

Healing PCBs, Healing Ourselves

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As a practitioner who uses shamanic techniques I am accustomed to being amazed and educated while in a “non-ordinary” state of awareness. I use this term “non-ordinary” only to describe a *different* state of awareness because the longer I am involved in shamanic work (and play!) the more clear it becomes to me that *all* of our experience of reality is non-ordinary. It is just that we prefer to differentiate for the convenience of our daily activities such as going to work, grocery shopping, maintaining a sense of purpose and a sense of what we call sanity. I will suggest that true Sanity is the state of being in which we perceive *all* of our experience as non-ordinary, basking in the mystical adventure of Being Alive.

That introduction is meant as a preparation for what is to follow. I offer it for people who are unfamiliar with shamanic work or who are shy of crossing that threshold to engage in the enchantment of this (perhaps) fluid Reality in which we swim. And sometimes sink.

Several weeks ago a woman, whom I’ll call Carol, came to do some healing work with me. She has given me permission to tell her story and I bow to her with gratitude for the great gift she has given us. I had known Carol years before but our paths hadn’t crossed for nearly a decade. Although we’d had different teachers, we were both (at that time) learning Reiki II. I went on to study Reiki III, the teaching level - called, by some, the Master level. Carol was asking that I re-attune her for Level II because she was feeling that she had lost her way in her spiritual life.

Her exact words were that she felt “her spirit was gone.” My thought, until that moment, had been that our spirit - or soul - could fragment into parts, could escape in pieces when circumstances of trauma - acute or chronic - made the body inhospitable. I hadn’t considered that the *whole spirit* could escape. In the language of Soul Retrieval, the departing of soul fragments is Soul Loss. Soul Retrieval allows the shamanic practitioner to “journey” into non-ordinary reality on behalf of the person who has experienced the fragmentation and loss. This technique has a corollary in modern psychotherapy. In shamanic work the practitioner travels in the dreamtime to find the soul part, inviting its return. In my vocabulary, until Carol, having one’s “spirit gone” was to be *without spirit* and to be without spirit was to be in a state of death. For a long while I have associated spirit with breath. Spirit, that tentative occupant, is breathed in and out with each inhalation and exhalation, but never entirely ex-pired until we do, actually, expire. Carol’s perception was challenging my own, inviting me to shift.

She had first been injured by PCBs (Polychlorinated Biphenyls) when a leak occurred in the CAT Scan (Computerized Axial Tomography) equipment at the hospital where she worked as a radiologic technologist. My intuitive sense suggested that she’d been injured by radiation as well. The injuries were serious. Her comprehension, concentration and memory had been severely compromised by the toxins. The terms “Neuro-toxicity” and “Encephalopathy” were

part of her diagnosis. Carol was so stricken that her life - as she'd been living it - came to an end. She said that the hospital would not acknowledge its culpability. Even though testable symptoms were present, the medical industry considered Chemical Injury to be a form of mental illness. I remembered seeing some of the symptoms myself, at the time of her injury, when Carol had joined other practitioners for Reiki exchanges. She was distracted, panicky, hypersensitive and without the coping mechanisms or the sense of safety that good health brings. We speak of being "thin-skinned." This was like being "thin-aura-ed." Her energy field could offer little protection.

Although Carol had asked for a Reiki II re-attunement, we soon realized there would be other steps we'd need to take first, in preparation. I wondered if I would even be of any help given that chemically-caused brain injury and complete loss of spirit were new territory for me.

While Carol had many symptoms which disturbed her, among the worst was that she no longer dreamed. She remembered that her "last" dream was years ago when she was at Dr. Rae's Environmental Health Center in Texas, then considered the best facility in the U.S. for people suffering from chemical injuries.

Since then the absence of dreams - or at least any conscious awareness of dreams - had been for her a discomfiting loss: another effect of the "theft" of her sensibilities, stolen by PCBs - by chemical injury. Dreams, and the act of dreaming, are of course thought to be integral to a healthy brain and our sense of well-being. For Carol, when her "head hit the pillow" she was "gone." She had no sense of a process of *falling* asleep. It could be said that *her* falling was straight through the bottom of the dream barrel.

