Artist as Shaman

Conjuring Healing:
Imagery, Bio-theology, Health and Right Action

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INTRODUCTION

Over a period of forty years, I have come to understand that my life as an artist parallels the life of a shaman in many ways. This idea has been corroborated by witnessing ritual and practice in the many cultures I have both lived in and visited. This paper, based on personal experience, focuses on imagery as a powerful vehicle for physical/emotional healing, and recognizes the body as the repository of intuition, creativity and intrinsic knowledge leading toward behavior benefitting the greater good.

Artists collaborate with their medium (paint, etc) to layer veils of light and shadow to *produce* illusions of form that have dimension, reflection, refraction and the presence of substance. Shamans (and priests) are the mediums who *invoke* illusions of form that have dimension, reflection, refraction and the presence of substance. The Cabala (ancient Hebrew mystical text) states that "Adam was created as the shadow of the reflection of the substance". Both artist and shaman bear responsibility for the affect of their conjuring and are generally lauded as visionaries and respected for upholding and expanding the positive values of their culture.

Following the characteristics delineated by Marcel Eliade (*Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 1964), I can align much of my experience as an artist to that of a shaman in the following ways:

- straddle and intermediate between the spiritual and material/human worlds
- evoke imagery to change the consciousness of self and others
- heal trauma and restore balance to both the physical and spiritual aspects of the individual, resulting in positive change in the community at large "called" to this vocation
- spend long solitary periods in wilderness
- experience serious illness that is not curable by western medicine (E. Turner)
- self-heal through spiritual means
- help heal others of both emotional and physical illnesses for the greater good
- use symbols of respective cultures
- identify with certain animals
- require paraphernalia and ritual, (sacred space)
- enter into auto hypnotic trance

INTUITIVE IMAGERY IN MY LIFE AND WORK

In the 1970's, my paintings yielded the idea that floral organic forms may be related to letters – particularly to Hebrew letters. While immersed in explorations of letters within my art work, white spheres appeared in "Reconciliation." I had no interpretation for them.

Figure 1: Reconciliation, 1976, Oil on canvas, 2.5' diameter

In 1980 I developed a paralysis on the left side of my body. I received nothing but diagnoses carrying dire prognosis from doctors at the time, including multiple sclerosis.
I decided to explore my illness intuitively. I had two canvases built to my height – five and half feet tall – and, standing in front of the canvas, had myself outlined on to the canvas so that I could work visually within my body.

In "Through Generation" I worked into the physical aspects of my body, trying to locate and separate areas that were distressed.

Figure 2: Through Generation, 1980, Oil on canvas, 5.5' x 2'

Figure 3: Surge, 1980, Oil on canvas, 5.5' x 2'

Whether or not the deep work I did within my own image over a period of a year was responsible for the positive response in my body is not that significant at this moment. Suffice it to say, that as I delved visually into the tangles of my body and psyche, I emerged well.

White spheres continued to appear in my work, as at the top of "Through Generation." Then, I interpreted them as seeds of growth, *twelve seeds of renewal*. That was the first time these had appeared related to healing in my work. They did not reappear until sixteen years later.

From earliest childhood in Montreal, Canada, I felt comfortable alone in nature. My two last names mean deer - Yelin in Polish and Hirsch in German. I have always felt comfortable where deer live, and during the time I lived in the Rocky Mountains of Banff, Canada (1985) I enjoyed a daily communing relationship with a forest deer.

After I moved to California in 1967, I began solo journeys into wilderness. In my first lone foray into the Sierra Nevada Mountains in 1974, I was trapped in a blizzard, sank into the snow and was miraculously detected, found and retrieved from under a snow bank two days later - a barely live utterly frozen body - and was revived.

From the early 1980s I spent long solitary sojourns in wilderness, culminating in a 16 month retreat from 1989 – 1990 in an isolated mountain forest in northern Arizona.

During these long stays in wilderness, I began to perceive patterns in nature, eventually reading letters and words, first in Hebrew and then in various alphabets in the landscape.
The Cabala states that each letter alone and in combination represents states of consciousness of the universe. (See Figure 5)

I conjectured that as early man and woman roamed the landscape looking for food or alert for foe, they were repeatedly struck by certain patterns in nature that they eventually utilized as alphabetic morphology. I hypothesized at the time that these resonated because they mirrored the shapes of the neurons and neural processes of perception and cognition. By 1985 I had isolated five forms that I found to be present in all alphabets – ancient and modern. I was convinced that there is a continuous oscillating process between perception and cognition based on that which we are innately on a physiological level. (See Figure 4)

