

Ominous to Numinous: Cultural Contradictions and Indigenous Truths: Ritual, Induction, Intentionality, Placebo, and Image in Global Healing

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ABSTRACT

Belief systems vary widely and are both necessary and problematic. This paper will focus on various ancient cultures such as Nunavut, Kenya, Buryatia and Tibet, as well as more recent cultures such as Hungary, Germany, United States, Brasil, Goethenaum

(Switzerland) and Damanhur (Italy). Belief systems will be examined that result in practices that may be diametrically opposed from culture to culture that can lead toward the same healing results, as well as practices that are essentially common in diverse cultures that also lead to healing. However the destruction of indigenous culture and traditional belief systems most often leads to dysfunctionality and death.

Ritual, induction, intentionality, placebo and visualization will be shown to be common among all forms of healing. While ancient cultures succumb to the ravages of globalization, contemporary state-of-the-art medicine in the United States, for example, will be shown as having adopted the essentials of shamanic arts with great success.

The hope is that as cultures inevitably lose their identities, best practices can be imbued in the individual universally and in this way, move toward global health and spiritual harmony.

When I was a guest in the Dalai Lama's monastery in Dharamsala, I set out to read the *Dhammapada* - a collection of sayings of the Buddha in verse form and one of the most widely read and best known Buddhist scriptures. That particular edition was printed in India. It soon became evident that each time the word SELF was supposed to appear, the capital S had been omitted, and thus this deep wisdom was all about the ELF. This "teaching" by the "Grand Master Typo" burst the bubble of preciousness, and allowed for a much wider concept of the elfish self.

I was left with the questions - are we simply confections of time and thought, and are our faith and belief systems arbitrary and convenient?

The end of the Mayan calendar in 2012 precipitated a global uproar and widespread belief that the world was coming to an end. Interpretations ranged from ominous

predictions of doom, to numinous reflections of change by those understanding that a new cycle of advanced consciousness had been inaugurated. Those who believed in the ominous prediction acted in line with their belief and took precautionary measures to prepare for this event. For example, as Fundamentalist capitalist Christians believed that the Rapture, which is not known to be pet friendly, would take place in 2012, new businesses arose in the US to provide long term care for the animals left behind.

While in the 1970s and 1980s Future Studies was an expanding discipline, it has shrunk into oblivion. The understanding that variables are infinite, that the universe is constantly expanding rather than contracting as was previously thought, leads to a change in behavior with emphasis on being alert, present and conscious. Despite predictions of all kinds - and the creative person can imagine an infinite array - none play out as predicted. Believers' ensuing reactions either lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, or to plunging into action in an opposite direction.

As technology becomes a greater part of our lives, we are forced into exponential rapidity, are drowned in information overload and are divorced from our senses. The advent of technology causes stress and disease, and deprives flora and fauna from natural growth and evolution. (Whether the technological age is a natural evolutionary step is another question.) The natural world grows ever farther from our physical and emotional selves. We think of Spider Man rather than a spider, Internet virtual families replace the physical closeness of actual families, and virtual sex becomes just another form of pornography. "Virtual sex is to sex as virtual food is to food: you can't taste, touch or smell it, and you don't have to do any preparation or work. Sex with strangers online amounts to a diminution, close to an absolute negation of the context that gives human interaction genuine content. Erotic play without context becomes just a form of one-on-one pornography." (Susan Jacoby, *Weiner's Women*, New York Times Op-Ed, July 30, 2013)

Our vision of reality is tricked and digitally manipulated and we forget the messages that nature has encoded in the landscape. The loss of connection and reflection in nature coupled with a greater reliance on technology, precipitates instability in belief systems. Yet the need for belief remains as significant as it was for our forebears. Fear verses faith frames our very existence. Our lives are either supported or extinguished by our thoughts. Most often our belief systems are formed and cultivated by the cultures in which we are raised, while true meaning and purpose arise as we begin to pursue individuated paths. “Always form your opinions according to your own judgment,” Albert Einstein wrote to me when I was ten.

Belief systems vary entirely from culture to culture, and appear random, contextual and convenient. Truths change. While joy is culturally determined, eg in some cultures one wishes for many husbands, another many wives, one values daughters while another reveres sons, one is homosexual while another is heterosexual, and the gods change every few miles, grief is universally caused in the same way - loss of contact, rejection and abandonment.

While living alone with large animals such as bear, elk, deer etc in wilderness in North Eastern Arizona for as much as 16 months (1988- 1990), I recognized that we, too, are herding animals as it is only in the *herd* that one can be *heard*. Contact and connection form the essence of life well lived. Much like creatures of all genus and species, humans band together to face the fear of the unknown. Our belief systems are generally triggered because of fear of illness, death, dependency, separation or ostracism from the family and tribe. I understand this to be a fractal reflection of relational needs deeply hard-wired in our bodies. Cells must communicate with each other (“cell whispering”) across the “gap junction” (*Ross Adey, MD*)

http://cdn.preterhuman.net/texts/science_and_technology/medical/electro_magnetic/EMFieldsAndBiomolecularSystems.txt If they are obstructed from communication they clone themselves

becoming cancer. Similarly people must communicate with others or in their isolation they create multiple personalities, a psychological pathology; and communities,

nations, galaxies must also communicate with others of their own kind or they lose viability.

We create organized belief systems to counter uncertainty and ambiguity, and find comfort in the community of others with the same beliefs. These belief systems form and direct our thoughts and actions. We habituate to the belief system, grow expectations and behaviors, develop faith in these structures and systems, and give our personal power to others to whom we attribute special powers of healing and wisdom. A few examples illustrate a thoroughly divergent mindset leading to or promulgated by belief systems. Christians live in fear of sin and hell, and seek forgiveness from Christ; Jews regard the possibility that all events can be seen as either terror or revelation and enter into a conversation with God; Buddhists, believing that all things are connected, are motivated to change their behavior in support of universal compassion, and shamanic cultures, directed by ancestral spirits, see all things as positively or negatively spiritually animated.

