

Shaheed: A Relational Meditation.

Making Transpersonal Medicine through ‘Radical Participation’ in Ritual

Live Sufi practitioners may provide us another window that will open onto entirely new areas of inquiry. In Gregg Lahood's words 'The penalty for not dropping out of the modernist mindworld is to restrict oneself to the slim pickings gathered in one cognitive sphere (Bueler, Researching Sufism in the 21st Century - 2013)

The intention behind this writing is to invite the reader into a contemplative inquiry and relational ritual gathering. The purpose of the gathering is to explore and affirm, through ritual practices and engagement, our intrinsic divinity (which has a restorative enlivening quality). In our everyday lives, through ingrained psychic habit and force of culture, we tend to get identified with a socialized individual-linguistic self. The purpose of the group is to establish a more soulful and healing space, where we can explore our edges and where a more primary person can *come out*. I tend to speak of this as a *charismatic self* (and we can have some fun learning about this kind of primary person).

The invitation is to a once a week meeting over 12 or 15 weeks to see if we can become a working inquiry group (there are a group of specific human inquiry skills to learn, share and play with on the way). My role is to facilitate/initiate and orient for a time until the group assimilates what the new learning is ... and what the group is doing - after which we may choose to meet every second week for a charismatic-wellness top-up.

Therapeutic democracy is at the heart of the process which means *being willing* to make decisions together for the good of the individual and the group-as-a-whole. This means you have a very real political power in the group which means your voice is part of the directorship. We need to learn to row together for the inquiry to be valid. This also means the *collective wisdom* of the group is guiding its directions (and not one or two dominant

individuals or sub grouping). We will spend some time learning the art of collective decision-making as a spiritual practice (let your truth set us free). If any of this is attractive to you, and you think you might like to participate then read on!

Deep Engagement: Psychoid and Transpersonal Events

Deep engagement in ritual is gradually developed through the creation of a *relational container* augmented by the practice of *therapeutic democracy*. Through radical participation the 'individual consciousness' is gradually subverted by the ritual process opening to a collective or unitive consciousness – an individual-bi-unity. Radical participation in ritual can also facilitate access to *subtle transpersonal* realms of being that Carl Jung called *psychoid* or *synchronistic* events in which mind seems to 'misbehave' and participate in matter. What characterizes such events is a quality of connection or 'interconnectedness'. These participatory experiences not only serve to strengthen the relational container, they can also have a profound healing through re-connecting impact on the participants. Such experiences can also reconnect people who have suffered disconnection in early infancy to a wider principle in a kind of parent, *The Great Mother* (after Jungians) *cosmic kinship* (Lahood) and, as such, can be highly therapeutic. I will speak to one such synchronicity in the transpersonal anthropology section below as a case in point.

Early Relational Trauma & Dissociation

There is a large and growing body of research now from neuroscience, attachment and trauma studies that claim the relational (interpersonal-empathetic-social) brain is developed by the attunement of the mother and child in the first two years. When this empathy-attunement is faulty, fragmented, or missing – (for various reasons: trauma, addiction, busyness, mental health) *relational trauma* occurs and with it comes the infant's *reliance* on

dissociation. Dissociation also becomes a survival manoeuvre in the face of traumatic interactions in childhood that objectify, violate, shame, or psychically annihilate the relational needs of the little person – we learn to leave, to check out, to flee and fly away. This dissociative defence mechanism will automatically kick-in whenever a relational interaction even *seems to resemble* the original trauma ... creating difficulty and in adult relationships.

Furthermore, infantile and childhood wounding can leave adult persons feeling very much alone and ‘as if’ they were symbolically *orphans*, slaves to loneliness, archetypal lone wolves, “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long way from my home” goes a mournful blues standard. They/we can feel abandoned and unable to trust in human contact, we can cease reaching out and learn to turn away and avoid contacting. Other symptoms can include feeling lost, unseen and unknown, unloved, empty and disconnected, alienated, inhibited, depersonalized, withdrawn and unreal.

Studies demonstrate early relational or interpersonal trauma and the alienation that follows is *the curse* of adult life and is tied to a host of illness and disorders including anxiety, depression, paranoia, suicidality, bipolar, somatoform, and character disorders (grandiose, narcissistic, borderline and masochistic), addictions, violent and antisocial behaviour, revictimization, sexual disorders, obesity, gastrointestinal, cardiovascular and immunological illnesses. Early wounding can dog our days, creates alienated selves, and follows us like our shadow – the discipline of psychotherapy *knows this*. And with the deepest respect to that discipline, transpersonal anthropology suggests that ritual offers another support on the path of healing.

This is an extract from a paper on ritual healing I wrote in 2008. It is being published in a book of papers celebrating the life and work of Dr Stanislav Grof whom I trained with when I was 28. I am 61 at the time of this writing which means more than half of my life and most of my work has circled around healing through ritual.

According to Jeanne Achterberg this sense of “alienation” from “family, community, the environment, the self, and the spirit world” (1992) is axiomatic with illness in many tribal societies and requires transpersonal rituals for its amelioration. Yet, as anthropologist Jurgen Kremmer points out, these are the very relational fields severed by the march of Western progress (including Western biomedicine). The Eurocentric ego is “constructed dissociatively from nature, community, ancestors” (1996).

