

Thresholds: Shamanic Perception and Technique

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For those who would like to expand their sense of life as a mystical adventure and reality as a fluid event, the exploration of our perceptions and beliefs is one sure means to that process.

What happens when we engage in the “mystery of being” rather than trying to solve it? How is our experience altered if we imagine ourselves walking through this mystery as it unfolds around us - and in us?

These are some of the thoughts and questions we work with (and play with) in a six class series titled *Thresholds: Shamanic Perception & Technique*. Considering these words may be useful for those who would like to begin, or continue more deeply, along a path of self-discovery:

Thresholds - For our purposes this is a place, an awareness, of being poised between perceptions. A threshold is a moment of possibilities, of opportunities. *She Opens The Door For Them* is Dionondehowa, in translation. Knowing this translation, compelled us to name our land trust Dionondehowa Wildlife Sanctuary & School which has land on the Battenkill River, long associated with that native word. The land is full of doors, invisible to the skeptical eye, just as our lives are full of doors, of possibilities, thresholds of perception that beckon us. Most often, we turn away. Too busy. Too afraid of relinquishing control - or... the perception of control.

Shamanic - While this word is gaining acceptance (2003), many people are still uncomfortable with it, dismiss it with sweeping cynicism. I am more uncomfortable, myself, with the “word” *shaman* as it tends to shift the emphasis to the individual, and away from the important *work* which is done to benefit the community. *Shamanic practitioner* keeps the focus on the work. To do this work the practitioner may enter an altered state of awareness, sometimes called *the dreamtime*, sometimes referred to as *journeying*. The practitioner brings an intention, a question, or a problem to the journey, humbly seeking insight, direction, resolution. In ancient times, the journey was taken as problems arise for an individual or for the larger community. It also served as rites of passage were approaching.

Perception - This is our human means of receiving and comprehending information gathered by the senses, including the 6th sense, which may be the culmination of the preceding five. In shamanic work we would not preclude the possibility of a 7th, 8th, 9th and so on. Allowing for possibilities is often all that is needed to boost us over a threshold of perception.

Technique - For us, technique includes the many ways we can jostle our perceptions - gently, of course - to allow for the desired shift, the new perspective. Some technique is in the form of exercises and practices, often relying on natural objects or quiet time on the land. Some is oral, as we consider ideas and their usefulness. Often we begin with provocative questions: **8** Are you willing to surrender your beliefs? **8** Are beliefs ever useful? **8** Are beliefs impediments to the

perception-shift we seek? 8 What would be the usefulness of suspending your belief in evil? In good? 8 How often do we miss an opportunity to cross a threshold of perception with the word “just” as in “it was just a dream” or “just an idea” or “just a _____” (you can fill in the blank). 8 Is reality a fluid event? 8 Is hierarchical thinking an obstacle to shamanic perception? 8 Is it ever useful? 8 When you pick up an appealing stone as you’re out walking, are you collecting it? Or is it collecting you? 8 Do we *apply* meaning to reality, or is it inherent? 8 If you “dream” with a feather can you learn about flight, about the bird from whom it came? 8 Is “delight” a threshold of perception? 8 Do you see spirits? Do you almost see spirits? 8 Is light better than dark?

Gathering together with others to explore these kinds of questions is not for everyone. It calls for an adventurous spirit. It challenges us to surrender - or at least to consider surrendering - the very notions, which we may think are foundational to us: familiar and sustaining.

Some will ask, Why would I want to do that?!!?!? Others will say, Yes! I want to expand my perceptions but how can I do so safely? At your own pace. At your own pace. If our intentions are to become more open and to conduct ourselves with compassion, then that path is before us at every step. We can proceed at a pace that *feels* safe - until we can remember that we are, already, safe... when our hearts are wide open.

My own efforts as a practitioner and guide are intended to deepen our human relationship with nature, with the wild ones - both visible and invisible. My working theory is this: if we can mindfully and humbly engage with the enchantment of wild places, if we can really feel the nourishment of delight and of natural beauty, then we will feel safer in this weird, unwieldy circumstance of Being Alive. And when we feel safer we will behave better with one another - including all who are not human. And by this work (and play) we might be less belligerent, less acquisitive. More joyful and inquisitive.