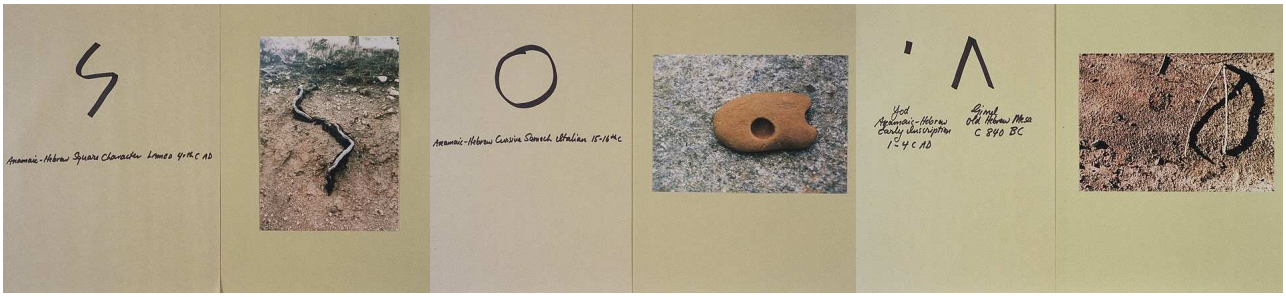
Figure 4: ***<u>Five Forms - Alphabetic Morphology</u>***

Figure 5: Letter Forms in Nature

The first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, "aleph" and "taf" form the Hebrew word for "letter," OT

"Y" in English. "Ayin" in Hebrew

"X" in English, "Aleph" in Hebrew



Examples of nature forms in alphabets, from "Cosmography, The Writing of the Universe." *GYH, DVD 1995*

Eucalyptus tree

Human neuron

Dried branch

Years of world travels ensued. I continued to look at alphabets, confirming my idea even farther. I also noticed that all things considered beautiful by all peoples share in these five forms. The nature of beauty appeared to be a reflective/reflexive system mirroring the beauty of nature.

"*The best therapeutic environment is said to be a place of great natural beauty,*" the ancient Tibetan medical treatise, Gyu-Zhi, states unequivocally. If we label as "beauty" the reflecting process which simultaneously induces harmonious states of wholeness, healing and health, we can then deduce that non-harmonious reflections, or the removal from or distortion of these positively reflecting elements, will cause negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, rage and grief.

Studies in psychoneuroimmunology, a medical term for mind and body healing, indicate that there is a significant relationship between healing and beauty on one hand and illness and chaos on the other.

The power of art and architecture lies in their potential to concentrate the ingredients of reflected beauty or life forms at the most innate level of being. In this vein, Dr. Gordon Shaw, of University of California, Irvine, shows that the notation of Mozart's most sublime music echoes the EEGS of very bright people. The highly publicized "Mozart Quotient" has had the odd effect of popularizing classical music with the expectation of making young children, as well as adults, smarter (Shaw and Peterson 1999).

In 1989-90 I lived alone in Tonto National Forest in North Eastern Arizona. I lived with flora and fauna – bear, elk, deer, coyote, tarantula, etc. With no heat, and no water, I had to learn to survive, particularly in the winter when the snows were high and the temperatures fell to ten below zero. I covered the outside of the cabin with heavy plastic sheeting to reduce the effect of the wind. The interior temperature was never more than 32 degrees F. I had to melt snow for water, had to be ever vigilant against freezing, and was constantly working for survival. My only buddy was a baby bobcat who adopted me as his mother and slept in my hair. He grew enormous, but always considered himself tiny, even as he slithered off the bed and grabbed my head with his huge paw.

I grew more and more entranced by nature. I lost all sense of identity as it had been formed by attachments and position in the city. I was exiled from the human embrace and comforted by the universal embrace. There was no difference between interior and exterior – everything was fluid. I had become tabula rasa. In January of 1990, the frozen pipes burst through the decaying wood floor boards of the cabin and one of the pipes leaked a steady stream of propane gas. It was too cold to cut the plastic open for ventilation. I was prepared to die. I lay on the bed, as always fully dressed, and dreamed: I saw my soul floating above me and the person who had saved me from the freezing death in 1974 stood by the bed and said, "You will get through this one in the snow too, Gilah". I awoke, and from that moment on, the burdens and difficulties of simply staying alive were transformed into the gifts of capacitating ongoing life. My will to live was far stronger than my will to die.