What is real? If I were to tell you that I see spirits in the trees in nature and felt them to be metaphors of human emotional and physical situations/conditions, you may believe me. However, if you were consulting with a shaman or a soothsayer with your belief system fully vested in their oracular accuracy, and s/he tells you that the spirit s/he sees is forecasting that you will break your heart or arm or that you will die soon, you would believe that as a prophecy. You may begin to act out of fear to either repel that prophecy, or hunt an enemy you think may be plotting harm against you. Or you may consult the ancestral spirits who *you* may begin to recognize. You will begin to see according to the suggestion of the shaman, guru, lama, doctor, teacher to whom you have given your trust and power.

Do we see because we think or do we think because we see?

Despite the lenses of specific religious or cultural practices such as individuals of discrete cultures recognizing healing properties of Tibetan mandalas, Balinese dance

rituals, or Navajo sand painting, all people respond similarly, both emotionally and physically to certain images, such as a laughing family, healthy sexuality, or horrific images of violence. Simply thinking of the images evokes the same responses, eg, voodoo works because people are literally scared to death by their belief systems.¹

Form evokes Feeling.

Feeling evokes metaphor.

Metaphor demands expression.

In the recognition/perceptual process neurotransmitters are evoked that change the psychophysiological emissions in the body in the same way universally.

No matter how different the cultures may appear, all individuals share in the following process:

- The patient or supplicant either overtly or covertly agrees to the power of the healer,
- has most likely already been swayed by the reputation of the healer, either by word of sight, or word of mouth, to believe that the
- powerful person is a specialist in healing,
- has abdicated personal power to this person of authority,
- has an expectation and believes that s/he will be healed.

Most often protocol includes:

1. a particular venue that may have unusual décor or trappings
2. sound and smell will be modified in some way
3. the healer will wear a specific costume
4. specific tools will be implemented

¹ “Many physicians are only now acknowledging the link between fear and cardiovascular events. But across cultures and throughout history, this dangerous connection has been noted. Voodoo curses and overly ominous thought for example, have created deadly outcomes that are hard to explain from a purely physical point of view.” *Zoobiquity - The Astonishing Connection Between Human and Animal Health*, Barbara Natterson-Horowitz, MD and Kathryn Bowers, Vintage Books, 2013

5. objects of veneration may be part of the décor
6. an induction will take place which will orient the patient to the place, healer and expectation
7. a long held recognizable ritual will be practiced that may include ingestion of a substance, chant, song, dance
8. something will be transmitted, given or promised by the healer to the patient
9. an iteration of faith in the process will be recited
10. hypnotic suggestion towards healing will be accomplished by all of the above.

Does it work? I would submit that both the patient and the healer must share an additional component for greater efficacy. If the healer is motivated by a mission beyond personal gain and toward the greater good, s/he will be more successful. Similarly, the intent of the patient must also be larger than personal gain or vengeance but must also reach towards the greater good.

Examining the Spectrum from Ominous to Numinous:

Ominous

When a culture is destroyed, no healing can take place. There are no bones of tradition on which to hang the 10 elements of healing.

Cultural suicide in Nunavut, North Pole, North America: When I visited the Eskimos² of Nunavut at the invitation of the tribal founder of Nunavut, Bill Lyall, I was shocked to learn that 90+% of all males under 40 commit suicide. This devastation began as a result of the arrival of Anglican missionaries in the 1930s that caused the demise of the native culture. Hundreds of Eskimo children were kidnapped and taken far away

² Before I came to Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, I had referred to the First Nations people of the North as Inuit (Mankind), which was known as the politically correct appellation. When Bill Lyall heard me use this word, he exhorted me to use only Eskimo (People Who Eat Raw Meat). The two names are used variously in different parts of Nunavut, but other governments use Inuit.

to the US where they were brainwashed of their culture, their names and language. Those who managed to remain or those who returned continued to witness the demise of all things sacred and traditional. Their land was raped by miners for diamonds, other minerals, and for oil; their sacred animals were killed by white “trophy” hunters, their traditional way of life based on the seven month long tribal hunt on dog sleds was eradicated, and gradually meaning, purpose and creativity in the lives of the native men was annihilated. Alcohol, drugs and gambling have replaced traditional values and practice of men. Although women see a bleak future for their sons, they still find a modicum of fulfillment in raising the children they conceive in brief liaisons with visiting white tradesmen.

I interviewed the oldest person alive, a woman of 65, who had been born on a moving dogsled during a tribal hunt. She had lost 5 sons to suicide, was raising her 4-year-old granddaughter as the child’s father had committed suicide and her mother had disappeared but was thought to have hooked up with a white trader in Yellow Knife. I asked about shamans and healers and was told that the one remaining shaman had gone underground, refused to practice as times were so terrible and that he was helpless in the face of cultural suicide. He also refused to teach his craft to anyone of the younger generation, as they no longer had respect for the ritual of the lineage. I was told Inuktitut, the language of the Eskimos in Nunavut, has no concept or word for future. Observing the world through their eyes, should we?

