

IN RIGHT RELATION

Evelyn C. Rysdyk

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Above: Tuvan shaman prays to the spirits

I'm so grateful to be living in a time when our most ancient ways of understanding the world are being joined with the most advanced ways of perceiving reality. The combination of these is creating a new paradigm for stewarding the earth and also providing a new template for being a whole human being.

This new paradigm has deep parallels to the ways of being which exceptional tribal shamans also exhibit. Each of the shamans with whom I have been fortunate to study, constantly expressed their spirituality, not only while teaching, healing or leading ceremony, but also during the everyday, mundane aspects of their lives.

When I studied with the late, Grandfather Mikhail 'Misha' Duvan, an Ulchi shaman from Southeastern Siberia, he was a ninety four year old man visiting a place a world away from his home. While his teachings were profound, it is the personal time I spent with him that showed me how congruent his practice was with his life.

In the traditions of the Ulchi, the shaman is always gracious with the spirits - attending to their needs and treating them as revered elders. Much in the manner of Native American peoples, the many spirits Grandfather worked with were addressed with titles such as 'Old One,' 'Grandmother,' 'Uncle,' 'Elder Sister' and so forth.

The spirits of nature and the Ulchi ancestral human spirits were all fed good food and offered songs and vodka to nourish them. This was done in the same fashion and with the same energy that one might care for one's treasured, living family members.

Indeed, a sense of humble and gracious reverence was expressed in all aspects of Grandfather Misha's life-practice. He bowed when encountering a person and was equally respectful during his interactions with the spirits of place. As he walked along with his staff, he would converse with the plants and stones. Since his home was far from where he was teaching, he would ask the spirits

of place to forgive him for not fully understanding their customs. He requested that they be especially gentle with those of us who were his students as we were 'still learning.' He fed them food and vodka and, in turn, asked them to share some of their power with him while he was in ceremony.

Through his action, Grandfather Misha was expressing what I call, 'Reverent Participatory Relationship,' and this is the way that the really powerful shamans I have met always live their lives.

Like he, they approach the world feeling a profound respect - expressing consideration and appreciation for all beings. They participate not simply with thoughts, but with coherent actions. Their actions arise from a deep sense of obligation that is in no way burdensome, but rather a form of reciprocity in motion.

Shamans understand very deeply that everything in the world is inspirited and that no one can exist without the complex interactions of the others with whom we share the

planet. As such, the shaman feels a deep sense of responsibility to give back with gratitude for all that is given. In other words, caring for those with whom he or she is already in relationship.

This way of being has tremendous power to transform and heal. David Reilly MD, Consulting physician for the Glasgow Homeopathic Hospital in Scotland, and renowned medical conference speaker, has proved that an effective therapeutic encounter - that is, one where a healing response has been engendered - is based in such an understanding of relationship.

In his April 2005 presentation for the Academic Department of the Glasgow Homeopathic Hospital, 'Creating Therapeutic Encounter,' Dr. Reilly suggests that 'traditional and indigenous healing systems, including shamanism, have spent a long time learning about these things - translating it to our world is the challenge.'

In regards to our own bodies' capacity to heal, Dr. Reilly noted, 'We know a human recovery reaction is a built in potential, we have seen that it can be modified for good and bad by human interaction.'

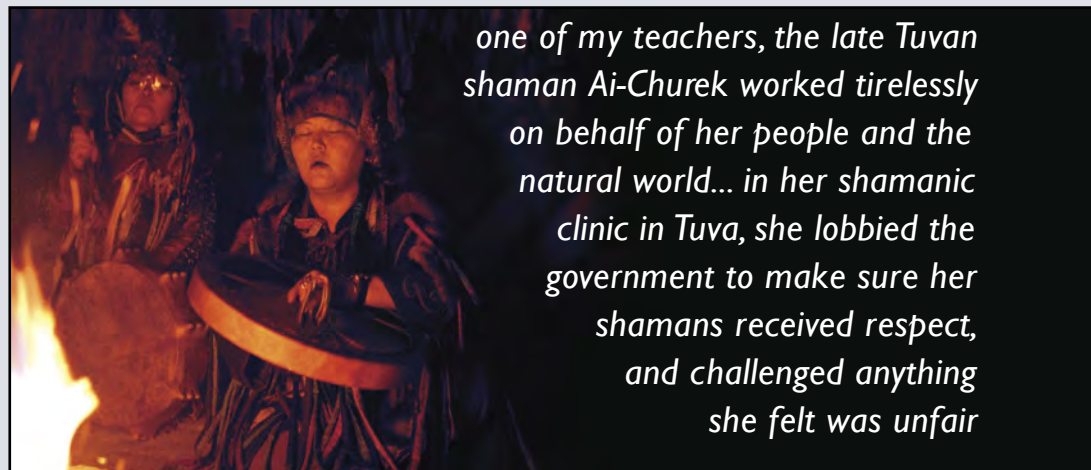
I believe that the very same may be said for how our human interactions impact the non-human beings around us, too.