Figure 6: Burden into Gift, 1995, Oil on canvas, 16" x 32"

In 1986 and '87 I journeyed through fifteen Asian cultures searching for that which is considered sacred. I also researched the relation between spiritual and medical/psychiatric treatment as it was practiced in each of these cultures, including examining form in rituals, believing that these would conform to the five patterns I had discovered as the basis of all alphabets. Since I saw a correlation between neurological form and alphabet, I was convinced that other well-functioning social systems would share healthy physiological patterns as well.

During that year I met and was befriended by Ngawandandhup Narkyid (Kuno), the Official Biographer of the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India. He undertook to instruct me in diverse esoteric aspects of both the history and spiritual practice of Tibetan Buddhism. I became privy to the heart of another culture in which *spiritual practice is simultaneously medical/psychiatric treatment.*

Figure 7: Dharmsala, India

Ngawandhondup Narkyid (Kuno)

Dalai Lama

In April of 1990 a letter from my friend, Kuno, arrived at my isolated mountain hermitage, inviting me to McCleod Ganj, Dharamsala, home of the Dalai Lama, to attend the first tantric (secret teachings) practice ever taught by a Dalai Lama. I left my snow covered mountain top in Arizona, and sat with Tibetan monks in blizzards for six weeks on that other snow covered Himalayan mountain top being filled with ancient teachings and very clear visualizations about how to live and how to die. The method of instruction was direct transmission of exceptionally detailed visualizations which were accompanied by mudras (hand gestures) and mantras (sounds).

One of the essential components of these teachings had to do with the process of attainment of Bodhicitta (Buddha-mind). Bodhicitta (compassion) was visualized as a white sphere which traveled from the top of the head down one side of the body through very specific channels and routes, essentially lubricating every organ, and then traveling up and similarly nourishing the other side of the body to be eventually expelled out the of the crown chakra (top of the head) into the universe to spread compassion. Bodhicitta practice is core to the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

"The thought of enlightenment is said to be the one great thought that always bears positive fruit. As inspiration, motivation, it is awakened by the practice of the 'four boundless meditations': boundless love, boundless compassion, boundless sympathetic joy and boundless equanimity. The open, endless nature of these positive qualities, generated from the heart, leads to a state of complete meditative absorption (samadhi)." (Clifford 1994)

This fully interactive approach to changing mind, body, and speech had a profound emotional and behavioral effect on me. The highly articulated visualization process not only achieved a sense of emotional calm and well-being, but also a sense of physical wellness and energy.

After the teachings in Dharamsala I once again returned to my snowy mountain top in Tonto National forest and remained there through spring and summer, returning in September of 1990 to the civilization of Los Angeles, my home, my life, my identity as artist, writer, and professor.

By this time, I had presented my theory on the origin of alphabet which I called *Cosmography: The Writing of the Universe* in many parts of the world. Each time it was presented, it changed the vision and minds of the audience. Additionally, after each presentation in small or large groups, individuals commented that they felt emotionally and physically better. They stated that they were *simultaneously stimulated by visually experiencing the ideas, while calmed by the sequencing and content of the imagery.* They were so transformed by the presentation that they were unable to see their environment, nor their world in the way they had seen it before.

Meanwhile, I was thinking deeper into the implications of the connections between neurology, perception and psychoneuroimmunology (mind/body healing). As an artist I knew that certain forms will catalyze direct psychophysiological affect in the viewer (as well as in the creator). Our bodies are delicately entangled with our perceptions. Every emotion precipitates biochemical reactions that change the physical state of each cell of our bodies. In our culture, the only area where this sort of direct emotionally impacting influence is popularly acknowledged is in the realm of sexually explicit imagery which in the west has come to be known as pornography.

