

The Healing Power of Shamanism in Transpersonal Psychology

Manuel Almendro

President, ATRE, Spanish Transpersonal Association
Spain

This report summarizes a process of several years of developing a practical and experiential encounter with nonordinary states of consciousness, both in the therapy room and with natives in the Mexican Sierra Mazateca. (We also work in the Amazonic tradition.) These encounters support the idea that the thousand-year-old native culture has kept in silence exceptional and surprising knowledge about the functioning of the human psyche. And it is also a way to enrich the field of therapy and psychology. These doors opened when a Mazatec family whom I had known for twenty years one day invited me to share a trip together. The rise of transpersonal psychology can be seen as an evolutionary opportunity and its further development can bring about an understanding of the great healing power in shamanism. It also conveys a message of reconciliation with life to the distraught scientific world, in such a way that the core of its message calls for the recovery of the perennial archetype of the path that awaits behind the virtual development of our genetized society. Many of the participants in the seminars whose testimonies are presented here are psychology professionals who thus go beyond the idea of life as programmed behavior, letting themselves be touched by the ancestral wisdom of a humble Mazatec Indian.

• The Beginning •

I MET Don Patricio at the very beginning of 1980 in a rainy town in the mountains of Oaxaca (Mexico). He lived in his "ranchito," where he made a living for himself and his family growing coffee. The steaming liquid, a result of his work materialized in his crops, induced satisfaction and meditation during the sharing sessions and activities at the end of his "spiritual work." I was informed that thanks to some Spanish visitors who started planting coffee, the valley found a better way to earn a living.

At that time there were still remnants of the hippie trend. The local people, both the natives and federal police, were extremely uncomfortable with some groups of people and individuals who came in contact with their culture without having any respect for it at all. Natives can tell who comes looking for mere sensations and who really wants

to participate in a cultural experience that can be deeply transforming and significant. Mazatecs value the effort involved in making a living and having a roof over their heads—which certain foreigners could not understand, not having lived with any of these problems. For me it was clear that it was not only a matter of getting mushroom indigestion.

Since then, I have visited this man on several occasions, and I can say that he and his family opened their house to me. I have also seen that a warm relationship, Latin style, is common here. The visitor must cope with certain ambiguities, especially at the onset of the relationship. Mixtures of love and hate and a certain unlimited admiration can occur on both sides.

During one of the various visits my companion and I paid Don Patricio, I remember that at the suggestion of a veteran hippie we went to a well-known local shaman.

Entering his house, we were struck by the large altar and the great number of calendar saints and large icons, highlighted by dozens of candles which, in the dark, anticipated the experience of visionary confusion set off during a trance. We passed him by, and at the suggestion of a homeopath decided to keep on looking.

Later, a young drunkard came up to us on the street waving a wax figure of María Sabina. We asked him who it was and what he answered was unexpected: "Ten thousand pesos." A bit shaken by the commercial interest, we walked away.

I remember that after visiting the homes of the most respected shamans with my friend the homeopath, we got a tip from a "serious and reliable" Mazatec grocer who led us to Don Patricio.

He was a man in his seventies, who greeted us while sharpening the edge of his hunting knife—which he continued doing during our entire conversation.

Days later, we got ready for work. With a resigned and deep look, and a tabard over his shoulders as if ready for a march, sitting on a bed, Don Patricio awaited our arrival. It seemed that the usual fog in the village was especially thick that night. In the old days that climate produced tuberculosis, of which a kind old man on the bus had been cured from, thanks to the María Sabina mushrooms. His words were full of veneration and also respect and fear as he talked about the Spirit and the Lady.

And then the time came. We go down in silence to the altar; his son is with us too and offers us some chairs. Don Patricio sits by our side. He cleans the sand off the mushrooms and offers them to us. While we eat and pass on that acid flavor that seems to scratch our throats, he lights the chunks of incense in a bowl. Don Patricio asks us for the chocolate he requested we bring and we all look forward to the relief it will bring us. When we finish eating and are awaiting the unknown, Don Patricio's son reassures us that it will be a good trip. Afterwards he leaves, and Don Patricio closes the door and turns off the light.