Indeed, the categories equating with alienation are the very ones associated with the demonic in many traditional societies. For example, anthropologist Bruce Kapferer says of Buddhist exorcism: In Sinhalese cultural understandings a demonic victim approximates what I refer to as an existential state of solitude in the world. The demonic as conceptualized by the Sinhalese is similar to that which Goethe recognized from within the worldview of European culture as ultimately everything that is individual and separates one from others. Demons attack individuals who are understood to be in a state of physical and mental aloneness. Solitude and its correlate, fear, are among the key essences of the demonic (Kapferer, 1986, p. 195).

Kapferer wrote, “At the paradigmatic level and in accordance with Buddhist cosmological view and worldview, demons are at the base of a hierarchy dominated by the Buddha along with a host of major and lesser deities” [similar to Christian hierarchies of angels] (1986, p. 193). Kapferer, arrestingly, links Buddhist thought to Goethe’s Romantic, participatory thought - both of which are seminal ancestors of the transpersonal movement (McDermott, 1993). Here is the crux of the matter; the modern European worldview as spelled out by Richard Tarnas (1991) is very much an ego-centric one and therefore according to Kapferer’s Buddhist/Goethe formulation; categorically ‘demonic’. The picture Tarnas paints of the Western ego - is one of absolute solitude, solipsistic, alone, and isolated. Our “cosmological estrangement ... ontological estrangement [and] epistemological estrangement [results in] “a threefold mutually enforced prison of modern alienation” (Tarnas 1991, p. 419). Seen from the Buddhist/Goethe/transpersonal standpoint the European mind is cathected to a flawed image of the universe. The mystery of nature is demystified through ‘objectivity’ and we are severed from participation in the sacred worlds of our ancestors.

The antidote to the demon of isolation from a transpersonal participatory worldview would be what Tarnas calls “radical kinship with the universe” (1991, p. 437) brought about by transpersonal ritual. Or, to follow Kapferer, “the languages of ritual contain varying potential for bringing together the Particular and the Universal”

(1986, p. 191). Achterberg wrote that ritual is the “foundation for transpersonal medicine” (Lahood, 2008).

Cooperative Ritual Making is a group process and can generate profound events marked by feeling of ‘*communitas*’, and deep social bonding (after Edith Turner) which is healing in and of itself – such words as communion, congress, or fellowship are the opposite of isolation, alienation and aloneness.

The Working Alliance

To be crystal clear I am not offering psychotherapy in this group. I am initiating a cooperative healing inquiry group where the contract or working handshake is ‘mutual care’ that means that you must do your own self therapy; be available for others at times, I will in there as an initiating presence with my own very real work to do. There will be times when my archaic wounding or existential issues are up. I expect the group to be mature enough to understand this.

A Collaborative Ritual of Three Practices: A relational meditation and shamanic yoga

Rituals generally have several parts and ours is no different. There are three basic *attunement* practices in the inquiry ritual and each one fosters a domain of contacting, connecting and contemplation as a way of gathering-in or recollecting oneself with others.

- 1) A period of sacred silence, attunement, contacting ourselves here now in this place.

Awareness of our embodiment, our minds and feelings bring us into presence. Sacred silence has its own special kind of charisma. This is an attunement to a pre-conceptual level being, and it is a very important experiential threshold – it will give us vital information about what our next move should be. This pre-conceptual communion is going on all the time unbeknownst to our egos. We don’t have to create it we simply

attune to it.

- 2) Personal sharing and interpersonal contacting. If we are not able to be present in free attention because of something impacting or impinging on our lives we can take time to share ourselves in the group. This is a communal healing process, and the rules of engagement will be discussed further on – but the main healing agent is the offer of free attention: *deep attunement and listening*.
- 3) Original or Shamanic Yoga: This is the *central action inquiry* where we do our deeper transpersonal research through Breathing/Sounding/Toning, moving, postures, gestures, free form spontaneous sounding (nada) yoga – subtle altered states, dreaming, imaginal opening to primary presences, powers and principles. Self-generated shamanic healing and opening. Becoming radically present to the world as divine presence – *compresence*. It is highly likely that shamanism gave birth to yoga. When rattling and sounding, movement and trance evoking postures gave way to more stylized and regimented postures such as yoga or tai chi. What we want to achieve in this part of the ritual is a form of *animation*; to reanimate the space with the vital powers of spontaneity, creativity and eros. Full participation and disinhibition can lead to some very healing, very enlightening transpersonal events and openings it may also show us where we are psycho-spiritually inhibited).

We are not, for a two-hour meeting, oriented to regression and surfacing of deep psycho-trauma. In this yoga of beauty we open up and slough off social inertia, habitual psychic patterns that trap attention and a gentle transmutation of the dross of everyday social life. It's more like a reconnection to one's inherent lights and beauty – dancing in the light with others – with a light touch and openness to the imagery that comes with sacred movements, postures and gestures does conjure some remarkable spiritual flavours. Taking shamanic and Sufi gatherings as precursors we use the ritual

to garner transpersonal support.