

MAGIC FOR HEALING: A Shamanistic Perspective

by Phil Hine

For magicians, whether they define themselves as working from a 'shamanic perspective' or not, magical healing is something of an under-researched subject. Whilst researching this article, I looked for books which dealt with magical techniques for healing, and found that, whilst it often gets a mention in terms of the use of amulets, talismans and so forth, most of the books written about healing come from the New Age or Spiritualist camps, although it has to be said that there are some very sane treatments of the subject in books on Witchcraft, too.

Healing is an aspect of sorcery. It's about getting an identifiable result, particularly where others are involved. If you come to gain the reputation of being a good healer, then the world will beat a path to your door.

THE HEALING PERSONA

There is a memorable sequence in Wilson & Shea's *Illuminatus!* trilogy where one of the characters slips into his 'doctor' role—he visualizes himself in a white coat, with a stethoscope round his neck. He focuses on being calm, and projecting a quiet confidence and assurance. The necessity of doing this will be obvious to anyone who has ever worked in a counselling/therapeutic discipline. Terms such as 'positive regard' and 'empathy' have become somewhat clichéd, but they are, nonetheless, important, particularly if you are working with other people. It all comes down to establishing mutual trust and respect, albeit retaining a core of objectivity about the situation. I have met many healers, particularly in the alternative sphere who, whilst having no problem projecting a Healer Persona, do seem to have difficulties in disentangling themselves from it. It's equally important that you can banish the Healer Persona when you're not on duty, as it were.

LISTENING

Being able to listen to others is one of the primary skills of any healer. We often get so caught up with

what we want to say in a conversation that we miss out on what others are actually saying. A good exercise in this respect is to try listening to what someone else is saying to you, whilst keeping your mind blank of thoughts—thus stopping your replies leaping out of your mouth before you've fully digested what has been said. It takes practice to listen with attention, and then yet more practice to give an appropriate answer. Some people are good at this naturally, while for others some form of formal counselling training might well be appropriate.

A great deal has been written about the shaman as healer by other people, so I'm not going to add much more to the weight of words in other books. Suffice to say that healing is more difficult than you might think, and should always be approached realistically. By this I mean that if you try and take on a problem which, deep down, you know you can't do much about, then it is wiser to pass the person concerned to someone more appropriate. If you do take a problem on, then make sure that both you and your clients know what the score is as to how you're going to approach the problem, and for how long your relationship with them will last.

THE QUESTION OF CONTEXT

Before I turn to actual approaches to magical healing, I think I should deal with the idea that healing is contextual—that it is a process, a series of events, rather than an on-off situation. This needs to be particularly borne in mind when one looks at a potential healing intervention, specifically with regard to goal-setting: the "Statement of Intent", if you like. When I trained as an Occupational Therapist some years ago, I was taught to examine situations in terms of short, medium, and long-term goals. I was also encouraged to develop an intuition towards what can be termed as realistic expectations in a situation. This is as valid for magic as anything else, and particularly in works of healing. Whilst one might attempt to heal someone who is in the final stages

of a progressive, degenerative disease, self-castigation if the spell doesn't work is unrealistic. This also raises questions of self-motivation (always an important factor when one considers sorcery intervention) and personal ethics. Again, it comes down to considering what is most appropriate for the individual, rather than what you think is best.

PSYCHIC HEALING

I'm using the above term in order to cover those healing processes which are related to something *other* than the action of potions, lotions, pills, etc. Now I realise that this sounds vague, but I have found that, when it comes to areas such as healing, I am wary of even attempting to sound too cut-and-dried about an aspect of magical work which, paradoxically, is apparently simple but also highly complex. But then again, this kind of paradox is present in most aspects of shamanic magic. It's one thing to do it, but quite another thing to try and explain it to someone else.

Healing is an important aspect of shamanic work, but it's not something which can be easily put to one side and examined separately as a thing in itself or a particular body of techniques. I think it would be more accurate to say that there is an undercurrent of healing in a great deal of shamanic practice. Having said that, of course, I'm now going to discuss some particular aspects of healing work. Just bear in mind that life isn't so clear-cut as one might think from reading a book or two.

