

Shaman, Healer, Sage

by Alberto Villoldo, Ph.D.

"I invite you to explore this tradition which is our tradition of the Americas. It's not a religious tradition; it's a spiritual tradition. Explore it. This is about our land, our Earth, and our mythology. It's of the feminine and it's a path of power and beauty."

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UNTIL ABOUT 40 YEARS AGO, no one had undertaken a serious study of the shamanic traditions and the medicine way. This is because throughout the Americas the medicine traditions and spiritual practices had been passed on through the oral tradition—from grandmother to granddaughter, and from grandfather to grandson. Still, these spiritual teachings were—and are—comparable to what you find in Buddhism, Hinduism, or Christianity. At the same time, the wisdom tradition of Native America is fundamentally different from the Western concept of spirit. We have an odd mythology in the West that is not shared by most other peoples in the world. Our Western mythology is very much a patriarchal mythology—unlike that of primary cultures, which are more of the feminine and of the Earth.

Let me give you some examples. To begin with, we have the only mythology in the world in which anyone was ever kicked out of the Garden. No one else has this view. Not the Buddhists, Hindus, Aborigines, nor the Native Ameri-

cans. They were given the Gardens to be the stewards and the caretakers, while our story of the Garden is all about banishment. We're great at going away from or going toward places, but very ill adept at being stewards of any one particular spot. When the Europeans came to North America they found a land that was extraordinarily beautiful—forests that went from coast to coast and pristine rivers—where the people had been living in complete balance with nature for 35,000 years. But now, look what we've done to it in the last 500 years!

Stewardship is really not a notion that's prevalent in our mythology. In a Western perspective, all the plants and the animals were created to serve us. According to Western mythology, our role was to rule and be masters of all of creation, and that meant we could rape and loot and pillage as much as we wanted as, indeed, we have actually done. Our victims include those traditions of the Native Earth peoples that were based on a relationship with the feminine and with stewardship of the Earth.

Another strange aspect of our mythology is that we have one of the few mythologies in the world in which the feminine is born from the masculine. In no other mythology does the masculine give birth. When have you seen a man give birth to anything except, perhaps, an idea? The Western mythology is derived from the masculine and, from Ancient Greece until modern times, the ways of the feminine have been subdued and subjected to cerebral processes.

In Europe, the conquest and even the decimation of the traditions of the Earth peoples started 6,000 years ago. That's also the time when Western mythology emerged. 500 years ago, the same conquest occurred in the Americas as the new mythology arrived from Europe. In 1564 there was even a gathering of the elders of the Church in Rome to determine if Indians, animals, and women had souls. While women barely qualified, it was determined that animals and Indians did not. Due to this assumption, during the 50 years that followed, over 20 million people of color in the

Americas were worked to death in the fields and mines. Since then, this decimation of the ways of the Earth peoples, and of the ways of the feminine, has been consistent, thorough, and in fact genocidal.

My original field of study was the mind–body relationship—slicing, dicing, and staining the human brain, and putting it under the microscope to look for the mind. I was going smaller and smaller in this search until, at a certain point, I said, “I’m looking through the wrong end of this instrument. I’ve got to look at a broader world view—perhaps one that is even larger than our common notions of space and time. How else can we understand this thing we call mind?”

What drew me to Peru was the fact that it was the last place in the Americas where indigenous people made up the majority of the population.

I spent my first few years in the Amazon working with medicine people who had mastered the journey beyond death. They worked primarily with a plant called the ayahuasca, which is known to open the doorways to this spiritual journey. Then, from the rain forest, I went to the high mountains to study with the last of the Inkas, who had lived in isolation for the last 500 years. They have managed to preserve—relatively intact—the teaching of the ways of the feminine, of the Earth, of power, of direct experience, of wisdom and knowledge.

I SHOULD TELL YOU THAT, previously, I was at San Francisco State University, where I was involved in the early work on what is today known as psychoneuroimmunology, or mind–body medicine. We have learned the mechanisms of how we create psychosomatic disease, but nobody taught us that we could create psychosomatic health. We don’t yet understand those mechanisms here in the West. But the traditions of the Earth peoples, in the Americas, in Tibet, Australia, and sub-Saharan



Africa understand the ways of energy medicine. And they understand that there’s a luminous energy field, a luminous template that surrounds the physical body, and that organizes the physical body in the same way that a magnet will organize iron filings on top of a piece of glass. They also know that disease expresses itself in the luminous energy field weeks, months, and decades before it expresses itself in the body. I have seen many clients who have had a tumor removed, but without having cleared or erasing the blueprint in their luminous energy field. Inevitably, their

cancer has reappeared. Energy medicine effectively works at the level of this blueprint. The luminous energy field organizes not only the physical body, but the external reality as well. It informs and predisposes you to certain kinds of relationships, certain kinds of illnesses, to meeting certain kinds of people, to being in the automobile that had the accident or, alternatively, the one that just missed it. When we’re able to clear the imprints of the luminous energy field—many of them due to karma that we bring with us from many, many years in the past—we are able to experience freedom. We don’t do this through intellectual understanding. We do it through a direct engagement with the energy of creation, and with the energy that informs our physical body.

In the medicine way, the shaman understands that there are four different levels at which we can engage the world. The levels I’ll give you here are rough categories. If you are interested, you will find more detailed explanations in my book. The first level is the literal level—the level of the body and matter. It is the one we are most familiar with in the West and in Western medicine. Enveloping this literal level is the symbolic, or the level of mind, the level of psychotherapy. You could call it chatting mind. Underlying that is the mythic domain that informs the two levels above it, which we could call the domain of the soul. And underlying all of these is the

energetic or essential level, which informs all of the levels above it.