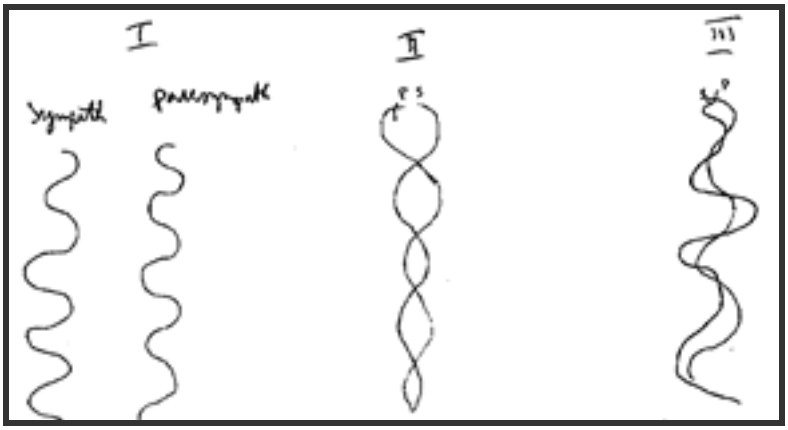
FORM AFFECTS FEELING
FEELING CONJURES METAPHOR
METAPHOR DEMANDS EXPRESSION

If the form conjures a positive feeling, or even a moderate sense of physical and emotional comfort, anxiety and tension would be reduced. When this happens, there is easier communication and attention between people as well as between people and their environment. It is this form that is universally construed as "beauty." Form considered beauty, then, has to do with positive affect, as it prompts evolutionary behavior, such as contact, communication, care, compassion, attunement to the interdependent nature of all things, thus promoting health and well-being. Beauty reflects congruence between internal perceptual apparatus and externally perceived phenomena.

For example, Dr. Andre Novac, psychiatrist at University of California, Irvine, sent me his newly considered model of the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. When the two systems, measured in sine waves, are working well, the sine waves overlap and form the image of the DNA helix. When they are obstructed or in "chaos," they lie in parallel, non-communicating lines.

Figure 8: ***<u>Model of Dr. Andre Novac: Sympathetic And Parasympathetic Systems</u>***

<u>Sine wave</u> <u>Working well together</u> <u>In chaos</u>



"Beauty is…a compact, or contract between the beautiful being (a person or thing) and the perceiver. As the beautiful being confers on the perceiver the gift of life, so the perceiver confers on the beautiful being the gift of life…Each 'welcomes' the other; each – to return to the word's original meaning – "comes in accordance with (the) other's will." (Scarry 1999)

"This reciprocal pact should assist us in turning toward problems of justice…" Scarry continues, as she considers the second attribute of beauty, "the pressure toward distribution." If one experiences something or someone beautiful, one spontaneously wishes to duplicate it, by sharing it verbally, taking a photograph, drawing or painting, writing a poem, etc. Scarry connects the mutuality of beauty to that of justice through the use of language: "The notion of pact here again comes into play. A single word, 'fairness,' is used both in referring to loveliness of countenance and in referring to the ethical requirement for 'being fair,' 'playing fair' and 'fair distribution.'"

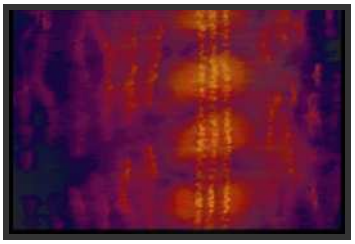
My time alone in the forest had precipitated thoughts and writing about the nature of exile, specifically the continuum of independence to exile. With no other human referent, I had understood that I had become an ungrounded, floating soul. It became clear that we, humans, are herding animals, as were the animals I lived with, since *it is only within the herd that we can be heard.* I questioned at what point does the independent thinker, explorer, astronaut lose connection with the community, prevailing belief systems, continent, galaxy, to drift into exile?

If contact and communication is the glue between thinkers, explorers, and astronauts, and gravity is the force tethering planets and galaxies, I believed that there must be a profoundly embedded paradigmatic reflexive model that allows us to perceive the forms that are considered beautiful, that promote health and interdependent evolutionary behavior.

Taking this as the next spring board, I began to examine human physiology from the cellular level. If, as I had come to believe, recognition is proprioceptive, hard-wired into the physiological system, the meta-model of contact and communication must lie submerged in our deeper physiological recesses as well.

I looked at cell behavior as it seemed to be a small enough discernable unit of life that tends to live in groups, as do herding animals and humans. I learned that adjacent cells "whisper" together through their cell membranes that vibrate in the electromagnetic field (soliton) created by the bioelectrical valence of various facilitating hormones, minerals and neurotransmitters. The presence of calcium, (an element that will weave into this discussion again), is essential for all of these processes to take place. If a cell ceases to be in contact with another, it becomes diseased. The synapse or "gap junction," grows wider and unbridgeable. In trying to arrange other neighbors of communion, it begins to proliferate itself, becoming cancer. Recent experiments conducted by Dr. Ross Adey at Loma Linda, California, VA Medical Center, show that the introduction of enough healthy cells into a cancerous environment may reestablish sufficient communication to propel the organism back to health. This process has been demonstrated in a film by Adey.