Russia

My 2010 invitation from the Russian Academy of Sciences to Russia, Siberia, Buryatia gave me further insight into the challenges of constructing new societies and cultures after physical devastation, social deconstruction and loss of tradition

The slogan of the new culture in Moscow is *Black Business in Dirty Water*. If one attempts “white” business one is either ostracized or shot. Transparency International ranks Russia 133 of 176 nations in terms of perception of corruption index.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption_in_Russia

<http://www.cnn.com/id/100805382>

Corruption and conspicuous wealth are ubiquitously evident. There is no sense of morality and the city is highly sexualized. When I was there in 1996, women in downtown Moscow wore sheer blouses with no underwear. My most recent visit in 2011, showed a city intensely focused on sexuality from billboards to behavior. Although there are many who push on with deeply moral and spiritual lives, the culture has lost its spirit and malevolence reigns. (30 of my paintings that had traveled for exhibitions in 7 European cities during a 7-year period were stolen by the high end Moscow gallery. http://gilah.com/wpcontent/uploads/2011/02/gilah_hirsch_catalog.pdf The combined efforts of Transparency International, the US State Department, other international agencies, as well as a large ransom payment, were successful in returning 25 of the 30 paintings.) Most recently Russia (June 2013) has passed anti gay legislation that is reminiscent of Nazi policies.

<http://www.policymic.com/articles/48411/russia-anti-gay-bill-russia-passes-radical-family-values-bill-while-president-announces-divorce-on-tv>

Yet there is a small but growing interest in New Age spirituality, yoga, psychology and healing, with large and multiplying “human potential” centers such as *Open World* (Moscow) in a culture in which spirituality was officially denied during the Soviet period.

I was introduced to a Buryat Bone Setter female Shaman, Raisa, in Moscow. I was told that she is both President Putin’s body worker and shaman, and also administers in these ways to others high in the government. She had come to my presentation at the Russian Academy of Sciences and noted my broken ankle in a cast. She volunteered to work for free as she wished to show me her shamanic work, which, she said, was utterly secret and unusual only to her lineage. I agreed and she came to my hotel room with a translator. I was surprised when she embarked on deep tissue massage and was indeed very good at this form of treatment. When I told her that this is a normal form of treatment in the west, practiced by thousands of trained, often licensed massage therapists, she was shocked. She and her family had been certain that this was their invention.

Berlin, Germany: Creativity and Transparency Bring Both Terror and Revelation

Contemporary Berlin is the perfect crucible in which to explore both the positive and negative elements of evolutionary belief systems as exemplified in the continuum between freedom and limitation. Although the guide and goal is the greater good so that the community at large will continue to thrive, there are untold challenges from within the systems that thwart these goals.

From politics to art, everything is evaluated in light of the two new significant values, creativity and transparency. As a new culture in which innovative lifestyles are creating rules rather than rules creating lifestyles, creativity is encouraged in all aspects of society; and as a center of creative thinking and behavior, Berlin is in itself an artful work in process, a living laboratory of creative growth and consciousness in action. Transparency is the second value touted by the government. Architecture mirrors both these values, as all new government buildings are literally transparent, while all other buildings are covered with art/graffiti declaring freedom.

The continuum between creativity and anarchy is the slippery slope that continually seesaws back and forth. On the one hand, Berlin is the most exciting art capital in the world, and on the other, Nazi skinheads are free to march and are doing so more frequently than ever. Furthermore, 70% of all Berlin inhabitants did not live there 8 years ago. (As an organism Berlin is like a human body in which cells change every 7 years). It is the city with the world's fastest growing Jewish population and Hebrew is heard everywhere in the streets. It is a city of youth in which the average age is 31 and it is endemically "green". With creativity as the #1 value, squatting is encouraged, and one can begin any venture in the most squalid conditions with no permits or red tape. The city is highly sexualized with swinger bars and immense sex clubs at almost every corner. The openly gay mayor has decreed that fewer rules are better, and has cited that crime has gone down annually. A full spectrum of experimentation to licentiousness is practiced. Shades of early 1930s are all too evident.

Alongside the more flagrant life of Berlin, there is growing interest in the New Age philosophy and workshops, and shamanic ritual and healing are flourishing. I was taken to a highly touted, very expensive healer who used silver “wands” to trace meridian lines, believing that this would heal all ailments. It is the “best of times and the worst of times” in Berlin, a vivid culture on the brink – but we cannot know of what.

Traditional Practices Differ in Form and Behavior.

1. Visualization

Tibetan Buddhist culture is still very much practiced as it has been since 7thC AD although severely threatened and damaged by Chinese policy and action since 1959. In this culture visualization is the key to well-being, both spiritually and physically. The Tibetan Medical lama assumes the role of the Medicine Buddha when engaged in healing and all healing is sought and accomplished for the greater good.

When I lived in an isolated mountaintop wilderness (North Eastern Arizona) for 16 months, I learned to survive 20 below zero temperatures, high snows sans power or water and came to grips with the depths and demons of my own nature within that natural wilderness.

After 11 months in wilderness, I received an invitation from Dharamsala to attend *tantric* teachings, (a style of meditation and ritual that arose in medieval India no later than the fifth century CE). This was the first time that any Dalai Lama had ever presented these secret teachings. I left my snow-covered mountaintop and arrived to the Indian Himalayas to sit in blizzards outside the Dalai Lama’s temple with 300 monks for 6 weeks. I was able to receive a simultaneous translation from Tibetan into English, as on a previous visit I had given my shortwave radio to a monk who had in the interim become the Dalai Lama’s amanuensis. He returned the radio to me thus facilitating the teaching.

The Dalai Lama, in the role of the deity of compassion, Avolokitshvara, guided us through extremely detailed visualizations with accompanying *mudras* (gestures) and *mantras* (sounds). Compassion (*bodhicitta*) was visualized as a small white ball over the crown chakra of the head, and was sequentially visualized lubricating all systems and organs, first down the right side of the body and then up the left, and finally expelled out the top of the head to spread compassion to all sentient beings throughout the universe.