Everything began in the blink of an eye. In the middle of our small talk, an inner powerful motor was set in motion. On a screen ahead of us there began a breathtaking flight following a light that soared up in spirals in the midst of the vast darkness.

I lost all sense of time and space; I was just an awestruck subject in the face of that unforeseeable

sequence of events. There was no chair, no house, nobody...

Suddenly a faraway voice begins to sound, although I have no clear idea of what it's saying...

I pay more attention and recognize it is the voice of Don Patricio, who walks into the pitch-black darkness like a pilgrim with his cane...

His pleas, almost moaning at first, have a funny sound, sliding down from word to word, Mexican-like, whistling "s" after "s"...

He seems to repeat the same litany: "Lord, Christ, Lord, here we are again before you in this dark and cold Mazatec Sierra to ask you for more and more...and much more!"

I feel that this Don Patricio perceives us; I recognize the reason for his call; now we go together; it's something we feel although no one sees anything. I also realize that Don Patricio reconciles me with his Christian words, put down by my environment and myself for many years...

I continue to go after the voice that still seems pleading and I realize that, at the same breathtaking speed as me, my homeopath friend is at my side as another entity...

Suddenly the voice seems to disappear, and at the side, a red whirlpool appears, with tracheal rings. I decide with all my might to reject those jaws and at once the voice of our guide reappears. I follow it and my fear turns into joy and laughter. Now I hear his voice easily and, laughing away, we dodge all sorts of dark and shapeless obstacles. I am only attracted by the rising and winding light and by his voice, giving me pleasure and a sense of safety.

More whirlwinds shake us; they seem like buildings, like cities full of huge modern glass buildings. Everything passes nonstop and the voice transports us ritually to and fro, as if in an alluring "via crucis." Immediately after, the voice introduces us:

Here I bring you, Lord, Don Manuel and Don Corrado, who come from far away to know your marvelous deeds. They are good people, Lord, so we expect from your presence that all goes well in their lives. You know, Lord, that important people come here from far away to see this poor old Indian in this dark and cold Mazatec Sierra to ask you for more and more and much more...

The voice, the light, and the beat of the crook rise intermittently. We follow Don Patricio, who,

at that moment, embodies the archetype of the pilgrim. Suddenly we see faces appear and come closer, looking us straight in the eyes. When they try to approach us, a grating stops them and they grab the bars, sticking out their horrible tongues at us in revenge...

Nonchalantly, I follow the voice while I continue to laugh. Everything appears colored red with shapes that vanish. Following a carnival of images that appear as in a *humor vitreous* and then change to a Renaissance heavenly tone, I observe their shining vestments. Looking closer, I notice in them the typical Indian embroidery (Hüipil) that can only have been inspired by the mushrooms...

After a short rest, Don Patricio rushes off, only to slow down gradually. The inner mystical climb is more trusting and peaceful after vomiting, in which a deep cleansing was felt all over.

The predominant color now is dark blue with bright lights. Somehow I see colors that don't exist. Don Patricio lights a cigarette, takes a grass he calls *San Pedro*, rubs his hands and offers us some, while he whispers: "San Pedro has something to tell us." He puffs deeply at his cigar, making big clouds of smoke, but it's not the smoke but rather thousands of glittering sparks that spread all over the house giving us a sense of protection and incredible well-being...

A smell of green fields renews the air in the room. We continue the climb peacefully, with ongoing pleas and prayers, but now aimed in a specific direction.

Suddenly a typical folding screen appears in clear reality. Since a while ago, I feel a part of what is happening, body and soul, not an outside spectator. I remain still, flabbergasted, while a total silence takes hold of everything. Paying attention, I see a pair of eyes looking straight at me from close up, eyes that inspire friendship and respect. Everything is subject to this presence. The thing that strikes me most about this strange and human being, together with his long hair and beard, is the strong swaying of his feet from one side of the folding screen to the other...I feel him as if he were me; there is distance and simultaneity, power, majesty, and mystery.

Everything indicates that we have reached our destination. Don Patricio breaks the situation and the mystery of that omnipresence with an overwhelming respect and humility. With a

whisper, he commends us to Providence and does the same for his family and his crop.

