

The Shamanic Perspective: Where Jungian Thought and Archetypal Shamanism Converge

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Much has been written about the juncture where Jungian psychology and shamanism converge (Haule, 2009). Indeed, Jung, who developed the concept of *archetype*, might agree that both are instances of the same primordial image or instinctual pattern known the world over. Both shamanism and Jungian psychology acknowledge the importance of the sacred in healing processes. Both recognize how the sacred is manifest in wild nature and through the realm of the *imaginal*, areas where modern man has fallen out of consistent connection with wholeness. Both observe how loss of contact with the sacred results in loss of soul and understand that recovery requires initiation and successful integration of direct experience. And both, it would seem, would concern themselves with an alarming manifestation of nature like the massive disappearance of the honeybees. In this work, I will review the commonalities of Jungian psychology and shamanism with a focus on soul and soul loss.

The Sacred

First, both Jungian psychology and shamanism focus on wholeness as a state of health. Shamanism defines health as being in balance with the sacred, and lack of health as violation of the will of the sacred. Smith (2007) establishes that Jungian thought identifies *health* as wholeness, and *pathology* or lack of health as lack of wholeness. He characterizes the sacred as an experience of something that evokes rapture, awe, exaltation, or ecstasy; something that is even dreadful in its intensity and power. As opposed to profane or ordinary, sacred is often perceived in contemporary culture as something alien or *other*.

Though indigenous and earth-based cultures likely made no distinction between the

sacred and the profane, in my life, at least, I am increasingly aware that the sacred is not something I experience in my busy everyday routine unless I somehow slow myself to witness a sunset or feel into a sudden sense of longing or love. Only then, in the spaciousness of attention, am I aware I have generally tuned out the sense of something powerful and unknown. Something sacred often invokes a feeling of mystery beyond the power of words to describe. As I touched on earlier, Jung often used the term *numinous* to connote the sacred: describing it as something which provides an experience or alteration of consciousness independent of human will, arousing, affecting, bedazzling, or blinding one to other realities. Both “sacred” and “numinous” are words connected to the idea of soul, the creative, sacred life force that imbues all things with energy and meaning.

James Hillman (1982) describes soul as not just an element, region, or dimension but rather, as a perspective: as deepening, noticing, penetrating, and insight. He seeks to extend the soul beyond humanity to the world at large, to forms and objects around us, whether natural or man-made. Each thing, Hillman claims, has a spark of soul at its core. He challenges us to imagine a world soul, the *anima mundi*, as that particular soul spark that “offers itself through each thing in its visible form” (p. 77). Jung considered psychology deeply tied to soul; so much that he referred to psychologists as doctors of the soul (D. Bona, personal communication, October 8, 2008). Similarly, Smith (2007) states that the province of the shaman, as technicians of the sacred, is disorders of the soul. Eliade (1974) calls shamans masters of ecstasy, stating, “The shaman is the great specialist in the human soul; he alone ‘sees’ it, for he knows its ‘form’ and its destiny” (p. 8).

Smith (2007), noting the pathological conditions emerging in contemporary culture, posits that shamans would diagnose western societies not as having a breach in relations with the

sacred, but as having no relations at all with the sacred. As individuals in modern culture, Smith continues, we have repressed the contents of the unconscious and summarily forgotten it entirely, disregarding the magic and mystery there. Shamans and those commonly called *folk healers* rely on the power that issues from the sacred to conduct their healing activities, and the sheer lack of it in current times and culture epitomizes the tremendous precipice on which we perch as a result. Jung, sensing the enormity of the split between our conscious everyday lifestyle and the vast depth of the psyche, warns, “We do not understand yet that the discovery of the unconscious means an enormous spiritual task, which must be accomplished if we wish to preserve our civilization” (as cited in Sabini, 2005, p. 145). According to Jung, the only way to address the deep loss of connection to soul that we are experiencing as a species is to reestablish our connection to the sacred.

Eliade (1974) reports the practice of shamanism has been around for millennia, essentially as long as humans have existed, and is the oldest spiritual healing tradition still in use today. Though the word *shaman* emerged from Siberia via the Russian language, shamanism is historically found in virtually every culture in the world. Eliade emphasizes shamans cure like doctors and perform miracles like magicians. They manipulate the sacred, and, in fact, “have access to a region of sacred not accessible to other members of the community” (p. 7). Shamans are often linked to events surrounding life and death, healing and health, and spirits and the underworld. Not only are they responsible for the religious direction of a community, they also guard its soul.