We felt emotionally, spiritually, and physically very well. Later on, I discovered that this visualization practice increased the levels of calcium in the body that triggered concomitant emissions of other neurotransmitters, yielding an increase in physical, emotional and spiritual well-being. (Gilah Yelin Hirsch)

http://gilah.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/bodhicitta_calcium_8-2001.pdf

http://gilah.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/ISSSEEM_BiotheologyImageryHealing.pdf

http://gilah.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/eskimos_have_no_word_for_future.pdf

2. Induction, Sacrifice, Trance

I was privileged to observe a festival of approximately 100 Buryat shamans in Buryatia. Buryat shamans are specialized as Bone Setter or Blacksmith shamans, each with their own ritual, implements, and lineage teaching. The all day event featured consistent *drumming*, *sacrifice* (slaughter of a goat), *trance*, *reverence* of shamans, tree and nature spirits. The persistent drumming produced an entranced, almost hallucinogenic environment. The regalia clad shamans each went into trance at different times. At times there were very many shamans in trance, each with their helper and entourage of kneeling supplicants who asked for various kinds of help. The helpers relayed the requests to the shamans and then translated the esoteric messages arriving in an incomprehensible language of the ancestors (*ongun*), and/or power animals, into a common tongue. The spectacle of the event was in itself an *induction*. Several generations of this culture were present after traveling a long way; some had traveled days. They had grown up with the expectation of having their requests satisfied at this event, and people expressed fulfillment of having been

healed. After the daylong ceremony of the shamans – which also included eating the sacrificed goat - twilight entertainment featured performances of wrestling, singing, and dancing. http://www.tengerism.org/Buryat_Shamanism.html

http://www.academia.edu/1476929/Introduction_to_the_Present-Day_Shamanic_Practices_of_the_Buryats_in_Mongolia

The day after this event, we were introduced to 40 of the shamans in a conference setting, and were taught by 4, both Bone Setter and Blacksmith shamans. One of the Russian Academy of Sciences scientists proceeded with an experiment. Lay people such as I, as well as shamans, were asked to change the PH of water in a sealed jar. A meter was inserted through the top of the jar cover into the water and the monitor was attached and visible at the top. One by one, we were asked to hold our hands around but not touching the jar and to concentrate on changing the PH. While some of the lay people were able to do this to a greater or lesser degree, the shaman, surprisingly, was unable to do so. He said that he could not raise his power for a mundane occasion. He was then asked to visualize a specific person who was ill and in this way transfer his power from the water to the person. With this induction he was indeed successful at changing the PH, demonstrating that altruistic intentionality is of paramount significance in healing.

3. Veneration of object:

One object, two contradictory sets of beliefs.

Mt Kailash is known as the holiest mountain in the world for both Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists. Devotees of both religions go on pilgrimages to circumambulate the mountain up to 22,000 feet. The top 3000 feet “house the gods” and are not to be violated. Many pilgrims of both religions go there to die. En route to the base of the mountain, one passes Lake Mansovar, which is sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists and all stop to venerate this lake.

Hindus believe that they must immerse themselves in sacred bodies of water in order to be healed. They therefore enter into the water fully clothed, much as they do in the River Ganges in Varanasi. They emerge believing that they are purified and healed.

Tibetan Buddhists, on the other hand, will never enter a body of water as they believe that fish carry the souls of dead babies and must never be disturbed. Tibetans circumnavigate the lake as they pray with their *malas* (prayer beads) and prayer wheels, before they proceed onward to Mt. Kailash. They, too, are purified and healed.

4. Secular Veneration of Healing Agent

Introduction of unexpected healing agent: leeches.

Ulan Ude is the very sophisticated capital of Buryatia where 70% of the population has western style university PhDs, and Buddhism, Christianity and Tengere shamanism are practiced. I have studied Tibetan medicine in Tibet, India, Bhutan and US, and have observed a consistency of approach and treatment. However, in a new modern Tibetan hospital, the most up to date medical facility in Ulan Ude, Tibetan doctors wearing white coats and using every kind of western medical paraphernalia, were applying leeches for every ailment. Doctors and patients attested to full healing for ailments ranging from neck pain to broken limbs to major systemic illness. When I inquired about the use of leeches in Tibet, India, and the US in Tibetan medical practice, this was unheard of. While the use of leeches and blood letting which were practiced as the basis of medicine from the Middle Ages on, has been seen in the US as quackery, I eventually found that there may be use of leeches in Western medicine for skin grafting. <http://health.howstuffworks.com/medicine/modern-treatments/leeches-in-modern-medicine.htm>

5. Recreation of Rituals to Restore Eradicated Belief Systems: Divergent Agendas

Birobidzan was established in 1934 by the Soviet Government in a sparsely populated area five thousand miles east of Moscow on the Trans Siberian Railway close to the Chinese border. It was designated as the administrative center for the Jewish Autonomous Oblast in Russia which was to be the national homeland of Soviet Jewry, part of the Kremlin's effort to create an alternative to Palestine. At one time there were 100,000 Jews in Birobidzan, and an active Yiddish culture that included theater, schools, libraries, synagogues etc. Now it is said that there are 4,000 Jews, 5 percent of the population.

According to Rabbi Mordechai Scheiner, the former Chief Rabbi of Birobidzhan and Chabad Lubavitch representative to the region, "Today one can enjoy the benefits of the Yiddish culture and not be afraid to return to their Jewish traditions. It's safe without any anti-Semitism, and we plan to open the first Jewish day school here". The town's new synagogue opened in 2004.

Jewish culture was revived in Birobidzhan much earlier than elsewhere in the Soviet Union. Yiddish theaters opened in the 1970s. Yiddish and Jewish traditions have been required components in all public schools for almost fifteen years, taught not as Jewish exotica but as part of the region's national heritage. Jews who live there are trying to reinstitute the lost culture but have insufficient teachers and models of how to do things correctly.