Shortly after, at dawn, we are impressed by the misty and phantasmagoric Mazatec Sierra.

Group Exploration

YEARS LATER I thought that this knowledge should be known in all its dimensions, so I prepared certain people to experience it directly. It was one of the most fascinating group experiences I have ever known as a therapist.

Today I believe that the study of the human mind cannot leave aside the findings of other civilizations, even though they are not based on sophisticated apparatus. This knowledge is more quantum than Cartesian, and is linked more to transformation than to acquisition and manipulation of the environment. And also because the age-old knowledge other civilizations possess deals with the key to life and death.

We have additional reasons to make contact, as apprentices, once more with those civilizations, especially with the Latin American people, who have been linked to us in such a drastic and decisive way.

These people who participated in a group session with Don Patricio previously went through a long preparation with me. Some were psychologists, and none of them were, so to speak, "experience-freaks." Also, the work was prepared with intensive processes in Oaxaca, with body exercises we could call holotropic vibrations, aimed at generating the ideal atmosphere for transformation that is not dependent on techniques.

After the work with Don Patricio, they spent days on end integrating the experience in order to enrich their daily lives with it. Sharing such moments, we can realize that any simple life—like the life of Joe described by Yensen (1987)—is really an amazing and unique life.

Many of the experiences described by them begin with: "I started off with a strong physical experience, my body was transformed, I felt a plant, a mineral, and an animal...also I felt surrounded by strange animals."

Someone else, a man, describes the following: "I go into an open space where there are animals and shapes surrounding me, snakes and fish, but most of all, eyes of different sizes and shapes..."

In all cases, we see that the shamanic experience appears in one way or the other. It is followed by a

celebration and an ascent to higher levels of reality. One such case is that of a young woman:

I saw the head of a leopard and I turned into the leopard, following Don Patricio who went into a cave followed by two or three other people...an invisible hand took out all my guts and big white worms crept in and out of all the holes...I wasn't scared, just surprised...At another point I swirled around in a beam of white light...huge white crystals were growing...in some others, a gothic cathedral floated inside...at the same time I was the cathedral. I penetrated into the earth and the soil went in and out of my eyes, my mouth...my blood became a fluorescent green liquid that I watched rise from my feet through two huge pathways and when it reached the head, it spilled out...I felt a great love for everyone.

One of the foreign psychologists explains her experience this way:

What I feel in the presence of Don Patricio is the desire to bow my head. I go into a totally terrifying trip; at first I go along the labyrinths and depths of death, images of death, images of bones, a lot of bones, eyes, a lot of eyes, shadows...afterwards comes the ascent and I go on a journey to strange and beautiful cities...at the end of my journey I get to my country and there I ask for peace...finally, rays of white light reveal the presence of a divine energy and I become ecstatic, moved beyond words.

Another woman explains:

It all started with a vibration in my hips that spread to the rest of my body. I felt something crack...my butt bulged out, my lower jaw grew and stuck out from the rest of my face and forehead...I was a real gorilla, with guttural sounds...

I can understand that some people should question the reason for all this. Obviously, there is no commercial value in offering death experiences. We must understand it in the way the previous woman ends the report of her experience:

I'm becoming a tree, of a very hard and compact wood...the trunk has a big diameter, the roots are far into the earth and it has a luxuriant foliage. There's a lot of vegetation and I'm part of it. I feel Nature and I am overcome by a feeling of peace that's hard to describe.

I believe that the journey through all the stages of evolution of Nature is embedded in us, and so

it appears in this experience. I also think that it has to do with the cleansing of our subconscious and with physical cleansing, and the result is genuinely healing and harmonious.

The main issue would be to do research on these realities we have left aside because they are not part of ordinary observable matters—this is a real challenge for a researcher. I believe that in the shamanic model of research, the incompleteness of our Cartesian-Newtonian certainties is exposed, which isn't to say that they are not useful, too, as a model, but rather that it can be enriched and improved.

I am convinced that training in, and going through, these experiences could offer health professionals a new perspective to understand psychosis and certain neuroses. That is, of course, if we don't become trapped in a reductionist pharmacological outlook.