The Sacred Manifests in Nature

The concept of the sacred is inexorably tied to an *animistic* belief system: the impression that the world and everything in it is imbued with life, intelligence, and spirit. Thus, in the

physical or material world, the sacred manifests through wild nature as an infinite source of life and creativity waxing and waning in eternal cycles of death and rebirth. Shamans read nature, regarding and interpreting the elements and events that communicate through soul at all times and places (Eliade, 1974). Jung mourned the loss of the shamanic perspective; of contact between modern man and nature, and he identified our increasing analytic thinking and desire for progress through manipulation of the natural world as devastating to our well-being (Sabini, 2005).

Historically, in nature-based cultures, everything could be explained by the maintenance of right relations to the sacred, the divine force that holds the world together. When something went wrong in a family, a village, or a culture, it was obvious that something was radically out of balance with the world: the gods had been offended and equilibrium had to be restored (Smith, 2007). As Jung suggested, as modern man has increasingly developed causal thinking and has pursued science and technology as our foremost religion, we have placed ourselves at the top of a hierarchy that relegates nature, wilderness, and the imaginal to lesser status and importance. Nature has become something we exploit and control, and the imaginal realm, something to analyze, define, or explain away as irrelevant fantasy. No longer do we turn to these dimensions to gain insight and understanding from the gods or the ancestors who came before, or to engage with them to re-establish balance. In fact, it never even occurs to us to try. Jung, grasping our plight, lamented:

There are no longer any gods whom we can invoke to help us. The great religions of the world suffer from increasing anemia, because the helpful numina have fled from the woods, rivers, and mountains, and from animals, and the god-men have disappeared underground into the unconscious. There we fool ourselves that they lead an ignominious existence among the relics of our past. Our present lives are dominated by the goddess Reason, who is our greatest and most tragic illusion. By the aid of reason, we assure ourselves, we have “conquered nature.” (1964, p. 91)

Jung speculated that our connection to nature is ancient and undeniable. At the most profound levels of the unconscious, everything becomes less and less differentiated until our ego no longer exists as a separate entity:

The deeper layers of the psyche lose their individual uniqueness as they retreat farther and farther into the darkness. Here they become increasingly collective until they are universalized, merging with the body's instinctual and biological functions and eventually with nature itself. Hence, 'at bottom' the psyche is simply 'world.' (Jung, in Ryan, 2002, p. 26)

Jung went on:

Since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on the irrepresentable transcendental factors ...psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing. (Jung, 1970, p. 5)

Clearly, Jung discerned that there is no separation. Whatever the external landscape, the internal psychic landscape mirrors it, inhabits it, gives birth to it but also dies into it. The degree to which we are able to perceive the sacredness of what is manifesting around us in nature is the degree to which we are able to believe in the divine aspect of we commonly know as our own human nature.

The Sacred Manifests in the Imaginal

Both Jungian psychology and shamanism engage with image and call on the imaginal realm for healing. The language of the unconscious is the language of the soul: image as living symbol. Jung stated that psyche is image and for Hillman (1982), as well as for the Greeks, soul is image, too. Ryan (2002) describes how the soul speaks for itself in images and how those images allow us to enter different dimensions of consciousness than the one we are used to in our profane, everyday lives. According to him, images reach into the deepest recesses of the psyche.

Cavalli (2002) asserts, "Healing is as much an imaginative process as it is one that relies

on material manipulation of the body. Imagination, Einstein said, is as important as knowledge in understanding the universe” (p. 99). In fact, professor of psychology, Jean Achterberg (2002) asserts images literally interact with bodily tissues and conduct a dialogue with cells, organs, tissues, and ultimately with the central nervous system in order to effect change.