I was introduced to the most renowned living artist of Birobidzhan. His father and brother, who had been political cartoonists for Pravda were executed by the Soviets. His paintings were very influenced by his reverence for Marc Chagall, the legendary Russian Jewish artist, and he hoped to capitalize on the familiar image. Similarly, I was hosted to a Jewish meal in the most lavish restaurant. The elegantly served repast in July featured Matzoh (traditionally only eaten at Passover), a form of fish (I was told that this was *gefilte fish*), carrots in a desert goblet (which I was told was *tzimmes*) and some sort of meat (which was supposed to be *flanken*), all of which bore no resemblance to the Sabbath meal they were trying to emulate. In Birobidzhan as in other newly Jewish cultures, the reinstatement of Judaism is seen as a viable and lucrative Jewish tourist destination.

6. Medical Intervention to Heal Cultural Bonds: Evidence of Tribal Belonging - Circumcision

Judaism:

Circumcision, (*Brit Milah*) is a traditional aspect of Judaism, performed on 8-day-old boys, affirming the covenant between God and Abraham as recorded in the Old Testament.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/susser/covenantofcircumcision.htm>

Circumcision had become the norm for non-Jewish male babies decades ago, with clinical data showing improved health for both men and women later on. While circumcision is highly recommended by the CDC in Africa to help counter AIDS, in the last years a movement has sprung up debating the wisdom of circumcision for boys in the West. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/prevention/research/malecircumcision/recommendations.html>

Eastern and Central Europe

Budapest:

While in Budapest, Hungary for an exhibition of my paintings, I was invited to meet a prominent rabbi in the community who had come to see the art. He was intrigued with the encoded Hebrew in my work as well as my knowledge and understanding of the Cabala. He talked at length about the resurgence of Judaism after the horrors of the Nazis. People were reclaiming the Judaism that they had abandoned to save their lives, while others were converting to Judaism in unusual numbers. The rate of conversion was so high, that each year this rabbi was taking groups of 20 thirteen-year-old boys to London to be circumcised before their Bar Mitzvah. Furthermore, adult men were also converting and requesting circumcision, to declare their belonging to the tribe.

In Budapest, Krakow and Warsaw, Poland, as well as Berlin, Germany, and Kocize as well as other cities in Slovakia, where Nazis exterminated Jews, highly touted tourist areas have been developed in newly reconstructed Jewish areas. These areas feature Jewish food, music, theater and some schools and cultural centers and are becoming destinations for Jewish tourists. Conversion to or reestablishing Judaism is now trendy and there too, circumcision is on the rise.

Africa

Kenya:

While circumcision is traditionally a part of every boy's coming of age ritual in most African tribes, we, in the west accept this practice culturally, as well as medically as a

necessary step to containing the AIDS epidemic. However, the western view towards female circumcision is horrific.

While in Kenya, I spent time with a Samboro family consisting of a man, his nine wives and a herd of tiny goats. Each wife builds her own hut with mud walls and a roof of thatched sticks, about eight feet wide by four feet tall. I was welcomed by the group of tall, beautiful women dressed colorfully in beads, fabrics, and embossing, who sang and danced for me, rhythmically lifting their breasts. The chief wife invited the translator and me into her home that was cleanly swept and carefully arranged for eating, cooking (hearth in the middle of the mud floor), sleeping and visiting. The entrance was the height of a two year old and just wide enough to crawl into. A tiny goat entered the dark hut. The wife slaughtered and cooked it as she sang soulfully and chatted. She had already lost two babies and now cherished her only child. As we ate and relaxed, she slowly moved closer to me and our conversation became more intimate. At one point, she came to sit leaning into me, put her arm around me and in a sisterly sort of tone, asked when I had been circumcised. I said I had not, that in my culture this was not done.

The beautiful woman was visibly shocked. She burst into tears. With tremendous incredulity she asked, "How is it possible for a woman to go through life without circumcision?" She was astonished at my equanimity, and was overcome with both horror and empathy for me. She crawled out of the hut and sadly broadcast to the other wives about the tragedy of this poor uncircumcised woman. A wail arose from the other women.

I had come to Kenya with a very strict mindset about female circumcision, in the West called female genital mutilation.

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=female+genital+mutilation&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

Yet, in this context, an uncircumcised woman meant that she would never marry, had no place in society, would become an outcast, and would most likely die young because of her alienation from the tribe. I knew that in this culture circumcision

meant excision of clitoris, outer and inner labia. I had arrived convinced that the practice was barbaric, unacceptable, and I had a mission to help women curtail the practice. In this situation I was the freak. These happy and fulfilled women in their context looked at me with pity and hopelessness. I was living a tragic, wasted life, uncircumcised, unmarried, no children.

Egypt:

From the moment I arrived at customs in Egypt I was chaperoned by a Sharia guard. Women traveling alone in 2009 were suspect in the fundamentalist Islamic country. I witnessed astonishing contradictions as women in full black chador with only a slit for vision, sat on beach towels next to topless women in thongs at the Red Sea in Sharm El Sheikh.

I was also startled in a taxi in Cairo when the driver tuned his radio to an English call-in show dealing with Islamic female circumcision. The sexy female voice was answering calls from men who were asking how to satisfy their women who had been circumcised for Allah. I learned that many Islamic women are indeed circumcised (clitoris). I was astonished that a public program within a strict Sharia culture was describing detailed sexual acts to heighten women's pleasure.