My approach to Psychic Healing is one very much born out of my own direct experience, together with what particular beliefs I hold about it. I don't have a complete explanation of what's going on even for myself, let alone anyone else. I have never been taught in any logical manner how to perform this psychic examination, apart from the very useful advice from an elder who told me to 'drop all preconceptions'—including the preconception of what I might find, and even that anything is going to happen at all. What, for me, seems to be the most effective approach is to only attempt psychic healing when the moment seems right, but with zero expectation of anything particular happening "We'll just see what happens" is what I tell the other person (usually a friend or acquaintance). Whilst I have never gone out and sought opportunities to do this, I will occasionally offer to try if I feel the moment is right. Over the years I have come to understand that knowing

when to offer something is almost as important as actually doing it.

The two people responsible for encouraging me to become interested in healing were the woman who initiated me into Witchcraft (and no, she wasn't my grandmother), and a Spiritualist Healer with whom I became friends in my late teens. Whilst my Healer friend showed me the ropes of the practice of healing, it is only in the last few years or so that I have encountered the writings of Spiritualist Healers such as Harry Edwards, Gaye Muir, and Edgar Cayce, some of the ideas of whom are very relevant to psychic healing as I view it. Spiritualism is something which tends to get dismissed by hardcore esotericists, and equally, there are many Spiritualists who want nothing whatsoever to do with anything that smacks too much of occultism. In many ways, this is a pity, as the two camps are not as distinct from each other as they otherwise might think, and there is a great deal that each could learn from the other. For instance, Spiritualists say that healing is a vocation—they make a great deal of being in 'service' to their fellow man. The notion that power lies in service of one kind or another, is also, I feel, central to using shamanic techniques. You have to be genuinely interested in helping other people, or there surely isn't much point in attempting to take on the role of shaman.



Harry Edwards, author of a number of excellent books on 'Spirit Healing', makes it clear that, in his opinion, the fundamental realization which a beginner must come to is that he does not heal: which is to say, it is not, essentially, the healer who is responsible for whatever is taking place, but that he is merely a channel for healing guides or the spirit operators who are actually responsible for the


healing. He also writes, somewhat wryly, that many people find this difficult to accept and that, as a consequence, "all sorts of performance and ritual have been added to the attempt to give healing". Certainly my own experience of healing bears this out. Whilst it is all very gratifying to say "oh yes, it's my 'power' that's responsible for this effect", I must be honest and say that I lean towards the view that whilst I might orchestrate a situation—a context, if you like, where 'healing' may take place—I don't know what is the cause, indeed, it seems more likely to me that the urge to locate a causal 'something' in this sort of situation is never going to be fulfilled. Harry Edwards, being a Spiritualist, would say that the hidden agent in psychic healing is, of course, the healing guide, an assertion with which shamans from many different cultures would very likely concur. I am reminded here of something which Aleister Crowley wrote, to the effect that a man of genius reduces himself to a negative and allows his genius to play through him as it wills..., which is a useful description of what I find to be the appropriate mind-state for healing. As my friend Fra. Qodosh once quipped "the darkroom attitude; we'll just pop in and see what develops". According to Edwards, "reception from the Spirit World takes place when the ordinary mind is dormant". Edwards is very much of the opinion that one cannot learn to be a healer, but that what those of us who are interested in healing should do, is to learn to attune ourselves to

the Spirit World, in order to become better "instruments" for the healing spirits to work through. There is a kind of passivity implied here which a good many western magicians—limited by their belief that the magician 'must remain in control'—would doubtless have difficulty with, but on the whole, I feel this attitude of "it's not me that's responsible, it's the spirits", is a good one to hold. For a start, as I discussed elsewhere, it's often difficult for Westerners to acknowledge spirits as having any kind of causal role (except when it suits us) in a situation. Moreover, it is also an effective barrier to becoming puffed up with one's own 'power', and above all, a reminder of the inherent weirdness of life.

THE "HANDS-ON" APPROACH

The type of psychic healing which I am most familiar with is 'direct healing' that is, with the client present.