Imagery has always been central to the work of indigenous shamans. Ryan (2002) asserts, “the shaman everywhere is the great master of ‘thinking in primordial images’” (p. 41). Jung deemed the shaman as having a “direct line to the unconscious” (p. 41). A shaman requires access to images in order to see intrusive spirits that cause disease and to locate the disease in the body. Simply showing a patient an intrusive object that the shaman has extracted can have a powerful effect on the patient, just as patients in the western world are affected by images of an x-ray or a pill that might help them heal. “The shaman today, like his ancestors, is able to ‘see’ an invasion of foreign energy encased in his patient’s body, ‘hear’ the call of a lost soul, and ‘feel’ the brush of his power animal against his leg” (Gagan, 1998, p. 53). Smith (2007) describes the shaman’s effectiveness as a result of being able to enter a different reality, gain a new perspective, and return with it to change the patient’s *world image* or inherent belief system.

Image is the direct path to the unconscious in the opinion of James Hillman (1982). To be imaginative does not necessarily require what we traditionally think of as images, that is, actually seeing imagery; rather, we perceive images with the imagination: we imagine them. Hillman insists images are actually metaphors; thus poetry and music, as well as dream figures and felt experiences, also qualify as image because we perceive them with the inner senses of our psyche.

Depth psychology has adopted the term *imaginal*, coined by twentieth-century French philosopher Henry Corbin, to describe images through which the unknown expresses itself. Jung suggested we look within the psyche, the collective unconscious, to find the sacred, believing it

shows up through access to the imaginal realm, the space of myth, dream, and symbol, of ancestors and spirits. Jung found these energetically suffused images to be numinous, instigating emotional resonance in relation to the psyche and self. He theorizes that archetypes, those autonomous, energetic blueprints that are common to all human beings, often show up as numinous images imbued with sacred power. Jung recommended the practice of *active imagination*, which enables us to engage with unconscious, archetypal, imaginal elements in a creative way (Hopcke, 1999).

In Jungian therapy, the analyst guides the patient to connect with images brought forth from the unconscious as dreams or symbols and then encourages him to hold the tension they bring until something begins to shift. Jung attributed the new perspective or worldview that emerges from the opposition as archetypal: a pattern that transcends a particular culture. These newly generated images or configurations interact with the patient at a deep level and allow him or her to begin to shift into a new configuration or context, and therefore to transform. By accessing images and experiences in a dimension where magic and power reside, in which archetypes and entities have dreams, will, and intelligence of their own, we can develop our own relationship with the sacred. Encounter with the imaginal generates rapture, awe, and power; providing insight and growth when we personally interact with it through active imagination, movement, writing, art, poetry or other depth methods (Smith, 2007).

Both for Jung, in his world of the unconscious psyche, and for the shaman in non-ordinary reality, there is a cosmos equal to the physical world with its own landscape, made of images with energy and will of their own (Ryan, 2002). Our dialogue with and relationship to these living images is the source of soul. Here, Jung claimed, in the depths of the soul's interior, our mental functioning, connects to the *pleroma*, the deepest roots of our being, the origin or

source. This is the realm the shaman also penetrates in his quests for healing and understanding. It is at the level of the *pleroma* where the shaman is endowed with the powers to cure and revitalize. This is also the transpersonal space Jung called the *subtle body* where the “symbol can operate to transform both body and mind” (Ryan, 2002, p. 41). Mazatec shaman, Maria Sabina asserts:

There is a world beyond ours, a world that is far away, nearby and invisible. And there it is where God lies, where the dead live, the spirits and the saints, a world where everything has already happened and everything is known. That world talks. It has a language of its own. I report what it says. (Halifax, in Sandner & Wong, 1997, p. 11)

Soul Loss

Studies in anthropology led Jung to adopt into psychology a concept prevalent in shamanic societies: that of *soul loss*. Typically recognized as a state of general malaise, soul loss provides another common thread between both Jungian psychology and shamanism. Soul loss is a fragmentary sequence in which parts of the whole wander away, flee, or get split off, lost, or disoriented resulting in a loss of vitality or life force (Ingerman, 1991). In a shamanic worldview, the dislocated parts are carried away to the underworld; in psychology, they are said to recede into the unconscious. With the critical absence of vital parts of our soul, we are left feeling weak, empty, depressed, deflated, or anxious, and commonly trend toward mental or physical illness. Jung cited the loss of connection between our ego and the Self as the fundamental cause of soul loss:

There are two reasons why man loses contact with the regulating center of his soul. One of them is that some single instinctive drive or emotional image can carry him into a one-sidedness that makes him lose his balance...his one-sidedness and consequent loss of balance are much dreaded by primitives, who call it “loss of soul.” (1964, pp. 228-9)

Hillman (1975) outlines five functions of soul: (1) it makes all meaning possible, (2) it turns events into experiences, (3) it involves a deepening of experience, (4) is communicated in

love, and (5) has a special relation with death (p. xvi). For Hillman, as a result of these five characteristics, the soul represents the imaginative possibility of our nature, a possibility that is realized in reflective speculation, dream, image, and fantasy. If any one of these aspects of soul alone is lost, the repercussions are immense. As meaning dissolves and love and death become increasingly distant aspects of our experiential understanding, our lives are prone to becoming simply a series of events, which happen to us, one after another, and from which we are progressively more disconnected and detached.

Both shamanism and psychology seek to treat soul loss by retrieving and reintegrating vital essence that is missing. According to Eliade (1974), soul loss occurs for many reasons: one, as a protective measure, transpiring when we simply cannot sustain the distress caused by accidents, abuse, attack, or other sudden, devastating events. In this case, the soul flees in order to escape feeling fear, pain, or shock. On other occasions, pieces of our soul remain with other people after relationships end or they depart with souls who have died. Additionally, invasive energies can attach themselves to, or are directed at, a person. This is commonly perceived as witchcraft or sorcery from a shamanic view and as a *complex*, or constellated, spontaneously activated, unruly energy triggered by past conditioning from a Jungian standpoint (Storr, 1983). Last, soul loss can occur from habitually refusing to listen to the guidance of the gods or spirits (Ryan, 2002). Indigenous cultures often relate illness, both of body and mind, to soul loss, believing the resulting illness, disease, depression, or malaise stemming from the loss of an essential part of the self can only be restored through shamanic intervention (Sarangerel, 2001).

In psychological terms, soul loss is dismemberment or dissociation: the loss of contact or connection with deeper, vital parts of ourselves associated with the Self. French psychologist Pierre Janet coined the term *splitting* to describe the defensive mechanism through which the

human mind is able to distance itself from the effects of trauma by severing the connection to thoughts, feelings, and memories that are in excess of what it can process at that time (Smith, 2007). Kalsched (1996) states that dissociating is a normal psychological defense that allows us to bear pain that may otherwise be unbearable. Disengaging and dropping the part of ourselves that was most traumatized is the only way we can cope and move on. In each of these instances, we dissociate or dismiss the parts of ourselves that are vulnerable to the brunt of the trauma and banish them for either punishment or safekeeping. Ultimately, it is a default mode of sequestering and coping with unknown entities that threaten us.

Glendinning (2007) maintains that the ability to remove our consciousness around an area or topic that is too painful to bear serves an important function. According to her, dissociation is a brilliant method of self-preservation, a way to stave off or avoid threats, challenges, and difficulties we are unable to integrate. Dissociation is a kind of fencing off of our psyche, a splitting, just as when we first fenced off plots of earth in order to manage them more effectively and accommodate our ongoing survival (as cited in Glendinning, 2007, p.113). These fenced off areas, once established, seem to freeze in place, holding the contents in the original untouched form, as if freeze-drying them to preserve the host from contamination. In psychology, these are what Jung referred to as the complexes, which are often spontaneously broken open when certain triggering situations arise (Jung, 1964).

Indeed, it is this loss of connection to which June Singer (1994), Jungian analyst and author, also attributes the core of our soul loss. Singer says when soul loss occurs, the soul has “ceased to be the connecting ribbon of a road between the conscious individual and the vast unknown and unknowable” (p. 39). She, like Jung, believes it is a necessity for the soul to provide ongoing intercourse between the ego and the unconscious.