<http://www.quranicpath.com/misconceptions/circumcision.html>

Adoption of Shamanic Practices of Healing in the United States and the West

White Coat Culture:

Medical doctors are the venerated shamans, gurus, priests of the West. Charlatans, snake oil vendors and other negative epithets preceded the growing veneration of science. Yet science is always changing - what was right yesterday is wrong today. Costumed in white coats, brandishing stethoscopes instead of drums and rattles, doctors attain the utter trust of the populace. Many of the elements that have been used effectively in ancient cultures, are now very much part of modern medicine as practiced in the west, including ritual, induction, hypnosis, amulets (wearable religious symbols), potions (placebos), and magic charms (affirmations) and

visualizations. “Formerly, when religion was strong and science weak, men mistook magic for medicine; now, when science is strong and religion weak, men mistake medicine for magic.” Thomas Szasz

http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/t/thomas_szasz.html

Placebo: Much research has been done regarding the effectiveness of placebos (a substance that the physician believes has no known specific pharmacological activity against the condition being treated.) When asked about the difference between taking a drug and a placebo, Irving Kirsch, Psychologist, Researcher and Associate Director of the Placebo Studies Program at Harvard Medical School says “People get better when they take the drug, but it’s not the chemical ingredients for the drugs that are making them better.”

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=CBS+60+minutes+placebo&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/jun/23/epidemic-mental-illness-why/?pagination=false>

Kirsch claims that placebos are 99% effective for treating a number of disorders including mild to moderate to chronic depression, irritable bowel syndrome, repetitive strain injuries, ulcers, Parkinson's disease, sleep disorders. Placebos can take many forms of pills, treatment of all sorts, even surgery – simply opening the patient and closing them again.

Cultural bias plays a large role in efficacy. For example in a soccer playing country such as Brazil, where the winning team wears yellow uniforms, a yellow, soccer ball shaped pill will always be effective, but a blue (rival team uniform color) soccer ball shaped pill will never be effective.

Effectiveness of a drug or a placebo will increase by the doctor saying, “Mr. X, I know this will help you.” Placebo does not work as well in extreme cases of depression, yet it does work even with traumatic knee pain. In Kirsch’s clinical trial, some patients with osteoarthritis underwent knee surgery, while others had their knees merely opened and then sewn right back up. In terms of walking and climbing, the people who got the placebo actually did better.

Controversy has arisen regarding the ethical use of placebos. Is it more or less ethical to lie to the patient, (saying that s/he is getting a drug), than to give a drug with negative side effects knowing that it is not effective? Patients who are told that they are getting a placebo that will stimulate the desired effect reap the same benefits as a blind placebo. (Nathan A. Bostick, Robert Sade, Mark A. Levine, and Dudley M. Stewart, Jr., "Placebo Use in Clinical Practice: Report of the American Medical Association Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs," *The Journal of Clinical Ethics* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2008).

Laughter therapy, made famous by Norman Cousins, (*The Anatomy of an Illness*, Bantam Books, New York City, NY 1981), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqLAcpxzNks> has been shown to be effective in combatting serious diseases. *Anatomy of an Illness* was the first book by a patient that spoke to our current interest in taking charge of our own health. It started the revolution in patients working with their doctors and using humor to boost their bodies' capacity for healing. <http://www.semel.ucla.edu/cousins>. The simple mechanical act of raising the corners of the mouth makes us feel better. I am convinced that humor was invented in order to stimulate smiling and laughter by our ancestors who by continued accidental smiling/laughing recognized that they felt better. Studies have shown that smiling is a natural drug that releases endorphins, natural painkillers, and serotonin countering cortisol, the stress hormone. Together these three make us feel better. Other approaches to healing which are similar to laughter therapy, such as **play**, (*Institute for Play*, Stuart Brown MD http://www.nifplay.org/about_us.html), and **clowning** (*Gesundheit Institute*, Patch Adams MD <http://patchadams.org>) have shown remarkable healing results. **Biofeedback** (Elmer Green PhD), **voluntary controls**, **mind/body healing**, **psychoneuroimmunology (PNI)**, <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Elmrt+Green&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>, <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=pni++psychoneuroimmunology&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>, <http://www.aapb.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3383>)

teach people to regulate their own metabolic and emotional systems.

Psychiatry/psychology helps alleviate emotional blockage through talk therapy and compensatory chemistry. Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz, writes in *The Second Sin (1973), Science and Scientism*, "The goal is to assume more responsibility and therefore gain more liberty and more control over one's own life." <http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/healing-psychiatry>. Szasz said of talk therapy in an interview in 2000 with the Web site <http://www.psychotherapy.net/>. "The issues or questions for the patient become to what extent is he willing to recognize his evasions of responsibility, often expressed as 'symptoms.' "

Group sharing has been shown to help women with breast cancer heal better and faster. (Spiegel, D., Bloom, J., Kraemer, H., & Gottheil, E. (1989). Effect of psychosocial treatment on survival of patients with metastatic breast cancer. *The Lancet*, 2, 888-91. <http://stresshealthcenter.stanford.edu/>

Visualization (guided imagery) in medicine was pioneered in the 1970s by the "father of mind-body medicine for cancer patients," Dr. O. Carl Simonton, MD.

<http://www.simontoncenter.com> Since then visualization techniques in cancer treatment have become refined so that early images of Pac Man eating cancer cells have been replaced by visualizing the optimal state of health of each cell and system. This kind of visualization has been proven effective in many forms of healing.

<http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-help/about-cancer/treatment/complementary-alternative/therapies/visualisation>

Detailed visualization of successful outcome - pre, during and post surgery - has also been shown to be effective in both rate and success of healing.

<http://www.thebodysoulconnection.com/Newsletter/issue7.html>

Expressive therapies such as art are used in time tested, highly effective programs such as *A Window Between Worlds* <http://vimeo.com/9758097> *Art as a Healing Tool*

that sets up shelters for abused women and children in the US and provides art therapy as the essential technique towards healing.