It is interesting to note that the theories of the biologist Rupert Sheldrake (1989) are in a way related to these experiences. Most people are seeing the same morphogenetic field containing the same forms and the same resonances throughout the ages. For example, encountering geometrical shapes, animals that turn into luminous forms, while, at the same time, fear disappears. All these forms are already in the local Indian art: the so-called *alebrijes*, beautiful animals of great value made mostly of wood and embroidered on clothes and fabrics.

In the group experience, there are often heartfelt expressions of love:

I was surrounded by the most fascinating people I have ever met. Wrapped in love, safety, and support, I walked along the path of my destiny; it was them, it was me, we were one, joy exalted...as I touched and saw that unknown and, at the same time, well-known world...I was learning to be the pilot of my own boat...

In another account worth mentioning, a woman said:

... I feel like I'm in a luminous womb and I'm turning in slow motion. I don't know whether I'm alive or dead and in a split second I see my whole life pass before my eyes...even today I feel the influence of this second that changed my life...

I believe that this age-old knowledge should be approached with great respect and humility,

especially when one loses faith in the rational arrogance of our culture and one sees that it is from an Indian, far from our culture, that one finds a key to open a whole new dimension of life that makes it truly alive and liveable. But we have to go beyond the books.

As preparation, it is almost essential to cleanse ourselves of our ancestral and family traumas in order to have a certain degree of self-control and an open and relaxed attitude.

Also, during the transpersonal work, there are shamanic experiences with entry into "holotropic spaces," both in Spain and in Oaxaca.

In an Induced Vibration exercise in Oaxaca, a young man describes the following:

I continue to roam in that space and suddenly I begin to see dwarfs, thousands of them all over the place, all around me...I see a person who is like a sorcerer or a Mayan priest...he leads me to a kind of square cave, very bright, where there is a display cabinet with three hearts in it...as if in a ritual ceremony and, unexpectedly, he rips out my heart and puts in one of the others from the display cabinet, and says that this will be repeated three times at different points in life...

Also, in this kind of experience, old material is integrated, as was the case with this woman:

There's no solution anymore. A hand appears first, and I see the woman that first appeared seven years ago in a dream and she helps me come out. She says I have to keep going along that path alone...I run into the deer...Then I ran into the eagle, that took me up flying and showed me the world from up high, and other worlds...

Just as with Don Patricio, in the vibration it is easy to hear: "I saw a lot of spirals or whirlwinds; they were like nebula in motion."

And also:

Fear appears, the relationship with the father...I see a luminous door, I go in and start rising...I'm left alone and the music guides me to a tribe of Indians who I mix in with. In a kind of ritual, they give me some objects (they look like maracas, musical sticks or canes). I take them, feeling very strongly that they are a protection for the path I must still tread...the experience still lasts.

Or more personal, such as:

The more I breathe the darker it becomes, a darkness tainted by a mauve mass I must cross, a mass that holds my fear, my solitude, where I am with myself. I follow the tunnel of the unknown and there, unexpectedly, at the end of the tunnel a ray of light appears...where one can see the simplicity of life and draw the beauty of its geometry...

The "shamanic and biblical transformation" also happens intensely in vibrational and respiratory processes:

A fish appeared in front of me. I thought it was going to kiss me but it swallowed me. Inside its belly and sensing the gastric juices start acting, I took charge and punched a hole in its walls, close to the tail, and came out...I lay down and felt that I was pure energy, that I passed from the cosmos to the microcosmos, surrounded by planets.

I must admit that in the breathing and vibration exercises, when a good atmosphere is created there are also "perinatal and biographical therapies" that are essential in personal processes. For instance in this psychologist:

I'm in my mother's womb with my twin brother and it's time to come out. I'm very scared...I stop my exit but I realize that I am also stopping his, I'm hurting him and I feel guilty, I'm leaving him aside just as the family has done very often. Finally I'm born...I manage to process my guilt.

