIAL IN THE SHAMANIC JOURNEY
4. "DRIVERS" INTO AN A.S.C. : SOUND, DANCE, SYMBOLIC IMAGERY, MEDITATION, DRUGS

**Breath Control**

The driver I wish to address in this work is that of breath, in particular what I refer to as Death Breaths, as this is the most significant phenomenon I experienced in my journeys with shamans. As the derived model will demonstrate, it is used in conjunction

with other drivers - meditation, drumming, music, chants, symbolic imagery - but my experience shows that it is a primary vehicle for inducing an A.S.C. This is supported by the perspective taken by Stanislav Grof (1988, 1993) on the significance of breathwork. His earlier work on A.S.C. relied on the use of drugs - in particular LSD - to induce a different state of consciousness. He later discovered that intensive breathwork was just as significant, but safer, in terms of no side effects and maintenance of a sense of control over the process. He then developed a healing system called Holotropic Breathwork, an unstructured, free flowing process of breathing that stimulates the spontaneous physical release of pent up traumas and emotions (Grof 1993).

The Buddha addressed the significance of breath in the *Anapanasati Sutra* on the Mindfulness of Breathing whereby he precisely described sixteen different methods of using one's breath to achieve awakening. Thay Nhat Hanh (1987:23) has this to say about breath:

*Our breath is the bridge from our body to our mind, the element which reconciles our body and mind and which makes possible one-ness of body and mind. Breath is aligned to both body and mind and it alone is the tool, which can bring them both together, illuminating both and bringing both peace and calm.*

The yogic traditions considered breath to be the great connector between body, mind and soul, and the ultimate force of redirection and transformation. Thich Nhat Hahn talks about breath as the bridge that connects life to consciousness:

*(It).. unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again (1987:15).*

In a later book he says:

*to practice conscious breathing is to open the door to enter the domain of concentration and insight (1993:6).*

This factor of concentration and insight has been perfected in the yogic traditions through a system of breath control known as *pranayama*, particularly that which is drawn from Raja Yoga. This is designed to connect the meditator experientially with Cosmic Breath - which eastern cosmology regards as the prime mover of the Universe. In meditation, one's body is regarded as the Universe and its vital energy - *prana* - is brought to one's experience and awareness through *pranayama*. This is Conscious Breathing in practice, a revitalizing and purifying force that is consciously used for spiritual growth and evolution. In the yogic traditions, mastery of the science of breath is the process that

enables one to still the mind and turn inward. When the mind is still and calm, it provides such a clear surface that our true nature is naturally reflected back to us. Without the stillness we see only distortions and illusions. So without a clear and still mind one is subject to the bondage of the mind's attachments, distortions and projections. The human mind is only one portion of the equation that unites cosmic intelligence, human consciousness and the universe's potential. The different techniques of breath control, at some point, bring to the practitioner's awareness, the recognition that the mind and body is moved by the same energy that pervades the planet and the entire universe. Thus the science of breath in the body is regarded as part of the respiration of Cosmic Breath (Iyengar 1966). Different meditation structures, symbols, mantras, sacred posture, and other forms of focus are used at different levels of meditative entrainment. The key to all this is the conscious use of breath. Breath works as a "driver" to propel individuals from an everyday state of consciousness into a different state of spiritual awareness (Heinze 1994:10). I now examine the relationship between breath control, A.S.C. and near death experiences, but first let me turn to a recent publication.

#### Figure 4: BREATH CONTROL

##### 1. GROF AND THE BUDDHA'S *ANAPANASATI SUTRA*

##### 2. EVERYDAY LIFE                      DIFFERENT CONSCIOUSNESS



→ BREATH CONTROL →



YOGIC PRANAYAMA SYSTEM



BREATH AS "DRIVER" INTO AN A.S.C.

### **Near Death Experience (N.D.E.)**

In December 1994, Newberg and d'Aquili published a very interesting article on *The Near Death Experience as Archetype: A Model for "Prepared" Neurocognitive Processes*. They drew on Jung's archetypal hypotheses and argued that the neural activation of certain archetypes may be involved in the N.D.E. (1994:2). They note that the issue of the neuropsychological mechanisms underlying archetypal activation is a contentious one (1994:7) which gives me some room to speculate. The authors state (1994:2), that most N.D. experiencers report that they feel their cognitive functions are very clear and sharp (Moody 1975; Ring 1980), that they possess a hyperalertness:

*in which they have heightened visual and auditory sensation in addition to mental clarity. Time and space, however, are not perceived in the normal way. There seems to be a slowing or absence of time, and space is usually perceived as being either infinite or non-existent .*

This correlates with the previously discussed properties of an A.S.C. and also with the qualities associated with mystical visions in different meditation traditions. Ring has discussed the close relationship between mystical experience and the N.D.E. as representing an awakening to a higher spiritual reality (Ring 1984; Newberg and d'Aquili 1994:4). From the reports of N.D. experiencers, it is clear that a major cognitive and perceptual shift takes place during the N.D.E. and afterwards. Newberg and d'Aquili point out (1994:12), that the experiencers report:

*not only a persistent sense of the ultimate reality of the N.D.E. even after they return to this world, but they experience a transformed life in this world as a direct result of experiencing that reality in terms of decreased materialism, increased altruism, greater care for others and a lack of fear of death.*

Here they draw on the extensive research of Kubler-Ross (1969), Ring (1980), Noyes (1980) and Bauer (1985).