Figure 9: ***<u>Gap Junction</u>***



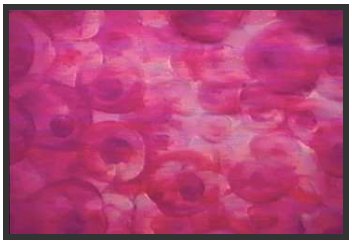
Electrical impulse soliton

Presence of calcium

Communicating cell

Gap junction

Beginning cloning



Cells same (cancer)

Cell communication met the parameters of my quest for a meta-model. Even at that minute level, it is necessary to have an "other" who mirrors. Yet the "other" cannot be a clone, i.e. a cancer cell, but a fully differentiated functioning cell. I had found a deeply seeded metaphor for conscientious behavior. We cannot mirror ourselves, although we may try to as narcissists. If we are physically isolated, we may begin to talk to ourselves. If we are emotionally isolated, we may produce multiple personalities. Yet our emotional search from birth is for a resonating, not duplicating mirror. We look for congruency (as two hands clasped and wrapped inside each other), not identical sameness, (as two hands held up against each other). Difference, although harmonious, much like a triad in a musical chord, is necessary to incite healthy growth. The well-intentioned rub of stimulation animates emotional and behavioral evolution.

This concept is reflected socially, universally. Joy is often culturally determined, and predicated on achievement. For example, one culture will value many husbands, another many wives, one many sons, another many daughters, some are heterosexual, others homosexual, and gods change radically from group to group. However, grief is universally experienced in loss of contact with a loved one, bereavement, divorce, separation from Beauty, removal from a cultural and/or physical home, abandonment.

In 1995 I began a series of paintings which I called the "Architecture of the Temple of Mind." There were four in the series, all within the same format, having lead frames – the alchemist's material. As I worked in each image sequentially, white spheres appeared. I suspected that they had to do with "worlds within worlds" of Chinese ivory sculpture, but then the thought of calcium crept into my mind. The spheres were persistent in their presence.

Figure 10: Architecture Of The Temple Of The Mind

1st Window in the Temple of the Mind, A/C, 1994, 22" x 30"

2nd Window in the Temple of the Mind, A/C, 1994, 22" x 30"

3rd Window in the Temple of the Mind, A/C, 1994, 22" x 30"

4th Window in the Temple of the Mind, A/C, lead fram 1994, 32" x 23.5"

The series progressed through 1996 and 1997. At the same time, I began to suspect that my own body was in need of more calcium. Doctors generally advocate that people, particularly women, take calcium supplements as they grew older. I noticed two more parallel physiological/psychological congruencies: aging reduces calcium in the bones and simultaneously may increase emotional isolation and loneliness among many individuals as the body declines. One may become less physically active, which may cause greater emotional/intellectual separation.

I moved into the new studio building that I built adjacent to my house. My first painting, "Alembic" signaled new birth, and there were those white spheres, dancing in the field. There was something alive, almost scary, about this work.

Figure 11: Alembic, Oil on canvas, 1997, 60" x 50"

I began to seriously study calcium.

"Small Ion with Cachet. The Calcium Signal: Calcium is in a different league from the sodium and potassium ions; though still quite small, it holds enough information to carry a hormone message. Crystallographers have known for some time that calcium is a cut above the rest of the small inorganic ion crowd...it has a flexible crystal field – bond distances and angles are adjustable, with coordination numbers that can vary from six to ten – and it has higher ionization energies. The adaptable coordination sphere permits a wide variety of cooperative packings, giving the ion an advantage in the cross-linking of crystal structures, both inorganic and organic ones. Proteins - domains with, say, six carbohydrate residues – can accept the calcium ion rapidly and sequentially and can twist around it, and all this with specific structure and reversible.

Thus, we may rightly say, this ion is within the proteins' grasp

"There is hardly a function in your body that doesn't involve calcium: heartbeat, muscle contraction, gland secretion, signal transmission in the nervous system, signal transmission between nerve and muscle, cell division, cell motility, bioluminescence, cell adhesion, etc…"

-- (Loewi 1999 - discoverer chemical signal transmission in the nervous system)

In 1997 I began to paint in a diamond format, concurrently with other paintings. I found the diamond to be very much a mirror of the body, my body, and the white spheres persisted.

In "Equipoise" I was searching for the balance between mind and body, heaven and earth, firmament and water.

Figure 12: Equipoise, Oil on wood, 1997, 38" x 38"

I wondered if it were possible that these white spheres could possibly be Bodhicitta, compassion, similarly envisioned in the tantric (Tibetan secret) visualizations.

In "Delicately Tangled in the Sway" I looked deeper into the heart of hearts, where the experience of loving is felt.