When 'Reverent Participatory Relationship' becomes ingrained enough to be a person's framework for living, remarkable coherence is exhibited across all aspects of life. The typical separation most people feel between the spiritual and mundane worlds simply does not exist. Indeed, everything is felt to be and treated as sacred and beloved.

Another one of my teachers, the late Tuvan shaman Ai-Churek said in a 2007 interview that, "Shamanism is like a gift, and for me... it is for life."

She was someone who worked tirelessly on behalf of her people and the natural world believing that, "...the main thing in shamanism is the earth, nature, and my connection...." Her focus when doing rituals was to "help people who are not indifferent to the fate of trees, the fate of living nature."

The same fierce respect was bestowed upon the people who worked in her shamanic clinic in



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Above: the late Tuvan shaman Ai-Churek

Kyzyl, Tuva. She lobbied the government to make sure her shamans received appropriate respect, and challenged anything she felt was unfair. Thanks to her hard efforts, both men and women healers at her clinic receive government maternity leave. This was a feat she shared delightedly with us! For her, this work was as holy an action as performing an ancestral fire ritual, as they stemmed from the same root of sacred interaction and deep caring.

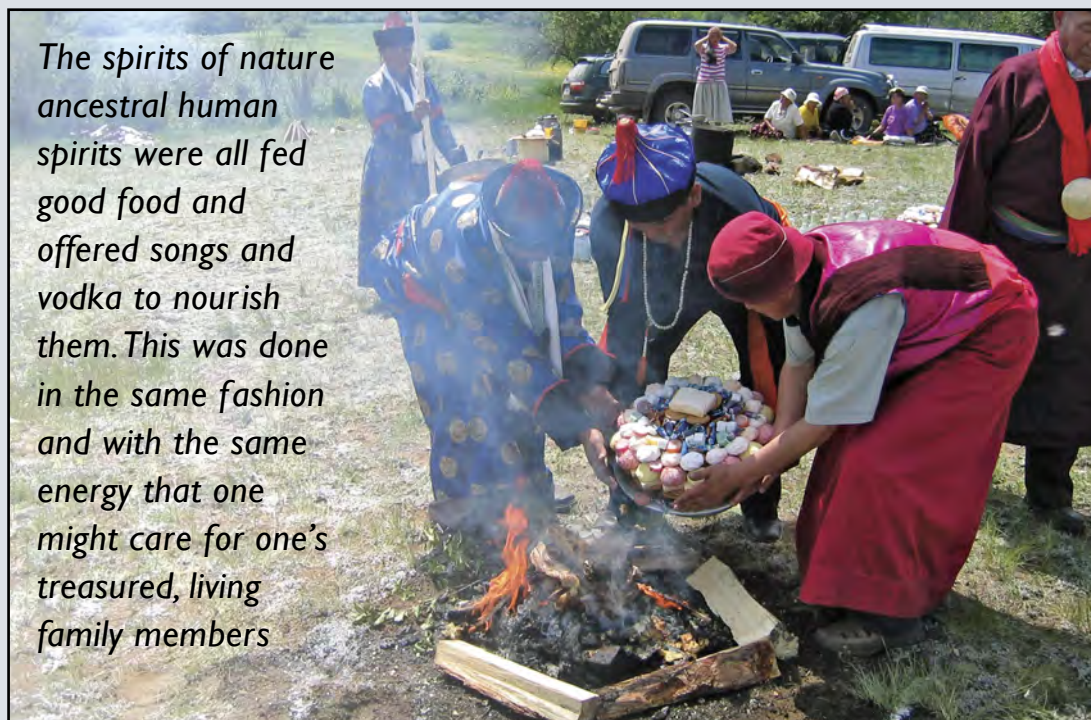
Nepalese shaman, Bhola Banstola is another great example of someone who practices Reverent Participatory Relationship. He is a twenty-seventh generation shaman and the thirteenth generation in his family history to be a practicing shamanic healer. As we are friends, Bhola lives with my partner and I

during his visits, and from so close a relationship we are able to see him in all of life's situations. Whether ironing his shaman's costume, preparing a meal, doing e-mails or when, as I witnessed once, negotiating with an airline when a flight was canceled, Bhola consistently maintains his focus to remain kind, grateful and in spiritual harmony, no matter what is happening - in other words, he lives his practice.