The N.D.E. is triggered by two circumstances: firstly, the actual and imminent prospect of physiological death, and secondly the *perception* of being in a life threatening situation. This distinction is important in terms of how the authors correlate it with different archetypes, and how I then use the notion of perception, archetype and death

breaths. But that is jumping ahead a little; let us stay with Newberg and d'Aquili. The authors assert that N.D.E.s activate both the archetype of Dissolution and the archetype of Transcendent Integration. Dissolution refers to the kind of hell states reported in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Freemantle and Trungpa 1987) as the Chonyid state of grisly dismemberment, torture and other imagery of that nature. This visual imagery is a symbolic representation of both the physical body's disintegration, and the final deterioration of the sense systems, and has to do with an individual's personal physiological death. Transcendent Integration is the archetype of transformation - of ego and self into a universal structure of integration and wholeness. This experience is actively cultivated by most meditation traditions and it is obvious there are shared characteristics between meditative experiences and N.D.E., in that they both cause major cognitive shifts into a similar kind of A.S.C.

The authors point out that while the first archetype has a physiological basis, the second one is *perceptual*, and can be triggered without any immediate physiological distress. The authors point to the numerous documented N.D.E.s where there was only a conscious perception about almost certain death without real physical danger. It is the perceptual pole of the N.D.E. that I now focus on. I argue that the *perception* of imminent death provokes an enormous release of material stored in the collective unconscious. It could be argued that our main focus in ordinary waking consciousness is on survival of the body, and a vast amount of our energy and attention is directed to body survival. My contention is that the N.D.E. moves the focus of energy away from body survival, and redirects it to the collective unconscious, a realm of consciousness that very little attention is paid to in the ordinary waking state. This, in fact, is what Death Breaths do and I will describe the breathing methodology in the next section.

**Figure 5: NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE (N.D.E.)**

NEWBERG AND D'AQUILI (1994)

1. NEURAL ACTIVATION OF ARCHETYPES

2. TRIGGERS INTO A N.D.E.:

(a) PHYSIOLOGICAL DEATH

IMMINENT



ARCHETYPE OF

DISSOLUTION

(b) "PERCEPTION" OF LIFE

THREATENING SITUATION



ARCHETYPE OF

TRANSCENDANT INTEGRATION

"DEATH BREATHS"

1. CONVINCING MIND THIS IS THE LAST BREATH, ENERGY SHIFTS FROM BODY SURVIVAL TO A.S.C.

2. DRAMATIC PHYSIOLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE EFFECTS

### **Death Breaths and the Shamanic Journey**

The first act of a newborn baby is that of inhalation. The last act of a person who is dying is that of exhalation. The focus of Death Breaths, as a process, is on extending the component of exhalation in order that the mind becomes convinced that this is the last breath to be experienced. This also creates a different internal "space", and it is at this juncture that energy shifts away from body survival as the mind's primary focus, and attention is diverted to the realm of the collective unconscious. This brings about dramatic somatic and cognitive effects. Death breaths are part of a cycle of breathing that I was trained in, by my shaman teachers. In the yogic traditions, this form of breathing is termed "*Asparsa Yoga*" and is known colloquially as "dead man's yoga" for reasons that will become very apparent. The breathing cycle begins with deep breathing – In-breath :

Holding Fullness : Out-breath : Holding Emptiness. There is a slow count for the Holding Fullness and Holding Emptiness portions of the deep breathing. This is the same basic pattern that is used in yogic breathing. The count increases until the individual holds the fullness and the emptiness for slow counts of twelve. This build up can take approximately twenty to thirty minutes. It is then followed by several minutes of short explosive breaths -- similar to the *kapalabhati* breaths of the yogic *pranayama* system, after which the death breaths begin. These are long in-breaths and retention of breath for a slow count of twelve, followed by the out-breath and holding the emptiness for a slow count of thirty. This continues to expand so that one builds up to holding the emptiness of breath, after the exhalation, for as long as is possible. What does this do? Obviously there are variations depending on an individual's preparation, openness and willingness to enter an A.S.C.