Figure 13: Delicately Tangled in the Sway, Oil on canvas, 1998, 42" x 42"

In the summer of 1998 I was in Dharamsala again, a guest in the Dali Lama's monastery, reading everything I could find about Tibetan medicine and psychiatry, hoping to discover a link. It was then that I came across the rare *Gyu-Zhi*, as quoted in *Tibetan Medicine and Psychiatry* (Clifford 1994) to my astonishment also called "The Diamond Healing."

"…The three kayas, the "three bodies of the Buddha," the Dharamkaya, the Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya represent the Buddhist sacred trinity of the three levels of expression of the reality of Buddha-nature. They represent the unmanifest, subtle and manifest levels of Buddha-essence. They represent the Buddha mind, the Buddha speech, and the Buddha body.

In Vajrayana, the practice is to transform ourselves and the world around us into the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. These practices are described in a series of texts known as tantras (Tibetan *rgyud*). Through tantric esoteric rituals the practitioner creates and simultaneously identifies with a particular form of deity. This is accomplished through visualization, mantras (special formulas of syllables that use the spiritual power of sound vibration), mudras (symbolic gestures that awaken spiritual receptivity and awareness), and through formless meditation. In these tantric sadhanas or, in fact in any meditation or religious practice, there are three things the tradition holds of main importance: first, to have the intention of *doing the practice for the sake of the liberation of all beings*; second, to be unattached to the experiences that may arise in meditation; and third, to share the merit of the practice, to emulate none other than the Medicine Buddha himself. While the physician is practicing medicine normally he is spiritually identified with the Medicine Buddha…"

I learned about "thigles," visualized as *spheres* or the vital essences which are of two types: absolute and relative. *"The relative thigles are of many kinds and pervade the body as vital essence-drops…"*

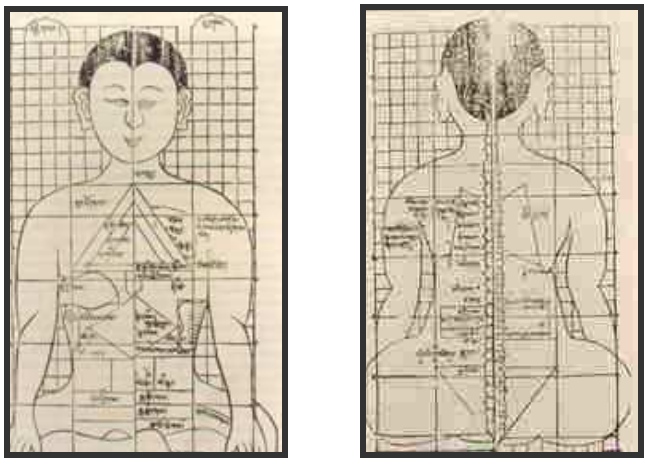
"All the thigles in the body are generated from the main thigle in the central channel at the heart center. This central thigle is composed of the pure quintessence of the five elements (represented by five–colored light); it also contains the essence of the life-force. The red mother essence-drop and the white father essence-drop are generated from it and move downwards and upwards respectively, in the central column…

…when the thigles are maintained in the body as gross essences rather than wisdom essences, the world outside is perceived negatively. When maintained as wisdom essences, good karma is created in the practice for the universal womb of illumination…

In the higher Mahayana and Vajrayana, the Medicine Buddha is not simply worshipped for his healing powers. The Medicine Buddha is the form of Buddha-nature that the practitioner aspires to realizing himself. Through practice of meditation of the Medicine Buddha, one can generate enormous healing power for self-healing and for healing others. Thus, the exalted model that the Tibetan Buddhist physician aspires. Transmuting the thigles into their refined wisdom nature, the world is perceived in a positive way, and one's awareness blossoms as bliss and peace. Thus the purpose of tantric yoga is to untangle the knots in the channels, purify the karmic wind-energies, and reveal the thigles as the nature of wisdom."

I remembered and reviewed the two healing paintings of 1980, "Through Generation" and "Surge." At the time I had worked to untangle the physical and emotional knots present in my body.

Figure 14: ***Tibetan Medicine: Body energy systems***



"The thigles are, through yogic practice, drawn into the hollows of the central column along with the airs. By controlling all the airs and essences and sending them into the central column, and further activating those essences within the central column with the force of the "mystic heat" one opens the mandalas of the chakras, the inner psychic centers along the central column, and sets a straight course to full enlightenment.