Soul Recovery

It is the task of the shaman to walk between worlds as an interpreter or mediator of the spirit realm—including the province Jung referred to as the collective unconscious. According to Mircea Eliade (1974), one of the most vital functions a shaman performs is that of soul retrieval wherein the shaman's spirit leaves the body to seek out souls who have lost their way, journeying into other realms to locate and retrieve the lost soul and re-integrate it into the person's physical body. Similarly, psychotherapists also seek to re-integrate disconnected pieces of the soul, or psyche, but, in this case, the major difference from a shamanic worldview is that patients are encouraged to go in search of their own split-off parts. The therapist will then help the patient interpret the significance of her interaction with the imaginal and to frame her experience in order to reintegrate the parts (Haule, 2009). From both perspectives, healing can be achieved through visions, dreams, and symbols, regardless of whether they are accessed first by the shaman or the patient (Roberts, 1999).

Ingerman (1991) points out that a significant difference between shamanism and psychotherapy is that in shamanism it is categorically apparent where the fragmented pieces of soul go when they leave. In traditional psychology, we understand there has been a splitting off resulting from trauma, but we don't think to ask where those lost parts reside. Smith (2007) rightly suggests that a shaman might consider most of the disorders defined in the *DSM*, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published by the American Psychiatric Association, as symptoms with an underlying cause of soul loss, otherwise defined as loss of vitality or power. Regardless, healing, whether in shamanism or in Jungian psychology, results from gathering those parts and reintegrating them with the whole—just like bringing the lost bees home to the hive.

Collective Soul Loss

Modern times seem to find the increasingly global culture suffering from a spiritual crisis, a collective soul loss and a dismemberment of body, mind, and spirit (Allen and Sabini, 1997). Rampant dissociation characterized by inertia, loss of vitality, depression and disease pervades our everyday life. Daily we are exposed to new and ever more disturbing accounts and media stories of addiction, violence, rage, and intolerance. In order to prevent the discomfort and pain these events arouse, we must numb ourselves on an ongoing basis. Dissociation, a form of disregard, disrupts our connection to a universal, cosmic web in which we participate as equals with the greater whole of elements and life forms around us. It deepens the separation we have established between ourselves and what we see, and it intensifies our view that the outside world and everything in it is dead, justifying ever greater abuse and manipulation of the natural world, the earth, and each other (Bernstein, 2005).

Our collective culture mirrors an individual who is suffering deeply from soul loss, manifesting in symptoms such as falling into conflict with the self, fragmenting into splinters in the pursuit of goals, interests, and occupations; and losing touch with his “origins and traditions...even losing all memory of his former self” (Sabini, 2005, p.182). Disregard, numbing, or not wishing to see or feel the distress and negative effects that soul loss brings also moves us ever further away from deep connection with soul and into a society where meaning is hard to find, compelling us try anything to fill up the gaping sense of emptiness that results. Jung correctly diagnosed our compulsive, cultural tendency toward hyperactivity, saying, “we rush impetuously into novelty, driven by a mounting sense of insufficiency, dissatisfaction, and restlessness” (as cited in Sabini, 2005, p. 141). Rather than turning inward to find a sense of meaning, rather than encountering and engaging with soul to integrate the disparate pieces, we

grasp at straws outside ourselves and further fragmentation ensues.

Jung also recognized that entire nations suffer from dissociation and soul loss, reminding us, "Modern man does not understand how much his 'rationalism' has put him at the mercy of the psychic 'underworld'.... His moral and spiritual tradition has disintegrated, and he is now paying for this break-up in world-wide disorientation and dissociation" (as cited in Allen & Sabini, 1997, p. 216). In fact, we are witnessing an ever-greater loss of soul at the planetary level as well. The *anima mundi*, the world soul, so rich and varied with her diverse multitude of cultures, languages, species, and habitats, is losing soul with increasing speed as each becomes endangered and then extinct. With every loss of heritage, home, or heart, pieces of soul drop away, leaving the world soul weak, listless, and disoriented, lacking needed vitality and energy to exist.

Initiation and Direct Experience

A final common and compelling component of shamanism and Jungian psychology is that each seeks to treat soul loss by retrieving and reintegrating vital essence that is missing. This must occur through direct experience; therefore, the underworld journey to retrieve the soul is one of necessity and initiation.

Jung believed symptoms of soul loss, such as disorientation, lack of focus, or feelings of powerlessness, exist because a portion of psychic energy that is normally available to the ego has vanished into the unconscious; becoming lost to the underworld. However, Jung realized when there is a depletion of libido, that life energy is not irrevocably gone; it continues to exist in the unconscious, awaiting the opportunity to resurface. The energy, equally powerful in the underworld as in our conscious life, continues to be busy as it manifests in images and symbols, the language of soul (Ryan, 2002).