My experience of this cycle - cognitively and physiologically - did vary in the many shamanic journeys I have undertaken, but there were common patterns of experience. First of all, the deep breathing took me into a state of mental calm. Secondly the short explosive breaths produced a sort of portal or gate that I could feel myself going through. I also felt light headed and dizzy. The death breaths, however, really did the trick. On the in-breath and retention I would feel stable, on a particular plateau of experience. On the out-breath and holding emptiness for as long as I could, my limbs and body would shake and tremble. There would also be periods of profuse sweating and extreme cold particularly in my hands and feet. Then on the last gasp of holding emptiness I would take an in-breath. The trembling and shaking would stop, and while holding the fullness of in-breath for a count of twelve I would experience a deep clarity. Cognitively, I felt hyperalert and hyperlucid. The next out-breath and the holding of emptiness for as long as I was able, would again produce trembling and shaking throughout the body, extreme sensations of heat and cold but from a different level of experience. Once more on the last gasp of holding emptiness after the out-breath, the in-breath produced a feeling of cognitive calm but at a different level. In doing the death breaths over a period of time, I felt as though I was taking a series of steps to different plateaus of cognition. In the process, however, I always felt a sense of control, totally cognizant of what was taking place at different levels of awareness; "dual consciousness" once more (Grof 1993). The other drivers I would experience with my

shaman teachers during the breathing cycle were music of a repetitive rhythmic nature, drumming, rattles, and nature-based music that incorporated the sound of animal calls.

Each cycle of deep breathing, explosive breaths and death breaths would have a period of respite - of normal breathing for several minutes - then the entire breathing cycle would be repeated, and I would experience similar cognitive and physiological shifts, once more climbing further stairs of cognition. I was quite aware of being in an A.S.C. yet simultaneously aware of myself in conscious waking reality. What was happening with the death breaths was that a different "space" was being created for my consciousness, as my mind was being convinced that this was the last breath my body would experience. In actual fact it was not, but the trick is to move the mind into the *perception* that this is so, in order that the energy devoted to the survival of the body can be switched into triggering connection to unconscious archetypal material that can then be dialogued with. Then one is considered to be ready for the shamanic journey. This can be guided or non-guided. The former involves the symbolic imagery of a guided meditation while you are in an A.S.C., and provides a loose structure so the individual can dialogue with archetypal material about his unique personal scars, traumas and also about her creative potential. The dialogue experienced in the journey can continue afterwards through writing in a journal, communicating the experience, and consulting with the shaman facilitator. At the end of the shamanic journey there is a return, and you come back to where you are sitting or lying down. I will provide an example of this process but first of all I want to refer to some personal experiences.

Over a period of five months in the spring and summer of 1994 I experienced very intensive shamanic journeys that I had prepared for through fasting, meditation and sexual abstinence. The cycles of death breaths were over an hour each time. On five separate journeys I met in turn, and dialogued with, the ancient shaman from the East, the ancient shaman from the South, the ancient shaman from the West, the ancient shaman from the North and the ancient shaman of the Center. I knew this was an experience and dialogue with five facets of the same archetypal material from the collective unconscious. At the same time it is important to note, that in the experience of each of these journeys I was always met, and then lead to the ancient shaman, by a female figure. In previous work on the Parsifal myth (1991), I had stated very clearly that primary access to the collective

unconscious for males in our civilization was through the female archetype - the anima. The existential significance of this assertion was right before me, in the experience of being met by a female figure in each of these five journeys. Yet I did not make this very obvious connection until much later, when I reviewed my field diaries more than a year after these particular journeys took place. It was with an almost visible shock that I noticed I had missed something so significant and so obvious. There it was - the anima staring me in the face from my field logs from March through to July of 1994. There were other fascinating consequences that I was also not immediately aware of.

At my home in the middle of Gatineau Park in Quebec, I had a small circle of large stones in my front yard with a beautiful fern growing at the center. I had an overwhelming compulsion that summer to build a medicine wheel, with this circle of stones as the centerpiece. I had been taught by an Apache shaman from Arizona the appropriate state and procedure of respect necessary to construct a medicine wheel. I enlisted the assistance of two friends who shared my respect, and we carried out the appropriate ritual, reverence and construction. As we proceeded on a very hot and humid summer's day, a silence settled on all three of us in a very tangible way. Something was happening inside and around us while we were creating this architecture of incredible grace, power and beauty. I had collected the stones for the medicine wheel from my garden and the surrounding forest. They were some of the most ancient rocks on the planet - the hard granite of the Canadian Shield, and they were part of the very ground where the medicine wheel was being built. After wheeling in fresh earth from the rest of my garden to fill in the four quadrants of the medicine wheel, we contemplated what had been created. I realized with a start that it was completely related to my shamanic journeys over the previous months. The cardinal points of the wheel are the four directions, North, South, West, East, all leading from an outer circle to an inner circle at the center. So what had taken place was a symbolic recreation of my archetypal experience of the five ancient shamans. The medicine wheel was a symbolic map of my internal dialogue. It just took me a while to realize that I was re-inventing the wheel for myself from my own experience. This led to the insight that medicine wheels, mandalas, sweat lodges etc., are symbolic formations of the collective unconscious that take an individual from her present existential location into a dialogue with an archetypal map that is common to all human beings. Although this may be well

traveled ground it was important to verify the insight from my personal experience. This brings me finally to the derivation of a model, or ceremony, of healing that draws in part from my experiences with shamanism. Here I combine my expertise and training in the healing and meditative arts over the past thirty years with more recent research on shamanism over the past decade.