The absolute thigle is pervasive. It represents the Buddha-nature and exists within all the subtle pathways, airs, and essences. It is the "Great Thigle" which is the same as the absolute bodhi-mind. …Realization of the great thigle is tantamount to enlightenment. This is the transformation that occurs when the subtle airs and essences are in the central column and become respectively the inherent wisdom-air (Tibetan. *Ye-she-kyi rlung*) and bodhi-mind.

Therefore the central channel is the most important space within the subtle body; in its realized state it is called the "Wisdom Channel." When it is controlled and purified, it completely transforms the basic ignorance (which it represents) that is the cause of all delusion. It is the "Middle Vein" like the "Middle Way," and in this sense it indicates that its nature is shunyata and that it avoids the two extremes of nihilism and externalism (the polarities of energies of two veins). *This vein is not produced by visualization. It is discovered by visualization and meditation. It is always there. It is the main link between the purely spiritual and purely physical worlds.*

Realization of the karmic airs as the wisdom-air and the thigles as the bodhi-mind within this central channel at the heart center is equivalent to realization of the Dharmakaya."

In "Exaltation" I was perceiving harmony in the many aspects of the universe, the white spheres ever present. However, I began to notice a pattern in the placement of the spheres.

Figure 15: Exaltation,
Oil on canvas, 1999, 70.5" x 70.5"

I became convinced that there was a correlation between Bodhicitta and calcium. And I believed the locations of the white spheres or thigles were related to acupuncture points. I read in, *Tibetan Medicine and Psychiatry*, "Tantric mystic physiology of the subtle body is directly related to the somatic physiology of regular medicine, and the tantric practices of manipulating it bear directly on tantric healing. For example, the system of subtle veins and pathways are the channels used and manipulated in Tibetan acupuncture and moxibustion" (Clifford 1994).

On the 29th of June, 1999 I was in a near fatal accident on Queen Charlotte Island, 200 miles out from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in the Pacific Ocean. This archipelago has been the home of the Haida Indians for 15,000 years. The steering wheel of the rented car seized up, took off to the right, rolled three times and landed upside down, in a ravine invisible from the road. I was left hanging upside down, unconscious, my thorax twisted and crushed between the two front seats. Many hours later the overturned crunched car and my crushed unconscious body were miraculously discovered. I survived, and became neither quadriplegic nor brain dead. I had

broken two vertebrae, many ribs, the scapula on both sides, sternum, tibia, five millimeters of bone fragment floating in my spinal channel, injured head, and my heart so contused until that I have continued for years to have flat T waves on my EKG.

From the first moment of consciousness I began to visualize life. After 5 days in unequipped remote island infirmary, I returned to Los Angeles alone by sheer volition and morphine "to go". There, in an MRI tunnel I literally saw how terribly injured my body was, and I experienced unbounded compassion for my severely broken skeleton and smashed organs. I understood that my body had once again insisted on life rather than death. I had no surgery but was immobilized in my home on my back for three months in a back brace, and my full time job was active visualization - practicing imagery, cell by cell, to heal my back, chest and heart. With the aid of medical texts, I pictured discreet and specific images at all levels of the physiology, bringing it from the pathological to the healthful state. When I began to walk, and could pick up a brush for a minute or two, I began to paint again, at the beginning one stroke per day if at all. I intended to reconstruct my body from the inside out. Every bit of that active intentional change was geared toward the direction of wellness as life could be used toward service. I knew I held the greatest power to heal my own body.

As in my self-healing work twenty years earlier, I was the one initiating and effecting the healing from the inside out. I focused on regeneration of the ribs, spinal column, cells, evoking the DNA and reflowering power of spirit in "Who Will Live and Who Will Die? The Jaws of Life and Death." (The Hebrew words, "*Mi Yichyeh Vami Yamut? - Who Will Live and Who Will Die?"* from the Jewish High Holiday prayers are painted in the lower part of the work. I felt it necessary to add the power of written incantation along with the imagery).

Figure 16: Who Will Live & Who Will Die? The Jaws of Life & Death, Oil on canvas, 1999, 85" x 85"

I was painting layers and layers of imagery as the body changed, from the trauma of the breaks to the light and wholeness of the image. The white spheres continued to appear. I realized that that they were arranged in a pattern that reflected meridian and acupuncture points. By focusing on these healing spots the paintings were increasingly acting as medicine paintings.

In "Refuge" (Fig. 16, Hebrew: *Chassiah)* I magically parted the ribs and painted protection for the heart and spinal cord, in a bed of healthy cells. (*Chassiah* is my first given name, although I have never been called by that name. I inscribed the word in Hebrew around the spinal cord.)