Certain knowledge of deep repressed layers appears. Among these are sexual abuse during childhood, and so on. Whenever I can, I examine them to see whether they are real or imaginary, whether the family is likely to abuse or not, although the essential is the psychological reality. These words are expressive enough:

The profile of that presence became more and more distinct: it was my mother, the mother I carry inside, the mother I perceived when I was in her womb...she was a dark mother, very scared...a mother who despised herself, who suffocated her femininity, who was ashamed of me because a man had desired her sexually and the fruit had not been a boy...After shamanic breathing, I relived all the pain and choking of the traumatic experience of my own birth...I feel that I experienced it when I was born...and little by little it became more conscious, and after some time it was a real life experience. We had been vibrating...I felt

a black presence in front of me. I asked him, "Who are you?" and felt how he jumped on me. In a matter of seconds I was a three- or four-year-old girl. I was in my grandmother's room, in her bed, and I felt my grandfather touching me. I was a little girl, very little, and I felt paralyzed, with all the pain and impotence...my mind repeated "It can't be, this can't happen to me," and I cried and cried over the terrible, painful and traumatic wound. In the light of that experience, the disconnected and senseless puzzle of many aspects of my life began to fit together; I understood my rejection of my body, my fear of femininity, of men, of sexuality, the mystery at home surrounding my grandfather...repression, silence and fear of eternal condemnation. It wasn't my grandfather, it was that force that possessed him...and an intuition crossed my heart: there's just one solution, forgive yourself and reconcile yourself with your body. The hand of my travel mate helped me to go into that forgiveness, caressing my body and embracing inwardly who I am. A warm and loving light began to penetrate me and carry me. I entered into an indescribable space full of peace and love that words can't express...

It is true that in the group integration it is possible to specify, and at times glimpse, the particular connotations of each experience in terms of the personal life of each of the group members. The result was an incredible enrichment, although there is still much research to be done on these experiences which, by the way, are part of the artistic and religious expressions of humankind which share that so-called "collective unconscious." Moreover, they allow the person to choose a path in life that is based neither on drugs nor on consumption.

The trips experienced with Don Patricio and his family were innumerable and almost indescribable. I could say that they are territories with their traffic signals, their cities and pathways, just as "here on earth" (says Don Patricio didactically). It is true that Don Patricio obeys an order and the city of Santa Fe appears, flooded with malva, and many other such spiritual places. The evangelists appear in order: St. John, who offers his pen, up until St. Peter who'll offer his keys; all this seasoned with other apparitions, such as the peacock, and so on.

Interestingly, and due to syncretism, each saint corresponds to a native entity. So, according to R. Gordon Wasson, Ruck, and Hoffman (1985), we find different maps that chart a single territory and which match with one another when they are lived

out correctly. I cannot deal with it in length here, but one day, during personal work with the Mazatec family, after saying a Christian name, Don Patricio's son whispered, "*Cuathemoc*," and he appeared in all his splendor. I felt bracelets on my wrists and feet, just like the ones worn by the Aztec warriors—the bracelets gave me the force—and afterwards I heard: "We're ready," and we entered into a world full of cities and drawings that decorate the pyramids and the objects left by that civilization. This knowledge needs no explanation nor justification; it simply is.

In that moment I perceived that *Cuathemoc* is a state of being in the Aztec tradition. Somehow, by crossing the plane of matter we were crossing the plane of death. I perceived that the journey after death recorded in age-old texts is probably not very different from the nature of this knowledge. The return is what counts.

Among the trips we did as a group with Don Patricio, I especially remember one in which the group, as a whole, went floating through the universe in an experience of unity. However, I kept feeling a purring sound that struck me. It was like some kind of "engine" that pushed us all. At a certain point, I realized that the purring sounds were the prayers of Don Patricio's wife, who was behind us, pushing us along and uniting us, and her strength was humility. I had never seen her incarnate that way until that moment.

✱ Psychological Reframing: A Possible Introduction to a Cartography of the Spirit ✱

WE COULD review or cartograph the experiences I have outlined in a sort of investigation of where we've been. To find their source, we can look at modern holotropic psychology (Grof, 1988).

We must consider the return to this knowledge as a return to the Spirit, a return to what lies beyond space and time. Thus, if we consider that there are four Basic Perinatal Matrixes (BPM) (Grof, 1988) that pertain to the "hylotropic" world, or world of Matter, then there will also be four BPM for the "holotropic" world, or that of the Spirit.