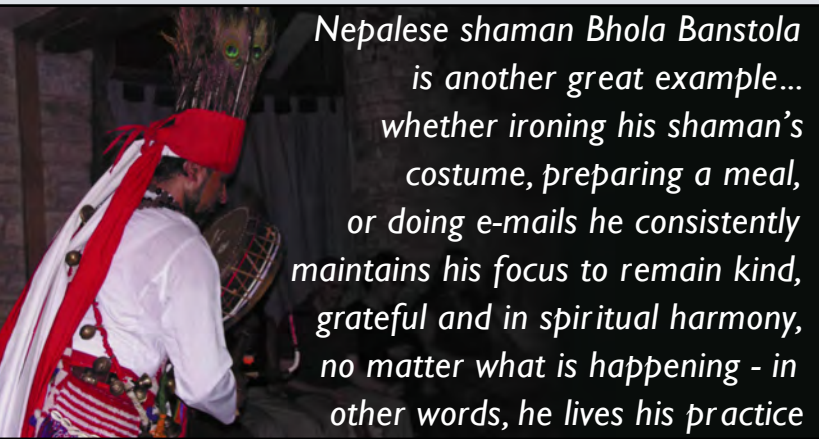
It is too easy in our culture to allow anything of importance - even our spiritual practice - to become an intellectual or theoretical exercise. In reality, while many people can have high ideals, it is in the living of one's life that the 'rubber meets the road,' it is through expressing one's spirituality in every day life that true real power is achieved.

To be sure, this is a disciplined way of life. It means truly 'walking

Below: food offerings are given to the fire during a Mongolian shamanic ceremony



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Above: Nepalese shaman Bhola Banstola during a ceremony at the 2008 Shamanism conference in England

the talk' - following through on spiritual beliefs by taking concrete actions. It means living in gratitude, being completely faithful to our word and keeping our words and deeds in complete alignment. It means eliminating the erroneous ideas of separation from the mind and stepping up to care for the beings around us that give and sustain life. It means treating all beings as you might a treasured friend or loved one.

It is my profound belief that this is how we all must learn to live our lives. In so doing, we support a renewal of the earth and ourselves. As an added benefit, we also develop the level of spiritual potency that a truly powerful tribal shaman exhibits.

In our spiritual practices, learning the nuts and bolts of metaphysical techniques and methods of transformation are just

Thankfully, this way of being is slowly gaining more credibility, even though it challenges the typical ideas our culture has about power. This is marvelous, as unfortunately too many people in our culture still feel powerless whether they express these uncomfortable feelings or not.

From a place of emptiness, they seek to fill themselves with ever more, in hopes of one day feeling complete, worthy or happy. This addictive behaviour keeps them in a constant cycle of temporary highs that are followed by feelings of an almost desperate hollowness. It creates a lifetime of desperately seeking and never really finding peace.

In stark contrast, those that are willing to step into deep relationship with the spirits of nature, other beings and themselves, are able to feel that they are a part of the divine. In essence, through behaving as our ancient shamanic

the very beginning. It is only through deliberate practice of loving the world and being in 'Reverent Participatory Relationship' with all, that our lives transform. Through this way of living our practice, we develop ourselves into beings who are able to provide healing and balance through our daily interactions.

ancestors did, we are more able to perceive the nature of reality that quantum physics proposes - that is, we are always intimately and irrevocably interwoven with everything and everyone.

At no other time in history, have we been offered so many opportunities to truly comprehend and act from this understanding of the world. In diverse corners of our culture, from business, to science, to healthcare and education, we are seeing a convergence of knowledge that is extraordinary. All paths seem to be coming together to show us the nature of the cosmos is one of connection. Furthermore, these connections are best nurtured and healed through heartfelt interaction.

For instance, a recent article in the 'Journal of the American Medical Association' by Helen Riess MD, 'Empathy in Medicine - A Neurobiological Perspective,' stated that '...new generations of physicians must understand the emotional, physiological, and practical consequences of ...empathy.'

The author goes on at length to describe the actual, positive neurobiological, psychological and physical changes that occur when we choose to be in an empathetic relationship. In other words, when we realise that we are actually part of one organism - sharing the same experience, we are able to transform every moment into opportunities for healing, renewal and an even deeper connection.

This premise has become the foundation for my shamanic healing practice, as it is my belief that being in 'Reverent Participatory Relationship' with clients supports them to become healthier individuals. My partner and I also follow this ideal in our teaching work, as we believe that it is the only road to becoming a truly powerful shaman. Our goal is to remind students that as each of us takes steps to embrace the world with reverence - allowing our hearts to be open, grateful and loving - we are reshaping our human existence into something truly and wondrously powerful.

Evelyn C. Rysdyk is a shamanic practitioner and teacher living in Maine, USA. She delights in supporting people to remember their sacred place in 'All That Is.' Evelyn co-runs 'Spirit Passages,' a joint shamanic practice with Allie Knowlton. www.spiritpassages.com

Below: offering scarfs tied to trees for the spirits at a sacred site in Siberia