### Healing Ceremony

<b>Figure 6: HEALING CEREMONY</b>	
<u>SEQUENCE</u>	<u>DRIVERS</u>
1. BREATH FOCUS	1. <u>MUSIC : SOUND</u>
2. EXTERNAL SYMBOL OF PURIFICATION	↔ (a) SACRED FLUTE
3. INTERNAL SYMBOL OF PURIFICATION	↔ (b) ETERNAL OM, GREGORIAN CHANT
4. BREATHING CYCLE (4 times)	↔ (c) TONAL
- DEEP BREATHS	(d) CHARIOTS OF FIRE
- EXPLOSIVE BREATHS	(e) DRUMMING
- DEATH BREATHS	(f) GAYATRI MANTRA
- PAUSE	
5. JOURNEY	2. <u>SYMBOLIC IMAGERY</u>
	↔ (g) NATURE BASED MUSIC
6. MEDITATION ON LIGHT	

The healing ceremony is based on the principles of safety, sacredness and responsibility, and draws in particular on two traditions - shamanism and meditation

practices - and my experience of both. The traditions are not as far apart as one may suspect, as Eliade (1958), Mironov and Shirokogoroff (1924) point to a continuity between pre-Vedic shamanism, Vedic practices and later yoga. Furthermore, shamanic practices used in the Tibetan Bon religion were incorporated into Tibetan Buddhist practices over 1300 years ago, indicating a cross fertilization between the two traditions. This is endorsed by a recent publication by Geoffrey Samuel (1996). His fascinating book, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, examines both the monastic and the shamanic traditions in Tibetan Buddhism. He shows how the need for shamanic services by the majority of the population, dovetails very neatly with the journey to enlightenment pursued by a minority of the people - the lamas, monks and yogis. The shamanic use of altered states for healing and divinatory purposes was incorporated into tantric Buddhism, and Samuel illustrates how the lamas in Tibetan Buddhism have subtly reconciled shamanic and monastic traditions in their teachings and scholarship.

The ceremony begins with a stated verbal emphasis and focus on the attention to breath, so that everybody's awareness becomes attached to in-breath and to out-breath. The circle motif is maintained and emphasized during the opening symbol of external purification. Individuals gather in a circle, and burning sage is passed from person to person in a clockwise direction; one person holds the sage while the next one in the circle takes the smoke with their hands over their heads and bodies. This manner of conducting the "smudging" is intended to reduce perceptions of hierarchy. During this opening process -- the external symbol of purification - a musical driver, is in operation. Sacred Native American flute music is played quietly as people gather for the ceremony, form a circle and participate in the opening purification. It is emphasized that persons validate their experiences from their own internal recognitions, and that this can be discussed and verified at the end of the ceremony through guidance from the ceremony's shaman facilitator. Once again this caveat removes dependency on any hierarchy, and reveals the influence of Krishnamurti on my thinking (Krishnamurti 1984), about the absolute necessity of knowing for oneself the significance of one's experiences, rather than relying on what someone states should be experienced. Unless it is one's own experience there is no real self-knowledge.

The next step is a symbol of internal purification; a simple heart center meditation. During this meditation the sound driver changes from the opening sacred flute music to religious chants. The sound of the eternal OM being chanted, or Gregorian chants, facilitate the deepening of the internal symbol of purification - the heart center meditation.

As you fill your lungs on the in-breath, visualize white light coming in to the middle of your chest - your heart center. You can visualize this as light floating gently down to the area behind the sternum, or as a funnel of light coming directly into your chest from the Universe. Whatever works. If you do not visualize easily, then *think* the light coming into your heart center. Feel this white light as a gentle glow and take it through the heart center, inside the chest and throat, up to your crown. All this is on the in-breath. At the end of the in-breath, at the top of the crown, hold the breath for a moment and place a thought into the procedure. The thought is "Send this light to every cell in my body". Then on the out-breath imagine the white light moving from your crown, filling your entire body right down to the toes. Complete the breathing cycle by grounding the energy through your feet into the floor. Do this ten times until you feel something different in your body, a different sensation or a greater feeling of relaxation.