Each of these levels has a language. The language of the literal or the body is chemical. The language of the symbolic is verbal. The language of the mythic is visual. If, for example, I ask you to raise your hands, you can. But what if I ask you to raise your blood pressure? It's difficult, but if I were to show you images or pictures of beautiful people wearing skimpy bathing suits, I'm willing to bet your blood pressure would elevate. That is why visualization is much more powerful as a healing practice than doing affirmations. You cannot access these deep structures of the psyche through language or words, but you can access them through imagery.

AT THE ESSENTIAL LEVEL, the language is pure energy, which informs all of the levels above it. Computer programmers know that this is the structure of computer programming. You can't use a screwdriver to find a poem you have written on your hard drive. You have to go through several steps before it appears on your screen as an electromagnetic field. The closer you work to the essential, the more powerful your work becomes.

The gift of the shaman is to shift our engagement with the world, to take something that is expressing itself in the literal and resolve it at the energetic level. Alternatively, the shaman can help his or her clients to reinvent themselves by taking something from the

level or domain of possibility into expression or manifestation. The shaman is able to work with these four levels of engagement, knows the languages of these domains, and is most familiar with the language of energy. Understanding the structure of reality is very important if we hope to glimpse the depth of these traditions.

In *Shaman, Healer, Sage* I go into areas of healing that are not readily understood or common. However, they are extraordinarily powerful. We are so open to some individuals that we become susceptible to their energies. These energies affect us like a virus affects the body; they contaminate our luminous field, and, as a result, they have to be drawn out or extracted from it. When you talk about this to physicians or psychologists, they generally cringe, especially when you talk about spirits who may be influencing your health. But I would say that one out of four clients that I work with have either an intrusive energy or an intrusive entity that is the cause of many of their symptoms. The intrusive entity is often a relative who died unconsciously and was seeking assistance—perhaps a mother, grandmother, or grandfather.

ONE OF MY TEACHERS used to say to me, "Alberto, your people don't bury your dead." And I responded, on the contrary, that we have a tremendous death industry in our society. But he would say, "No, no, no, not that. Your people are followed by their ancestors—the living,

walking, unclean. These are the spirits of the ancestors who have not been mourned, who have not been grieved, who have not been brought up to an ancestor altar. So, they keep haunting you and living through you." Shamans understand that the veil between the visible and the invisible world is a thin one. And they understand the continuity of life. They understand the fact that crossing the threshold of death does not mean that life has ceased, but merely changed form. They know the journey beyond death and are able to accompany a soul on this journey. And not only that final journey, since they also can guide us through those little deaths that we have in the course of our lives, when we die to the person we have been. We go through these passages when we shed who we have been, and leap, like a jaguar, into the person we are becoming.

What I've attempted to do with *Shaman, Healer, Sage* is to translate and adapt a 5,000-year-old body of teaching (that my mentor believed was actually a 100,000-year-old body of teaching) into a very contemporary methodology—one that we can experiment with and explore, to heal both ourselves and others. To me, one of the more important sections in the book is the final chapter on the death rites, or how we can assist a loved one, which is something that we've forgotten in the West.

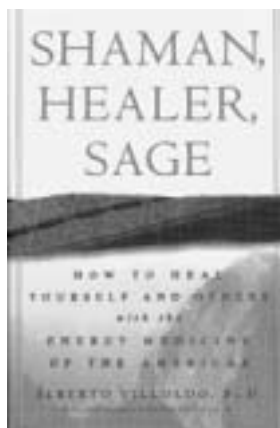
When my father was dying, I stopped a young priest from

performing extreme unction, the last rites of the Catholic tradition, because he was going to seal my father's luminous body inside his physical body. I did the death rites of disengaging the luminous body, which are the same rites a shaman does during the initiation to the journey beyond death. I helped to disengage his luminous body, or lift it from his physical body and then seal the chakra so it wouldn't come back into the physical body. The entire feeling in the room changed. It went from being a depressing place, with my mother and sister crying, to one where all of us were hugging and laughing. It had become a cathedral filled with peace and serenity. We sensed from the presence of my father's spirit that he was no longer suffering.

I invite you to experiment with a body of teaching that I think is also extremely important to us today since we're coming to the end of medicine as we know it. We have viruses that are resistant to anything and everything that we can throw at them.

The healing methodologies of the Americas have to do with coming into a proper relationship with all of life. The first healing process that we undergo in the shamanic training I experienced is to do a kind of soul recovery, or soul retrieval. It reveals the self that never left the Garden, that still walks in beauty on the Earth, that still speaks to God, that still speaks to the rivers and the trees, and that the rivers and trees speak back to. We heal the fundamental rift that we have with nature and our own nature, and we walk again in the Garden. We learn to talk to God.

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How to heal yourself and others with the Energy Medicine of the Americas

by **Alberto Villoldo, Ph.D.**

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Storyteller and healer Alberto Villoldo draws on his understanding and practice of the shamanic and healing traditions of the ancient Inkas (the spelling he prefers) to create a practical and revolutionary healing program. His book is filled with wonderful stories about the healing power of his Inka mentors and the energy medicine of the Americas.

Part I provides background regarding the belief system on which these techniques are based. Part II provides techniques for learning the shaman's way of seeing and creating sacred space, and Part III describes advanced techniques for master practitioners. While Villoldo describes intriguing techniques for dealing with intrusive energies and entities, and for assisting someone's passage to the Spirit world, he cautions us about the dangers associated with energy healing and shows how it must be practiced only with the strongest code of ethics and integrity. All in all, his book is a deft balance of Western psychology and native wisdom.