<https://www.awbw.org/awbw/anniversary.php>. Countless institutions utilize art, dance, music, theater, and writing as complementary medical therapies. Expressive therapies have been taught in medical schools for more than twenty years in the US and are

essential elements in training doctors to be more holistic in their approach. **Medical hypnosis** <http://marcschoen.com/> is used commonly to treat sleep disturbance, headaches, pain, stress, irritable bowel, colitis, arthritis, allergies, post-surgical recovery, panic attacks, phobias, and skin disorders as well as conditions such as test anxiety, and phobias. **Prayer** (Larry Dossey MD) has been shown to be effective if either the patient prays or is prayed for. <http://www.dosseydossey.com/larry/default.html> And while **Faith Healing** (*Faith and the Placebo Effect*, Lolette Kuby, White Crow Books, 2001), remains controversial, it is frequently successful.

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Faith+and+placebo+Effect&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>
<http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/complementaryandalternativemedicine/minibodyandspirit/faith-healing>

Faith healing is practiced now as it has been throughout history, most often practiced by praying to a particular god, or being in the presence of someone known to be a divine conduit, a faith healer, eg Katherine Kuhlman.

<http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&ved=0CEsQtwIwAw&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3D2nTCwoJqj8Y&ei=p0CUo6UDOOJjAKMiIHQCg&usq=AFQjCNH8ZVYCvMpj8Y8rf56m5CuwAc0Wxg&sig2=PqbB4IdVNh4pvOT3mmcrCw&bvm=bv.50500085,d.cGE> All of these healing techniques have integrated

shamanic practice into medical science.

Heading Towards Numinous:

Integrative Medicine

The *UCLA Collaborative Centers for Integrative Medicine* <http://ccim.med.ucla.edu> was initiated in 1985 by Ping Ho (originally a dancer) http://ccim.med.ucla.edu/?page_id=206 and has grown exponentially yielding **evidence based research** in the Centers for East West Medicine, Excellence in Pancreatic Diseases, Center for Human Nutrition, Center for Neurobiology of Stress, Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology, eCAM, Mindful Awareness Research, Pediatric Pain Program, Stiles Program in Integrative Oncology and the Simms/Mann-UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology.

<http://www.uclartsandhealing.net> UCLArts and Healing has elevated the role of **Creative Arts to medical protocol**. **Drumming**, led by John Densmore of the legendary band,

The Doors, was shown to be effective in allaying anxiety and increasing creativity in Los Angeles Unified School District. All UCLA medical centers utilize alternative and complementary medicine, including self-healing methods that may also be achieved through deliberately applied psychological mechanisms. These approaches may improve the psychological and physical conditions of a person. Research confirms that this can be achieved through numerous mechanisms, including **relaxation, breathing exercises, fitness exercises, imagery, and meditation**. Art therapy has become a major vocation for people in the medical and healing arts in the US. Both UCLA and Cedars Sinai Hospitals buy vetted **healing art** for patients' rooms as well as corridors and offices, and attention is paid to the wall colors and other decorative elements to create a healing environment. These practices are also successfully used in medical centers across the US, Canada and Europe.

Art as a Healing Force:

Numinous

Much like all spiritual cultures that are recognized by their “smells and bells” (rituals, costumes, incense, paraphernalia), we in the West are understanding the necessity and efficacy of creating a healing environment with contemporary images. The form of the environment alone can change the psychophysiology of the person. The venue can act as an induction to healing when knowledgeable attention is given to the form of the architecture, materials, and color. A change in frequency can be created and an uplifting environment is created by the addition of carefully selected and arranged imagery. While the design of temples and churches has always been geared to this aim, everyday environments can achieve the same results. Many private homes are now consciously built and decorated in order to provide a healing refuge.

Two relatively new cultures illustrate total integration of the arts as a healing force. While most decisions are generally fear based and short sighted, rather than proactive departures to examine unknown possibilities, creative process in art and life leads to

healthy risk-taking (rather than recklessness), and examining the known with a view toward discovering unknown potential.

Goetheneum

Founded in 1903 by Rudolf Steiner in Dornach, Switzerland, Goetheneum is based on the philosophy of Anthroposophy - “a path of knowledge aiming to guide the spiritual element in the human being to the spiritual in the universe”. The multidisciplinary curriculum of the School of Spiritual Science features anthroposophy, astronomy, medicine, natural science, agriculture, pedagogy, eurhythmy, speech, drama, music, literary arts, humanities, social sciences, and a cultivation of youth. Art in every form was and still is the essence of this culture. Positive form is understood to be a healing element and art is used as an integral aspect of the science of medicine.

Damanhur, was founded in 1975 by Oberto Airaudi (Falco) with 12 researcher friends in the mountains near Torino, Italy. This unique and growing country (Federation of States with its own language and currency) along with satellite Damanhurs in various parts of the world has proven successful as a spiritual, human and social experience that integrates art into every aspect of living, including science. A totally different and surprisingly buoyant social experiment, the creative process inspires effective decision-making toward the greater good. The slogan, *Change it when it is working*, insures against complacency and devolution into an institution that by definition is reactionary.

Closer to home, I worked with my students to transform the Watts Health Center in South Central Los Angeles from an abandoned medical center where no patients or doctors would go, to one which is sought after by both. The addition of aesthetic, humorous, informative murals benefitted patients, doctors, the student artists and the hospital. It is in the spirit of altruism, that healing can best take place in all cultures.

Self-Healing

In 1999 I suffered a near fatal car accident on a remote island. I was found dead, revived and eventually learned that I had broken all my ribs, scapula on both sides, sternum, 3 vertebrae, crushed heart and head, tibia, and five mm of bone fragments in my spinal column. I managed to maneuver a ferry crossing and two air flights to get to a Los Angeles hospital on my own on morphine to go. I was seen as the walking dead, and was given a dire prognosis. While paralysis and brain damage were almost certain outcomes, a moribund EKG baffled doctors and seemed to confirm the worst.