Then add a wonderful meditation that Thay Nhat Hanh describes in his book, *The Blooming of a Lotus* (1993:15). Accompanying the in-breath and out-breath say mentally within:

- |    |                               |       |
|----|-------------------------------|-------|
| 1. | Breathing in, I calm my body. | Calm  |
|    | Breathing out, I smile.       | Smile |

After ten breaths proceed to:

- |    |   |                  |
|----|---|------------------|
| 2. | Breathing in, I dwell in the<br>present moment    | Present Moment   |
|    | Breathing out, I know it is a<br>wonderful moment | Wonderful Moment |

Then abandon the words and remain within the silence and energy of the meditation for approximately twenty minutes. If thoughts distract you from the process, as they surely will, simply come back to the focus and direction of breath, light and word in the

meditation, and register with the information the body provides as feedback. This meditation is a centering vehicle; it grounds the person in her body and is an important step in ensuring safety for the participant.

The next stage introduces two drivers used in combination. The first breathing cycle of - deep breaths / explosive breaths / death breaths / pause - begins, and is accompanied by a different sound to that of the chants used in the prior meditation. Particular qualities of tone, rhythm and repetition correlate very closely with the experience of altered states (Olsen 1975), and changes in tone and rhythm intensify the driving effect of music, particularly during the breathing cycle. As Winkelman has pointed out (1992:95), the various combinations of drivers in sequence are designed to induce the experience of an A.S.C. The initial breathing cycle of - deep breaths / explosive breaths / death breaths / pause - is to the accompaniment of a tonal musical driver; for example, New Age synthesizer music that is repetitive, relaxing and harmonic. After the first breathing cycle is finished, everybody relaxes their breathing during the pause and prepares for the second breathing cycle. This cycle is accompanied by music that has a more insistent, repetitive, driving beat along the lines of the electronic synthesizer music from, for instance, *Chariots of Fire*. Once the second cycle of - deep breathing / explosive breaths / death breaths / pause - is complete, the third cycle begins but the sound driver changes to a ten minute period of drumming. Once this is complete the fourth, and final breathing cycle is entered and the sound driver moves into the repetitive sound of the Gayatri mantra.

This is the most powerful mantra of purification and transformation known to the yogic traditions. I would like to elaborate a little on the effects of the Gayatri mantra, as sound, on human consciousness, as this discussion will demonstrate the incremental steps taken into an A.S.C. during each stage of the healing ceremony. I discussed earlier how the expansion of consciousness facilitates healing, as the knots of suffering have less of a tightly woven consciousness to hold on to. This is what the Gayatri mantra does. It expands consciousness in multiple directions and in the process it shakes loose the fetters of suffering.

The Gayatri mantra comes from the Vedas - the ancient religious tradition of India. The successive sounds of the Sanskrit syllables and words are designed to move the individual into different states of spiritual consciousness (Saraydarian 1989), first of all by

calming the mind and body, then through activating the energy centers of the body which brings about a deeper connection with internal essence. It is an invocation for enlightenment that can have the effect of drawing other individuals into the same state. The repetition of the Gayatri mantra creates a unique vibration that integrates a person's mental awareness with deeper levels of the unified energy system that is believed to be at the core of being. Progressively, the mantra takes the individual into the experience of stages of expansion of consciousness, propelling the invoker into different cognitive/perceptual states. The tonal design of the sounds produces purification and integration, so that the individual at the physical, emotional and mental level becomes more open and receptive to inner guidance. From this foundation other levels of enlightenment and openness ensue. The Gayatri mantra is a meditation on OM. The sound of it is designed to move an individual from the realms of existential reality to the experience of the transcendental absolute dimension. As the “mother” of the Rg, Yagur and Sama Vedas the Gayatri brings about the conjunction of the individual self with the cosmos, and unifies the individual and universal at all levels. Thus the Gayatri mantra incorporates all components of OM symbolism – a prayer to Divine Reality for human enlightenment.

**Figure 7: THE GAYATRI MANTRA**

<i>OM</i>	<i>OM</i>
<i>BHUR BHUVA SVAH</i>	<i>ALL ON EARTH, MID-WORLD AND HEAVEN</i>
<i>TAT SAVITUR VARENYAM</i>	<i>MEDITATE UPON THE LIGHT ADORABLE</i>
<i>BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHI</i>	<i>OF THE DIVINE SUN OF LIFE</i>
<i>DHIYO YONAH PRACHODAYAT</i>	<i>TO ENLIGHTEN OUR SOULS</i>

The Gayatri mantra has been described as the most universal, non-personal invocation of integration and transformation which anybody can use irrespective of culture, language or religion (Bharati 1995). Although it is drawn from the Vedic traditions of India, in this healing ceremony the cultural associations drop away as being irrelevant. Recall the arguments made earlier about drivers and altered states (Winkelman 1992), the

N.D.E., perceptual states and archetypal stimulation (Newberg and d'Aquili 1994). Drivers and breath cycles combine to take an individual into an A.S.C. and prepare them for a dialogue with archetypal material. As this happens, the culturally specific significance attached to any form of driver is stripped away because they are zeroing in on *species* specific material, viz. Archetypes, rather than on the *culturally* specific material unique to the particular form of the driver.