I schedule three-hour sessions because I observe that our sense of time is also our sense of space and the process of healing self-discovery deserves space, even if we don't need all three hours on a particular day. After Carol and I had met a couple of times our work was comfortably underway using Conversation, Guided Visualization and Reiki technique. We were beginning to get our bearings.

On her third visit we agreed we were ready to really dive deep to reclaim her spirit, and, perhaps, even to have a dreamtime encounter with Polychlorinated Biphenyl itself. Soul Retrieval was our intention. Carol was lying on the massage table with a light blanket over her and I had begun some Reiki positions, resting my open hands gently on her head. As we settled into our work I internally invited PCBs - but only with Carol's permission - to show itself to me. I asked that it be in a form that I - a human - could comprehend and, if the PCBs were willing, that its presence would be for the purpose of having a conversation. Here I want to remind readers, who may not have experienced dreamtime or non-ordinary reality, to imagine that we're now in a state of awareness in which other dimensions have become accessible. And just to reassure the anxious reader, the adventure is safe because we are open-hearted and our spirit

helpers are nearby. It could be said that we have all we need for our journey: our companions and our compassion.

In that moment I was happily startled to have the compound Polychlorinated Biphenyls show itself to me in the form of a gangly-armed, gangly-legged, being whose “skin” was a sickly mauve and bubble-gum pink swirl - like paints mixing, like a toxic spill. Its face was only half present, a kind of hard plastic brown-black robotic mask: forehead, eyes and nose. No mouth. No chin.

It is not uncommon for me to “see” spirits/entities/beings; whoever-they-are or whatever-they-are, our language is too limited. This “seeing” is part of the shift in perception which altered-awareness allows. For me, these visions are neither “out there” the way that ghosts are portrayed in movies, nor are they in my mind as with things imagined. For me they are somewhere in between. Even though they are invisible by some definitions of the word, I find I am able to describe such a being in detail and its location in the room. I’m imagining that many of you, reading this, have your own similar - yet unique - experiences. While I am often delighted and sometimes challenged by this way of seeing I am definitely grateful that my effort to cross thresholds of perception affords me these encounters.

So there stood PCBs to the left of me, alongside the massage table. Carol was lying quietly with her eyes closed. I thanked PCBs for showing itself to me in a form I could comprehend and then I posed Carol’s question. Had it taken her spirit? Yes. It had. And would it be willing to return her spirit to her? Yes. But only if *its spirit were returned to it*.

I remember being startled, noticing my own amazement. The joyful shudder of revelation was rolling through me: PCBs was “asking” for its own soul retrieval. I could imagine soul retrieval for trees and pets and rocks. It had just never occurred to me that chemical compounds might also suffer soul loss.

“What do you need?” I asked.

“Respect” and “Honor” were the two words, clearly conveyed. Even in my altered awareness I remember the excitement I felt. If we could return to PCBs *its* soul, then imagine all the abused and enslaved chemical toxins which might be restored - and rendered harmless - by a practice of respect and honor! Toxins, abused and enslaved by none-other-than ourselves: humans. Their restoration would be *ours*, too!

Reviled and feared though it is, I told PCBs that I would do my best to return to it the Respect and Honor required in exchange for Carol’s own spirit and, perhaps, *her full recovery* - which was, after all, what initiated this conversation. Was Carol’s recovery from brain injury really possible? Certainly in the state of shamanic awareness it was possible. How would all of

this translate to the world of so-called ordinary awareness?

There was also the practical question: just how *would* one go about doing a Soul Retrieval for PCBs? Or radioactive material? Or...? It actually came to me quite easily, thank goodness. I saw what PCBs meant by Respect and Honor. I could see PCBs being “born” in a laboratory. I saw scientists working late and, finally, identifying just how to leash the molecule.

In that instant of serendipitous discovery, or invention, what if those human beings had seen outside the crushing cubicle of their Project? Then they might have sensed the danger inherent in Polychlorinated Biphenyls. They could have unzipped that clattering suit of hubris and gracefully stepped out of it, simply by acknowledging that we humans are not spiritually mature enough to be playing with such un-potable potency. Alchemical or Illchemical? In that instant our scientists might have bowed - with Respect - to the power of PCBs. They could have noted that yes, this *is* a superior insulating material, *but* to enslave it would not insulate us from a legacy of contamination. They *might* have recognized the PCBs’ usefulness *and* the inevitable injury. And in that instant of recognition our scientists could have given it Honor by *letting it be*.