I often use light touch in order to try and pick up cues about the client's problem; in fact, I often begin (if appropriate) with a massage. Not only does this help relax the client, but I have found I can pick up a lot of cues from massaging areas of the body. I often augment touch/massage with a series of hand passes over the client's body: weaving patterns which evolve without conscious effort. This, I find, helps me fall into the appropriate state for picking up cues. Cues can come in many forms (wounds, scars, knots, lumps etc.), all of which have a psychic/psychological/emotional/somatic existence. Sometimes I get the impression that an 'intrusion' (to use Michael Harner's term, though 'extrusion' is sometimes equally valid), will require several sessions in order to get all the badness out, and that like a zit, if the 'wound' isn't treated properly, it'll fill up again. An elder magician once told me that intrusive spirits often attach themselves to a person round the neck and shoulders, which makes sense, as it is a vulnerable part of the body. I have 'seen' psychic scar tissue in this area, and a common image that crops up with people who have a lingering attachment to someone/something, is ropes and cords hooked into the person's back. Now, were I to be taking the standard approach to discussing psychic healing, it would be time to start talking about chakras, auras, subtle energies, etc. These are fine as metaphors, but taking them too literally can be a mistake; nor is it necessary to adhere to




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these particular models in order to practice psychic healing.

A colleague who, as well as being a magician, is a Spiritualist Healer, recently informed me that there is a great tendency to rely on the standard 'seven chakra' system in healing circles. This is just one unfortunate aspect of taking a metaphor too literally, as there are a great many chakra systems in Indian magic, only one of which has become popular in the West. But as I say, you don't need to have studied any of the esoteric subtle body maps in order to be an effective healer. It's more a question of attitude, rather than formal learning in the accepted sense.

DO YOU SPIT OR SWALLOW?

One of the more obviously 'shamanic' approaches to direct healing is that which is known as 'sucking spirit intrusions'. This particular approach to direct healing has been observed in a wide range of shamanic societies, and, given that the practice of sucking out illness is often accompanied by the shaman spitting out an object (such as a lump of flesh or a worm) as part of the process, has led to accusations that shamanic healing rests on trickery or deceit. There are those who argue that the shaman needs to exhibit such objects as 'proof' of his power to his patients, whilst other commentators also argue that such 'benevolent deception' is sometimes a necessary part of any healer's work. A related technique to sucking, which is perhaps more controversial, is the psychic surgery which equally carries the scent of quackery.

I have used the sucking spirits approach on a few occasions, to some good effect. It certainly has a very primal feel to it and I find that the act itself, together with preparation, creates a very intense state for all present. In *The Way of the Shaman*, Michael Harner gives the basics of the 'sucking' technique. After locating the place on the client's body where the intrusive spirit is, the practitioner proceeds to physically suck the skin (pulling open clothing at that spot), pulling out the spirit, being careful to dry-vomit after each bout of sucking. Harner recommends that one should dry-vomit the intrusive spirit into a container of some kind, for later disposal. It should be obvious even from this cursory description that this is a very physical process, and should be used carefully and selectively. In order to illustrate my own approach to this technique, I will recount an incident of its use,

combined with other healing methods:

A few years ago I was doing some protracted healing work with a friend, who suffered from swollen glands in the neck. During a trance-investigation of her psychic body, I 'saw' the psychic root of the problem as a toad that had bloated itself up so that it was lodged in her neck. I was informed, by a familiar spirit, that the only thing that would dislodge this toad was an even bigger toad, and following meditation and divination, decided to invoke Tsathoggua (A Lemurian Toad-God) upon myself, following due preparation.

Taking on the aspect of, and drawing upon the power of Tsathoggua would, I reasoned at the time, enable me to command the sickness-spirit toad to depart from the place wherein it had lodged.

I prepared for this working with sleep deprivation and fasting, combined with energetic dancing (to drumming) at a stage event the previous evening. The Rite took place at my friend's house. I drew around us a circle using drum, rattle, bells and free-form chants. I covered my face with white face-paint, ash, and blood. I used a meticulously-knotted series of cords with which to bind my friend, whispering spells of binding into the knots as I twisted them.