Having been centrally involved in psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) since 1981, (a core member of the seminal Council Grove Conference on altered states of consciousness and mind/body healing) hp.sagepub.com/content/9/2/135.extract,

<http://gilah.com/hirsch-opening-speaker-at-council-grove-conference-2012/> as well as ISSSEEM (International Society for the Study of Subtle Energy and Energy Medicine)

<http://www.issseem.org>, on regaining consciousness in the demolished car, I immediately began specific visualization and continued with it throughout my journey. When I saw the damage within my body in live images projected on MRI monitors, I felt great compassion for each of the visibly shattered systems, and immediately focused concentrated healing imagery to each trauma. Instead of surgery, I recuperated at home taking on as my full time job visualization of optimal state of cells, bones and organs using medical anatomy books as my visual guide. When I could walk I began a series of diamond shaped paintings in which I reconstructed my body layer by layer. Small white spheres appeared in the constellation of various healing systems, including meridian and acupuncture points. I also interpreted the white spheres as *boddhicitā*, compassion, as the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala had instructed. Seeing them as calcium helped nourish the body both chemically as well as emotionally. I also encrypted Hebrew words such as *Chessed* (Grace), *Hodaya* (Gratitude) etc, to further deepen the induction of well-being. The process was a proactive engagement in my own healing. I believed that I had been granted life and was moving toward health in order to help others. Seven months after the accident I was presenting on my own

healing at a medical conference in another state. The Diamond Series was created as medicine paintings, and has had a profound effect on people of all faiths and cultures where ever they have been shown both in the West and in Central and Eastern Europe.

<http://gilah.com/publications/books/>

http://gilah.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/ISSSEEM_BiotheologyImageryHealing.pdf

Sunshine Kids Foundation

<http://www.sunshinekids.org>

<https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=sunshine+kids+f>

This organization gives special treats to kids (6 - 18) with cancer. They are picked up from their frequently disadvantaged homes in limousines, taken to places like Disneyland, meet famous people in the arts, sports etc., even the President of the US. I was invited to visit with the kids. Rather than just showing my work and signing autographs, I suggested that I work with them. A large meeting room was reserved for the event at the Los Angeles Downtown Mariott Hotel. I asked the coordinators of the foundation to buy a medical anatomy book for each participant, had them bring a full scale skeleton, a host of art materials, and a piece of six foot white paper which they would adhere to the wall for every person. A therapist, doctor or helper accompanied each participant.

I began the session by showing them the paintings I had created to reconstruct my body after a near fatal accident in which I broke and/or damaged just about all bones, and had a flat line for an EKG, crushed heart, crushed head and five mm bone fragments in my spinal column. Although the prognosis was dire, I healed myself through intensive visualization and the reconstruction of my body through art.

I told the kids that they, too, could become the President, the hockey player, the dancer, the artist if they were well; and that they had the power to work on their own behalf to aid in the healing process from the inside out. This possibility astonished the kids. Suddenly they had meaning and purpose for life and action that they could take for themselves. I was surprised that although every patient knew the name of

their cancer, they did not know where in their body the illness was, nor what it meant. Children were kept ignorant.

I first had every person stand behind the skeleton and manipulate the arms and legs to get a sense of their own skeleton. I then went around to each patient having them name their cancer and finding its location in their bodies with the help of the anatomy book. As they located and named their own and each other's cancer, the abstract concept of illness was transformed into something visceral they could identify and deal with. A growing excitement was palpable in the room. I then asked each helper to pencil the full body outline of their charge facing forward into the room against the white paper, and then asked the kids to create a new body with healthy cells, organs and systems as they found them in the anatomy book within their body outline. They could add anything else to the image as well.

The workshop was supposed to be two hours and went on to six. The kids created arresting and moving works of art that went far beyond the assignment. Many created auras around their bodies, others added wings and other uplifting visual elements. They were energized and hopeful as a result of the process. Weeks later I received calls about the positive effects of the workshop on the health of the kids, both physically and emotionally. They had a new take on life and a reason to live.

The art was eventually mounted in an exhibition in a Hollywood gallery. There was an official opening and the kids were now exhibiting artists. The art was so good that a Beverly Hills gallery framed, showed and sold the work to collectors.

Stepping into the Light

I learned of a program initiated by Desmonette Hazly in Carson, CA, called *Stepping Into the Light*, to help raped and abused women. These women had lost all sense of themselves as attractive, healthy, effective women and were riddled with shame and self-contempt. I suggested that the women pair up with my university senior painting

students. I had the artists and the women interview each other extensively and deeply about their lives. Each learned empathy and compassion for the other. The artists became attuned to the souls of the women and the portraits were deeply sensitive in their portrayal of the women. Through this intimate process, the women regained self-esteem, dignity and pride in their bodies; and the paintings were exhibited both in the US and in China. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_nzy12TtpY

Conclusion

As cultures sadly but inevitably lose their identities, emphasis can shift to teaching individuals and communities the understanding and practice of mind/body healing. A meta-vision of the common elements that trigger illness as well as those practices that heal can be parsed and disseminated. Universal best practices can be gathered to empower both the individual and community. In this way, there would be a concerted movement towards global health and spiritual harmony.

This approach may not be popular, as it requires the transference of power and wealth from professional healer/shaman/doctor to the individual who will be encouraged to accept greater personal responsibility for his or her own mental and physical health. While this would be a step towards greater individual autonomy, it would simultaneously be the logical evolutionary step towards greater fulfillment of human potential and the greater good.