The four breathing cycles are associated with four distinct sound drivers. Once the fourth breathing cycle is complete, normal breathing ensues and the sound of the Gayatri mantra continues, allowing the sound and experience of the mantra to penetrate more deeply into the mind and body. The individual by now should be in an altered state, extremely relaxed, and it is at this point that the shamanic journey begins, introducing extended symbolic imagery and a different sound driver. The journey proceeds to the accompaniment of nature-based music that incorporates animal and bird calls, and other sounds drawn from the world of nature. This is played softly. I use Dan Gibson's "Algonquin Suite" as an appropriate tonal musical driver for the journey. There are many variations to a shamanic journey -- into the past, into the future, under the sea, into the earth, beyond time and space, and they can be guided or non-guided. I will document only one form of guided symbolic imagery, and ask the reader to suspend disbelief sufficiently to accompany me on this journey.

### ***A Healing Journey:***

*See yourself walking through a beautiful meadow, full of flowers. You hear the sounds of insects humming, and birds singing. The sun feels warm on your face and a slight breeze ruffles your hair. As you walk, look up into an endlessly clear blue sky, and for a moment allow yourself to merge with it, and enter such clarity. (Pause)*

*Then notice a small shape hovering in the sky that gets bigger as it comes closer to you, and see a golden eagle slowly circling above you. He is your guardian and will watch over you and keep you safe on your journey. As you walk, the meadow slowly gives way to a stream, that runs over hills and*

*rocks before eddying into deep, still pools. Follow the bank of the river in the direction of the sun. There is a path to walk along. Notice the mallard ducks at the water's edge, with their ducklings, and a kingfisher sitting patiently on a branch overhanging a deep, still pool. The sun filters through the trees at the stream's edge and the light dances on the rocks and water like a crystal cloak that shimmers and moves with every swirl of the water. Walking round a bend you see that the stream empties into a clear lake fringed with forests, reflecting snow capped mountains in its still surface. Find a spot by the side of the lake, sit down and enjoy the intimacy of nature that is around you. At the end of the lake you see a cow moose with her calf at the water's edge. In the distance you hear wolves calling to one another, then you notice two rabbits beside a shrub close by. A doe and two fawns walk slowly and tentatively from the forest into the sunlight. Skylarks hover motionless in the sky, then descend to earth with their lilting song. Your eyes are drawn to a stately blue heron standing motionless in the reeds at the lake's edge. These creatures and more are there to remind you of your connection to the world of nature. Take a moment to be with the grass, the trees, animals, birds, insects, and bring to this place your favorite animals. **(Pause)***

*Then ask one of the creatures to accompany you on your journey and wait to see which one comes forward. It does not matter if none come forward, the golden eagle still circles overhead as your guardian.*

*Then after sitting by the lake's edge for a while, stand up and slowly walk into the water. It is icy cold, fed by glaciers from the snow capped mountains. But it is a cold that is easily bearable because it purifies, stripping you of your anxieties, stress and worries. Slowly walk into the water up to your hips, your chest and then submerge yourself in the icy cold embrace of purification. Underwater you can breathe and move around with ease. Notice the rays of sunlight coming into the water, fish swimming*

*swiftly past and see the rocks and submerged tree trunks on the lake floor. As you move around and adjust to the water you see a cave at the bottom of the lake and you swim strongly and powerfully to it and enter the cave. There is light at the end of a long underwater passage and you swim through and emerge out of the water into a cavern covered in crystals. The sound from the crystals shimmers through your body. At the edge of the cavern is a waterfall. Stand underneath it and feel the water washing over and right through your body. Feel the energy of the waterfall taking away any anxiety, tension and distress you may feel inside. (Pause)*

*Then leave the cavern and follow a trail that takes you through a pine forest. Beautiful tall pines are on either side of you, stretching up into the sky. Take a moment and see the entire blue sky endlessly clear and enter such clarity. (Pause)*

*Then see how the forest opens up into a large clearing with a big flat rock in the centre. There is a fire prepared for you by the rock. As you warm your hands by the fire and feel its warmth on your face, you feel a presence next to you. Turning around you see a beautiful old woman with clear brown eyes that look right into you. She smiles in welcome and you feel she knows all about you and embraces you in a simple, heartfelt love. She is a very powerful healer and a wise shaman and is there on your journey to serve you. (Pause)*

*Standing next to her is a handsome old man, with weathered features and a gentle smile that lights you up. From his eyes you feel an overwhelming compassion and understanding. He is a very powerful healer and a wise shaman and is there on your journey to serve you. (Pause)*