The solution, Jung insisted, is for us to descend into the unconscious to engage with the missing libido through symbolic thought. This is what the shaman does when he or she journeys to other realms to garner insight, to do battle, or to retrieve a lost soul; and what the psychologist and patient do through dreamwork or active imagination. By engaging with the symbolic forms and entering into relationship with them in order to understand their significance in our daily life, vitality can be restored as the ego once again gains access to the energy it requires (Haule, 2009).

Though they travel in what some label invisible realms, shamans are no strangers to direct experience. A shaman “has immediate concrete experiences with gods and spirits; he sees them face to face, he talks with them, prays to them, implores them” (Eliade, 1974, p. 88). Ryan (2002) insists that when a shaman, through ritual, vision, journeying, or dreams visits the realm of spirits, it is not figurative or metaphorical: he actually encounters the archetypal realm and the landscape therein. Similarly, Allen and Sabini (1997) maintain that it is imperative that every individual learn to dialogue directly with the spiritual dimension through journeying or active imagination rather than relying on an intermediary as most religions have done for centuries. Direct interaction with the spiritual dimension can heal dissociation and dismemberment by re-establishing the link between the ego and the Self.

Overall, Jung believed, the most compelling and transformational direct experience is the descent. In Biblical myth, paradise was an undifferentiated unconsciousness. All differentiation and self-knowing came with the Fall which symbolized the beginning of consciousness when Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden and recognize their nakedness and the difference between heaven and hell. Similarly, a descent to the underworld, whether through shamanic initiation or through what Jung called a *night sea journey*, a dark night of the soul, gifts us with differentiation, growth, and ultimately, transformation (Ryan, 2002).

In shamanic initiation, symbolic dismemberment incurs direct experience of the sacred as ritual death and rebirth take place. The initiate is re-assembled and reborn as a new being: a shaman with power and potential. Shamanic initiation, Allen and Sabini (1997) agree, requires various and numerous stages of ascending and descending the World Tree, a central axis that provides access to the other realms, each time gaining greater consciousness of the unified reality of the transcendent dimension. In everyday life, we each must make a descent in order to gain experience, encounter deeper aspects of ourselves, and emerge again, transformed, in the process of initiation.

Jung believed the Self, the centering archetype, to be ego-transcendent, calling it the God within us. Because it has a preconceived blueprint for wholeness and knows what is best for the ego, it will nudge us toward the path of greatest growth. There is a *telos*, a destiny factor, associated with the Self, then, that allows it to guide and regulate individuation, the unfolding of its strategy for wholeness (Kalsched, 1996). While we may not choose the descent to the underworld with our egoic mind, the Self may send us downward to our destiny because it is there where we will garner wholeness through direct experience of the challenges and conflicts life brings.

In spite of our current collective cultural crisis, Jung inferred that the loss of instinct, the loss of soul, which is the root of our pathology, can be restored through reconnection with the sacred aspects of the natural and imaginal worlds. Darkness is an aspect of nature. In our descent to reconnect with our roots in wild nature, the deep levels of the psyche, like bees that are lost from the hive, we may encounter destruction, violence, devouring forces, dismemberment, death, and decay. We may battle dark forces, pit our strength against demons, gatekeepers, and those who seek to destroy instead of create. We may navigate unknown territory, dark waters, and

close, tight spaces. We may even enter in that impenetrable dark night of the soul where all hope seems lost. But Jung urged us to look for the seed in the darkness that will come to fruition and light, stating, “a civilization does not decay, it regenerates” (as cited in Sabini, 2005, p. 183).

The hive is being dismembered through the loss of the bees, it behooves us to understand that dismemberment is the first act of initiation. What is broken into pieces can be re-membered and begun anew like the initiate who emerges as a powerful shaman. It is possible, through the process of descent to reconnect with the sacred earth, to restore our souls to their rightful wholeness, both individually and as a culture. By re-membering our roots in the sacred, by re-establishing right relations with nature and the imaginal, we renew our trust in the power of soul to help us find our way home.

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