The Invocation: I began by visualising Tsathoggua squatting in semi-darkness upon its throne, and then oozing through near-black tunnels and hopping lumberingly between the pillars of a ruined city. I began to move about the ritual space, 'feeling' my body outlines as though I were a huge, blundering toad-being; shifting my centre of balance and muttering identifications with Tsathoggua which became increasingly guttural and glutinous. I began to experience those peculiar shifts in consciousness which herald the onset of partial possession; I found that I salivated copiously; that I could feel my tongue swelling to fill my mouth; that my legs refused to bear me upright, and that I could no longer oppose my thumbs, nor could I see clearly through the blur of black and white haze that swam before my eyes. I was, for brief moments, submerged in toad-ness, and then returned, mixing nausea and agony with a thrilling exultation. As I ceased to struggle against the possession, I experienced a curious disengagement. It was as though part of me was standing at one side, observing the entire spectacle, and directing the body that stumbled about the room, moving

clumsily to the signals pulsing from the reptilian backbrain.

In this bifurcation of awareness, I saw the big toad and the little toad, crouching in the bound body on the floor. Then I was fully in my own body again, and dragged it over to my friend. Clumsily opening her mouth, I mentally projected my/Tsathoggua's tongue sliding down her throat, engulfing the lesser entity lodged there, returning, and ... gulp! The sickness-spirit was swallowed in my own belly. This act broke the spell. A wave of nausea washed over me and I collapsed, shedding the Toad-skin and metamorphosing from beast-self to human-self, using one of my magical masks as a focus for my efforts. After centring myself, I released my friend, banished the area, and continued with a less extreme form of trance work.

Following the working, I slept for a straight 10 hours or so, only to awaken with severe stomach cramps which soon progressed to vomiting. Evidently the poisons of the toad-spirit did not agree with me! The nausea lasted about three days before disappearing, and indeed this sort of after-effect from ingesting sickness-spirits is not unusual, in my experience.

Now granted, this is a rather extreme example of 'shamanic' healing but it is necessary, occasionally, to "pull out all the stops", providing, of course, you, and more importantly your clients, are confident of your ability. Mutual trust, empathy, and regard go a long way, and are possibly the crucial factors in contributing to the success of a healing event.

I tend to augment the sucking process by using emphasised mouth movements: imagine yourself attempting to stop a lively wad of spaghetti from splattering your chest (without using your hands) and you'll get the idea. This isn't so much about putting on a show for your client's sake, but of deepening the intensity of one's own experience through self-induced feedback. Doubtless Harry Edwards would say that all this performance isn't necessary in order to be an effective healer, and, by and large, he's right. You don't need fancy stuff most of the time, but as I say, occasionally it seems like a good idea. The dry-vomiting which Harner mentions is important. A similar approach is to draw illness out using the hands, and then shaking them as though one were shaking off water. The idea being in either case that it is possible that, in drawing the illness out of a client, the practitioner

can unwittingly become a harbour for it himself. Now this idea crops up in a wide variety of contexts, and the necessity of cleaning oneself as part of the direct healing process is an article of faith amongst many alternative healers. Behind all the theoretical justifications for this, there seems to be a grain of common sense.

Another element in the above example is that, in this particular case, I did swallow the intrusive entity, rather than gobbing it out into a bucket or crystal. This seems contrary to what I have just said about cleansing oneself from association with the client's illness. However, since my body was being used at the time by Tsathoggua, it was 'him' who ate the bulk of the toad-spirit. From the shamanic perspective, my own suffering was a necessary component of the process, as was the period of fasting and sleep deprivation which preceded the actual healing event—which was itself part of a protracted wider process. I wouldn't swallow a client's sickness-spirit lightly, but then nor do I usually tie clients up and become possessed by toad-gods, either! In some quarters, swallowing is frowned upon, but I have also heard it argued that if you wish to gain an intimate knowledge of a spirit, you must be prepared to experience it directly. This is rather like coming to grips with your own addiction spirits by letting one of them get a hook in you. Whatever you believe, it's up to you to develop a sense for what you do in a particular situation. As Harry Edwards says, there are no rules that govern healing, and what applies to one person or instance may not apply to another.