The entrance into the holotropic entails a first matrix or BPM I, full of darkness and amniotic covering. It is a dark firmament that forebodes various possibilities. This feeling of cosmic

enclosure can produce anxiety and anguish, but also peace and warmth.

The BPM II takes us to an experience of geometrical forms drawn as if by a laser beam. It is as if the forms that must take shape in the space/time of matter proceeded from there. It is a matrix that keeps the secret of the "morphogenetic" and the "holographic." Here are the perfect forms of objects: of flowers, viruses...a primeval frame of reference, with the characteristics of the ideal suggested by Plato.

The step on to the BPM III may be too sudden. The progressive and somehow hierarchical field of archetypes creates the feeling that one must tread carefully. The different array of archetypes, from the playful ones to those who appear as omnipotent, flows as if in an invisible and viscous liquid. Simultaneity is the law, and personal fear feeds the eyes of the surrounding beings. If an archetype takes flesh, it is because it has found a "loophole," and then comes the *outbreak* or *possession*; it seems that the law of life rules absolutely. Certain archetypes can make unscrupulous and irresponsible individuals turn a peaceful afternoon into a bloodbath. There are no higher or lower archetypes in the holotropic sense, since it all depends on the relative position of the traveler, a position which will take shape in the space/time of matter.

In the higher levels of that archetypal world we find the astronomic entities, the entities of chess, cards, tarot, and so on—characters that have, for some reason, marked human history.

BPM IV is an "exit to the Blue," to the world of the higher spirits, to their kaleidoscopic temples, to their silent, serene, and enigmatic ground: to the virgins, who at the speed of lightning, glow instantaneously in their presence. Shiva, Na Mu Kuan, Se Um Bo Sal...appear pointing to the subtle realms where Buddha, Christ live, which would be but doors opening to the inexpressible. When today we still admire those pyramids, either in Egypt or in the Mayan or Aztec world, we can fathom that, in fact, they are energetic temples copied from the holotropic world to which those people had access. Later, they returned to Matter, to the hylotropic, with the guides that the entities or entity recommended, and those temples were the places of connection or remembrance, of nutrition and prayer, during the lifetime of those who had made

contact. The whole tribe moved, dressed, carried out their whole daily life around those revelations and contacts. Still today, similar energetic temples can be found in the Nagüal, inhabited by entities that somehow rest in those sanctuaries.

Good shamans have their entity to which they travel to acquire health and knowledge; all their power will depend on the power of that entity. Possibly Christ, today, is behind the impressive humility of more than one shaman, rather than in the glory of the official stratum. It is obvious, however, that the builders of the great Christian temples of Europe were familiar with the process discussed here.

What is important is to highlight that it is a two-way journey, for it is senseless to have an encounter if it is not reflected in one's daily life, in the other beings and in the passage through our Earth. It is a journey to the "vertical-transpersonal" that reverts to a return to the "horizontal-transpersonal and interpersonal," marking thus the true evolution of life on Earth throughout its history; the transpersonal extends into the personal, and so the personal acquires knowledge.

We must recover the old road of the Well of Health, of the Marvel Flower that still lives on in children's literature, the solitary experience of Birth and Death. We must make the inner child grow so that the black clouds of our suffering become only passing dust, a fuel which will nurture with respect and wisdom a journey through a destiny that depends on us...

Alvaro Estrada (1977), recounting his relationship with María Sabina, recalls that she used to say, with wise innocence: "The little things (mushrooms) tell me what to say and how to sing." María Sabina became known as one of the masters of Mexican wisdom ever since the night of 29 July 1955, when R. Gordon Wasson went on his first mushroom experience in the Mazatec Sierra (Wasson, Ruck, & Hoffman, 1985). Don Juan instructed braying as a means of controlling anguish (Fort, 1991). Certain therapies in pre-Buddhist Tibet, practiced as a way of healing, say that the person should be devoured by the spirits haunting him or her, and that the climax of these processes would lead to healing (Evans-Wentz, 1971; Manzanera, 1996). Don Patricio begins by a complex ceremony to invoke the entities who will guide the journey. Whole families attend his sessions to be cured, and children also participate.