I felt and continue to feel enormous gratitude for the gift of life, and hope that the tasks for which I have been spared will be accomplished with grace equal to that which I have been granted. In the months of painting "Grace" (Figure 17.) (Hebrew: *Chessed*, inscribed in red in the upper part of the work,) I came to a profound understanding of the seeming internal chaos, yet all held together by a strong force at the heart. All is simultaneously substantive, dimensional and transparent, all illuminated by the entire spectrum, revealing a matrix of interpenetrating layers of life.

Figure 17: Refuge, Oil on wood, 2000, 27" x 27"

Figure 18: Grace, Oil on canvas, 2000, 85" x 85"

I read later in the *Gyu-Zhi*, "The whole of conditioned existence consists of radiations of energy vibrations emitted as rays or as fields of force and at varying rates of speed and thus solidity, intersecting and interacting in accordance with the harmonics of karmic balance."

I was determined to uncover what I could to corroborate my idea about calcium and Bodhicitta. In my experience, the Tibetan mind is one of the most acute in the world. The rigorous climate and all protein diet, contribute to honing an incisive mind and lean dedicated body. My strong hunch was that the visualization practice contained calcium in its metaphor. I reexamined what I knew about Tibetan history and diet. The highest peaks of the Himalayas are the youngest mountains of the world (called the Baby Mountains in Tibetan). That means that they were most recently covered in crustacean-rich sediment. The Tibetan diet on the Tibetan plateau is almost 100% yak that eats the tiny plants nourished by the crustacean-rich soil. Yak meat, butter, cheese is a high protein, high calcium diet. I conjectured that when the tantric healing visualizations were conceived, calcium had been combined with bodhicitta (Buddha-mind/compassion), at either the conscious or unconscious level.

I emailed my friend Kuno, in the Private Office of the Dalai Lama, sending him my idea and requesting published imagery and direct translation of the tantric practice I had been taught in Dharamsala by the Dalai Lama. He suggested I send my request to Geshe Tsultrim Gyeltsen, (1924 – 2009), an authority on tantric practice, founding director and spiritual head of the Thubten Darjeeling Tibetan Temple and Center in Long Beach, California. Geshe-la responded with a telephone call and the following letter that he permitted me to excerpt and quote:

"…First, there are two types of Bodhicitta: The first Bodhicitta is that mind which perceives the great enlightenment of Buddhahood: it is a consciousness and is the real Bodhicitta. The bodhicitta which you are referring to, coming from the crown chakra down through the wind channels etc, is the second bodhicitta, the physical, white bodhicitta which is merely named bodhicitta.

The first Bodhicitta that I mentioned is not directly related to or with calcium. The physical, white bodhicitta and calcium are connected because both are related with elements of the body. If calcium helps to support the health or well being of an individual, then it does indirectly relate to the first Bodhicitta in that it sustains a practitioner's ability to remain healthy and continue to meditate on the first Bodhicitta. The great compassion though, is the true cause of the real Bodhicitta, which is the mind aspiring to great enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. As I mentioned, the functions of the physical white bodhicitta are contained in the secret teachings (tantra) and it would not be suitable to discuss this with those who have no background in Buddhist teachings and have not received proper initiation into the secret teachings…"

Figure 19: Wind/ Spirit (Ruach), Oil on canvas, 2001, 17" x 17"

CONCLUSION

The Hebrew word for wind, *Ruach,* (Figure 19), is also the word for spirit. Each breath inspires grace in life and the exchange of atoms physically connects all things. Both artist and shaman trans-form by conjuring: the artist trans-figures the medium into form in order to change the mind/body of both the artist and the viewer, much as the shaman (or a lama or priest) invokes an altered state of mind and/or body by visual/aural performance. Sequenced ritual is key to both, and may be either private or public. Both artist and shaman must wisely shape the metaphors that they use as well as the metaphors by which they are known.

As surviving creatures of nature, we already have the blueprint for compassionate high efficiency, hard-wired and available, literally at hand. If we use our awareness and powers to model and remodel relationships, environments, architecture, social and political institutions so that they will be based on the lineaments of natural, paradigmatic form, we will more deftly accomplish our goals of harmony and peace. As creators and reflectors of divinity, our capacities are only beginning to be known. Divinity in humanity implies spirituality in behavior. With this focus directing mind and heart, we have an optimal opportunity to consciously link the eternal with the temporal, and the spiritual with the physical, providing an arena in which the human and the universal can embrace.

Figure 20: Light as Space as Skin, Oil on canvas, 2001, 68" x 68"

The Hebrew word for Light, "Or,"is the homonym for Skin.

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