DISTANT HEALING

Distant healing is basically the application of healing intention to someone who's not actually in the same room as you. In some ways, it's the spookiest form of healing since, at least if one is present with a client, one can always come up with explanations (auto-suggestion, astral vibratory attunement, endorphin stimulation etc., etc.), but if the patient is absent, and might not even know that the healing is being directed at him—but still somehow improves—that's really stretching the old logic-box, isn't it? This, in itself, seems like a good reason to attempt it. There are a wide variety of approaches to Distant healing, but I'll confine myself to those which I use most in my own practice.

THE HEALING MINUTE

The "Healing Minute" is very popular amongst Spiritualists/New Agers and, if you care to look, you will find advertisements in *Psychic News* for various groups which are co-ordinating "Healing Minutes" every week. Basically, this approach is similar to the mass 'energy-raising' rituals popularised by groups such as PaganLink in the late 1980s. Through meditation, prayer, etc, you are adding your own individual will and desire to (presumably) those of many other people. Adding your drop of consciousness to a stream. Again, there is an element of self-negation here (in the sense of being the main causative agent in the process).

It's not really that different to using a spirit or, for that matter, propitiating a god-form. The key, as in all forms of sorcery, is that once will and desire-form has been projected, it is 'forgotten': "that's that out of the way, I can now turn my attention to something else."

HEALING SERVITORS

A servitor is basically a thought-form, a spirit given name, identity, and purpose by a magician, and then dispatched to do his bidding. There are several ways of doing this, some of which are discussed in my book *Condensed Chaos* (New Falcon Publications). I have found it very useful to link the action of servitors whose task is to accelerate healing of some kind or another with an essential oil, used as a perfume or a massage oil. The idea here, is that every time the client uses the perfume or oil, they are reinforcing the action of the servitor. The better the client feels, the better the performance of the servitor. And I often find that it's good to let the recipient of your attentions become actively part of the magical process. Again, the confidence of the client in the magic efficacy, is in itself a significant factor, as has often been found to be the case with placebo drugs conforming to the expectations of not only those who administer them, but those who are prescribed them.

ASTRAL SIMULACRA

There follows a simple technique which is quite useful in distant healing. Whilst it is fairly common for magicians to visualize the person being enchanted, I have found that building up an "Astral Simulacra" of the subject enhances a working. To do this, one recalls memories of the subject, and

project into a specified space (triangle, crystal etc) the emotions that those memories trigger. One does this by verbalising the memories in the form of an invocation:

"I remember (name) laughing at a party
I remember the scent of her favourite perfume
I remember her graceful movements
I remember (name) in the ecstasy of an orgasm
I remember how (name) would complain about the rain
I remember how (name) sounded on the telephone."

By recalling memories and projecting them forth, energized by the appropriate emotions, the simulacra may be used as the carrier for a healing or empowerment servitor, which could, for example, be placed at an appropriate location within the body of the simulacra. The simulacra can be despatched, visualizing it as merging with the body of the target subject.

This technique can be very effective when a group of participants build a simulacra of a target from the gestalt-projection of the memories of those present.

This technique can also be used in works of self-healing, where one might, for example, be struggling to achieve closure with an estranged partner or relative. By creating a simulacra out of memories and emotions, one might address the simulacra as though it was the person himself, which can be a ritualised opportunity to tell the person things that one needs to, to move on from that life experience.

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Psychic Healing is an area of shamanic work where it pays one to be cautious. For a start, it is something of a contentious issue for many people. Over the years, I have met some excellent healers, who to my mind have some power. Equally, I have met healers whose claims to be able to cure terminal diseases, genetic disorders, etc, seem to be dodgy in the extreme.

There are people who make all kinds of extravagant claims about the power of Psychic Healing and who decry the medical establishment's 'blindness', and there are those who are obsessively sceptical about anything which isn't orthodox allopathic medicine. In the shamanic perspective, it isn't a question of who's right, but that of getting the job done.