• Conclusion •

TO CONCLUDE this article on shamanic healing as a means towards knowledge, it seems important to recognize that:

- The individual is looked upon as a developing whole in well-detailed shamanic-type processes. These processes take place in the participants' physical, psychological, and spiritual planes as well as in their relationship to their environment. Here I am referring both to close environments—that is, their relatives and their social and natural environments, as well as to remote ones—those related to experiences with unfathomable and cosmic worlds. And all of it is well protected with incomparable simplicity and familiarity.
 - These age-old shamanic methodologies could be accessed from an opening in Western psychology into worlds of ancestral wisdom through responsible investigations, for they offer an inestimable panorama of the psyche's depths facing a vital healing and understanding, that is to say, to really establish a complementary relationship between this ancestral wisdom and modern science far removed from the prevailing protectionist paternalism of the dominant culture.
 - "That" which produces this opening towards the *internal microscope* and towards what is beyond time, space, and matter cannot in itself be rationally encompassed or defined, even if according to some options it is "an intelligence...a conscience" that exists in atoms, plants, prayers—everything. Anyhow, we can't pass from *ethnocentrically* criticizing "spirit worshippers" as superstitious to become "molecule worshippers" with a formula included.
- In this respect, we believe that it is not useless to give warning that some researchers following the reductionist model of a determinist, materialist culture find themselves at the same time within a psychological type of reductionism, alleging that every shamanic, entheogenic, and nonordinary state of consciousness experienced is exclusively explainable as an intellectual process. There is no room for transpersonal nor suprapersonal processes. I don't doubt that these researchers' contributions are important; nevertheless, once again we end up denigrating the indigenous and negating their "spirits' personal experience.

I commented on this to a Mazatec Indian—one who knows—and he told me that the *spirit* doesn't always open the door to the heart of that mystery that leaves one breathless and where there is no room for a learned and narcissistic psyche.

- The steps to enter into that "other side," according to my experience, have certain similarities across cultures as diverse as the *Mazatecs*, who are warmer and more sociable, and the *Shipibos* or *Ashaninkas*, who are more individualistic. Their maps have similarities in their polyhedral spaces and colors (shown, by the way, in their handicrafts). On some measures they may differ, but not in their essence. Even in those personal experiences, genuinely indigenous spaces may agglutinate with historical spaces far apart from that culture, such as eschatological situations in European latitudes, personal experiences in world war scenarios, and others: challenges that entail not a few dislocations and meanings for the individual. It is not easy to frame and annotate all of this. Perhaps we should humbly contemplate it as an expression of the wholeness and the vast complexity of life itself, something which we often forget, something that in the end sinks into the intimacy of the trip and each individual's compromise with life. Each of these instances is a path of *endurance* for they are *uplifting* in that they urgently need receptors into which can be inserted certain cognitive and perceptive thrusts which tumble cultural systems learned from our psyches and from our bodies.

Nevertheless, we cannot forget the risks, for as the age-old proverb states: "there would be no false gold if there were no real gold." Today, exploitation has already started in such a way that some respectable Indians are worried by this commerce that places doubt upon the humble approach taught by tradition.

The healing power of shamanism develops a way of healing as a path of knowledge which abruptly burns out substitutes and thus demonstrates that these experiences, when realized with respect and caution, open a path towards a quest that can only be established in the following:

1. Benefits of healing rooted in the individual's sense of life and not in a simple suppression of symptoms.

2. Restoration of the enchantment of life, confirmed by us in people submerged in materialist rigidity.
3. Puncturing the limits embedded in a type of perception that reduces life to calculable and predictable matter.
4. Opening the perception to the unfathomable, whose nature doesn't fit into any predetermined equation.

Come what may, the age-old world holds in its womb the wisdom needed by the rational mind, in spite of the false gold and of the obscure areas in shamanic knowledge itself, which are not alien to the dual constitution of our knowledge.

A wisdom that offers undeniable sense and conscience for life.

Notes

Background to the work discussed here can be found in Almendro (1994, 1998).

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