*Standing between the old man and old woman is a young woman who sparkles. She is fresh, vibrant and beautiful and she is aglow with life's*

vitality. She also greets you with a smile, and a love and understanding that you know is unconditional. She is a very powerful healer and a wise shaman and is there on your journey to serve you. **(Pause)**

Know that these three shamans come from the deepest part of yourself and they represent your own powers of creativity and self-healing. The three shamans approach you and invite you to speak to them. Choose who you wish to communicate with, and talk to them about whatever distresses you; the anxieties of the day, the stresses at work and at home, then if you wish, go deeper into your distress. Talk to them about growing up, the neglect and abuse you may have experienced, the isolation, separation and lack of understanding you encountered as a young person, adolescent and adult. Talk about the damage caused to you and the damage you may have caused others. Talk about the hatreds, angers and insensitivities you experience and perpetuate. You can say anything to these three shamans. They understand and love you and are there to heal you. Talk about whatever you feel free to communicate, and feel the distress and trauma leaving your body. And when you run out of things to say, just be with their loving and supportive presence. **(Pause)**

Then ask each one of them if they would transfer their power of creativity, understanding and healing to you. And of course they agree. Look into the eyes of each one of them in turn and feel the transfer of their healing power with a jolt or energy circulation within your body. Thank them for this gift, then ask if you could speak to someone from the other side. Someone who has passed on that you did not have the opportunity to say what you wanted to say, or hear what you would have liked to hear. Wait and see if anyone comes and do not be disappointed if nothing happens. It is not the time **(Pause)**

*Take your leave of the shamans, thank them for their support, love and power of healing. Turning round you see a beautiful child surrounded with a golden aura. This golden child is you -- without trauma, wounds or damage -- the child comes directly to you and takes your hand, and leads you to a cliff edge where the beautiful golden eagle is waiting for you. He has been there as a guardian throughout your journey and is now ready to take you home. Ask your golden child if he or she wants to come with you, then climb onto the back of the eagle, and feel him take off from the ledge and soar high on the updrafts. Below you, see the mountains, lakes and forests of your journey. Smoke curls lazily skyward from the fire by the rock and as you fly with the eagle feel how beautiful this earth is. Then when you feel ready to do so, part company from the eagle and fly on your own. With your arms spread wide as wings, catch the air currents and soar, then swoop low over the streams and mountains and enjoy the strength of flying on your own. (Pause)*

*Then after awhile slowly fly back to the edge of the lake where you were sitting. Once again notice the animals, birds and insects and see how happy they are to see you again. Sit there for a time. (Pause)*

*Now see yourself sitting or lying down in the meditation hall or healing circle. Form a circle of brilliant white light around where you are sitting or lying down, then step through the light and slowly return to your body. Breathe deeply on the in-breath and deeply on the out-breath. As you breathe in, say quietly to yourself "I have arrived". As you breathe out, say quietly to yourself "I am home". Continue to do this breathing exercise for at least five minutes or until you feel "arrived" and "home" in your body.*

After the safe return a final meditation with light is conducted. Once more in a circle a tray of lighted candles is passed round in a clockwise direction and each person in turn, acknowledges the light in the other from the light that is in them. The entire healing

ceremony has been about surfacing and clearing fetters, knots and blockages - in other words, releasing energy "sinks". The internal dialogue with the shamans at the rock is with the powerful archetypal material of creative self healing that exists in everyone, and throughout the breathing cycles and journey other material from the unconscious will surface. It is essential to be aware and dialogue with all of it - so that the energy of trauma is steadily diminished. If trauma and distress come to the surface and are left there on their own, it is dangerous and destructive both for individuals and for the others they will inevitably project onto. It is absolutely necessary to bring to the surface the awareness of mindfulness, and the power of self-healing to take care of the trauma, so that an individual can begin to see deeply, and take the steps to release the energy of trauma. The final meditation with light acknowledges that there is more to consciousness than trauma, suffering, blockages and energy "sinks". There are seeds of happiness, joy and grace that acknowledge the inherent Divinity within everyone. The acknowledgements in the final meditation water these seeds and create a critical and crucial finale to the healing ceremony.

### **Conclusion**

The healing ceremony draws together and synthesizes my theoretical discussion with personal experiences in meditative and shamanic practices. The ceremony is based on a model of healing which assumes that blockages in the mind/body/soul system are caused by traumas from conditioning, genetic heritage and karma, and these traumas lodge themselves as energy "sinks" in the body and mind. The removal of such blockages, therefore, must also be in energy terms in order that a higher level of integration can take place. In the process of surfacing and clearing the distress caused by energy "sinks", it is essential that any distress brought to the surface of awareness be accompanied by mindfulness and the power of creative self-healing. This ensures that distress is surrounded by energy processes that facilitate transformation, which at the same time reduce the potency of the energy "sink" to render us dysfunctional or ill. In the experience of an A.S.C. during the journey, we are using one form of energy – mindfulness and self healing - to transform another form of energy – separation and trauma. The focus on meditation and initial breathwork secures the individual within the safety of his or her own body,

quiets the mind, and provides a foundation for the knots and fetters of suffering and distress to surface, both during the breathing cycles and the journey. The surfacing can be somatic, mental and emotional, particularly during the dialogue with the three shamans at the rock - who represent the archetypal symbolism of the power of creative self-healing.