If that was the moment of Soul Loss for PCBs, then that is also the moment of its Soul Retrieval. From a shamanic point of view - outside the usual strictures of time and space - it doesn’t matter that the opportunity for Respect and Honor seems to have long since passed. And that we have centuries of injury lying before us. Reality is not *linear*, only. Its spatial qualities allow other possibilities for recovery.

Since the revelation of its request I have been making offerings of Respect and Honor to PCBs at that critical moment of its inception. Imagine: right now even as you read this, new poisons are being enslaved - with names we don’t yet know - which one day will be added to our list, like Agent Orange, Dioxins, “Depleted” Uranium, DDT... What an opportunity for healing has been offered us, by Carol - and by Polychlorinated Biphenyls. A possibility for healing - and for knowing our place.

One of the reparations I’ve been making to PCBs for our myopic human arrogance is the telling of this story. Curiously, so far, it has evoked extreme responses. One listener immediately homed in on the issue of “enslavement” as one characteristic of not Respecting, of not Honoring. By this she means enslaving PCBs to do our bidding, regardless of our motivation or consequences. Enslaving others, whether humans *or* chemical compounds, always brings injury to those who enslave. Just as our river, once injured, injures us.

We humans have suffered a kind of collective memory-loss. We’ve forgotten to ask permission. We’ve forgotten to be grateful.

Another friend responded to my story by saying, “Wow! That’s a new thought!” Knowing

that he often uses ceremony in his work, I asked if he could imagine a ceremony we could create to offer the required Respect and Honor. He saw no reason for ceremony. The *shift in perception* - which he had just enjoyed - was all that he needed.

While I do agree, I can also imagine a circle of people who have felt the shift - or would *like* to - gathering together for the purpose of creating a ceremony to offer Soul Retrieval to *all* the “dangerous” entities we’ve thought we could enslave.

Another witness to the story, who had worked with radioactive material, responded with an emphatic “Yes!” to a ceremony of reconciliation and went home to write her own essay, “Talking to Toxins.”

Not everyone, however, responded to my revelations with a happy ca-click of shifting comprehension. Two people, on separate occasions, said “No!” They felt that PCBs are dangerous and to respect and honor them was only to further empower them. PCBs, they said, are already powerful enough. So don’t do it!

In each instance both I, and others present who understood the possibility for healing, tried to rephrase the revelation, hoping to inspire the same shift in thinking that we had experienced. The “Wow!” of recognizing a big idea with rippling healing potential. Unsuccessful, I wonder what it is they might be resisting. Do they prefer the war of good and evil to the compassionate stance of the open-hearted warrior? If they cannot imagine that everyone and everything suffers its own kind of Soul Loss then *what belief is it that serves them?*

Even now, in laboratories and war rooms all across the Earth, human beings are poised to choose either to respect and honor toxins or to lasso them with our feeble ropes of arrogance and fear, to make them “do our bidding.” Why would we *not* choose to interrupt this process with the brave possibility of reconciliation?

When Carol was with me, most recently, for our work together I showed her the symbol for the general molecular structure of PCBs, which I am now familiar with - thanks to my scientist friends. Most notable: the two hexagons, with a carbon bond. Without a moment’s hesitation she “read” the shapes. “Two stop signs,” she said. “Two stop signs.” If only the scientists could have read it so easily and so well.

As we settled into our time together that day, I asked how she was doing and if anything had shifted further for her since our last session. Yes, it had. Something significant. A cause for celebration. And perhaps a sign that her recovery was truly underway. She had begun, again, to dream.

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Sanctuary and School. www.dionondehowa.org The next 6-class series of “Thresholds: Shamanic Perception & Technique” begins in May, 2008. To join the series, or to schedule an appointment, please phone (518) 854-7764. Dionondehowa, an aboriginal place name long associated with the Battenkill, is said to translate to She Opens The Door For Them.