A major significance of the dialogue process is that each individual chooses which level of distress to communicate about. They are not pushed to deal with more than their organism can cope with - the consideration of safety once more. The ceremony clearly emphasizes the therapeutic role of an A.S.C. The death breaths focus on the extension of exhalation so that "space" is created within the individual for distress to more readily surface. The A.S.C. and the use of breathwork as a driver to enter this state, magnifies the effects of both the dialogue with archetypal material and the "space" created for distress to surface. Indeed, the intent and focus of the entire ceremony is to heighten the significance of the dialogue, by creating a different "space" to facilitate healing and integration. Furthermore, I would argue that healing and integration are complementary facets of the same archetypal material. The release of the energy causing distress is in response to the imagery of the journey, and the psychophysiological triggers induced by the breathwork. The particular type of breathwork used in the healing ceremony directs attention and energy to the archetype of Transcendent Integration and *not* to other archetypes.

The theoretical discussion of A.S.C., N.D.E., models of healing, breathwork, and also my personal experience of the same are the two essential components of this work and reflect how I think about doing science. Theoretically, one of course needs a set of conceptual reference points to construct models of understanding. The insights and knowledge from personal experience, however, provide the driving force to construct a level of meaning that would otherwise be impossible to achieve.

## Acknowledgements

Many audiences and scholars have heard presentations of different aspects of this work. I thank Ruth-Inge Heinze for critical feedback on the issue of shamanic experience as anomaly. Dr. Sean Kelly directed me to rethink Stanislav Grof's work, Radhika Sekar double checked my use of Sanskrit terminology and meanings, and Derek Blair provided an excellent critical response to my talk about "Death Breaths" at the 1996 American Philosophical Association meetings in Seattle. Previously I received a great deal of encouragement from members of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness at their 1995 meeting in San Francisco.

## Bibliography

Bauer, M.

1985 Near-Death Experience and Attitude Changes. *Anabiosis*, V.5:39-47

Bharati, Swami Raju

1995 Personal Communication

Bourguignon, E.

1973 *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press

Eliade, M.

1958 *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*. Princeton: Bollingen Foundation

1964 *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Freemantle, F. and

C. Trungpa

1987 *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Boston: Shambhala

Gellhorn, E. and W. F. Kiely

1972 *Mystical States of Consciousness: Neurophysiological and Clinical Aspects*. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 154:399-405

Grof, S.

1988 *The Adventure of Self Discovery*. Albany: S.U.N.Y. Press

1993 *The Holotropic Mind: The Three Levels of Human Consciousness and How they Shape our Lives*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco

Hahn, Thich Nhat

1987 *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Boston: Beacon Press

1993 *The Blooming of a Lotus*. Boston: Beacon Press



- Peters, L.G. and  
D. Price-Williams  
1980 Towards an Experiential Analysis of Shamanism. *American Ethnologist* 7:397-417
- Prattis, J.I.  
1991 Parsifal and Semiotic Structuralism. In I. Brady (ed.): *Anthropological Poetics*:111-131.  
Savage, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield
- Price-Williams, D. and  
D.J. Hughes  
1994 Shamanism and Altered States of Consciousness. *Anthropology of Consciousness* V.5, 2:1-15
- Ring, K.  
1980 *Life at Death. A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience.* N.Y.: Quill Publishers  
1984 *Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near Death Experience.* N.Y.: William Morrow
- Samuel, G.  
1996 *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution
- Saraydarian, T.  
1989 *Five Great Mantrams of the New Age.* Sedona, Az.: Aquarian Educational Group
- Siegel, R.K.  
1989 *Intoxification: Life in Pursuit of Artificial Paradise,* N.Y.: Dutton
- Singer, J.L.  
1974 *Imagery and Daydream Methods in Psychotherapy and Behaviour Modification.* N.Y.: Academic Press
- Tart, C.  
1969 *Altered States of Consciousness.* N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons
- von Franz, M.L.  
1976 *Confrontation with the Collective Unconscious.* Los Angeles: C. G. Jung Cassette Library
- Weil, A. *The Natural Mind: A New Way of Looking at Drugs and the Higher  
1972 Consciousness.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Winkelman, M.J.  
1992 *Shamans, Priests and Witches. A Cross-Cultural study of Magico-Religious Practitioners.*  
Arizona State University Anthropological Research Papers No. 44
- Wolf, F. A.  
1993 *The Eagle's Quest.* N.Y.: Touchstone Books