Shamanic Personal Transformation

In our previous article The Three Stages of Spiritual Unfolding, we offered some thoughts about our uniquely-human spiritual unfolding that takes place in stages during our lives. We began with Belief and mentioned how our belief systems can be greatly sustaining in the short term, but sooner or later, we notice that not much changes in our lives in the long term. Because of this, our beliefs eventually fail to compel us in the end, and it is usually then that the second stage kicks in--faith.

Faith soldiers on when our belief systems no longer compel us and it can be greatly sustaining which is why many choose to remain at this stage throughout their lives. But when faith is doing its job correctly, it brings us to the third stage of our spiritual unfolding: Direct Experience.

We're talking about the direct connection with the authentic transpersonal realms--those same mysterious regions that shamans call the spirit world. This connection profoundly and irreversibly changes us because when you've had the 'Aha! experience,' it's very difficult to un-have it. The direct experience of the spiritual world and its inhabitants represents a huge step in our spiritual unfolding because it brings us to the fourth stage of our spiritual maturation--Personal Transformation.

We are talking here about that ego-shattering, mind-expanding, and soul-enhancing experience known in the East as 'enlightenment' or sometimes in the West as becoming 'god-aware'. The experience is utterly life-transforming as it conveys to us the mantle of authentic initiation and provides us with knowledge about the nature of the Universe as well as our place and our role within it.

Nature as a Spiritual Bridge...

The experience often becomes available to us in response to what some call 'the deep psychic', a dramatic expansion of our awareness that may kick on through a powerful connection with Nature. And through 'nature mysticism,' we may step into a still higher stage of spiritual unfoldment, one that brings us into direct connection with our own immortal spiritual self aspect--our oversoul. This is the 'higher self' who 'hovers over us'--our god-self or angelic-self who breathed its seed of light into us when we took our first breath, and the one who will embrace and receive us back into itself when we release our last breath at life's end.

Once we establish connection with it, this ongoing contact with our oversoul allows us to experience still higher transpersonal levels, the Subtle and even the Causal Realms. This is what the ascended masters in both the Eastern and Western (and Indigenous) traditions have called true deity mysticism.

This is what really waits for us all out there on the trail... and it's up the hill, not down. We are to go upward
toward our own luminous destiny as souls traveling across eternity, not backward and downward into archaic and outdated belief systems. One more point is important to make here.

**Beyond Belief to Experience...**

When we have had that direct, transformative experience of spirit, we become aware that one of the traps of New Age spirituality is its equating of magical and mythic belief systems (e.g. believing ideas about the nature of reality) with the true transpersonal experiences of the deep psychic (nature mysticism) and the subtle realms (deity mysticism).

It is one thing to be inspired by listening to a theory or reading something--it is quite another to have a face-to-face encounter with these transpersonal forces.

The philosopher Ken Wilber calls this tendency "to equate magic and myth with the psychic and subtle to be the single defining characteristic of the New Age Movement." He exhorts us to stop confusing mythological stories with true transpersonal awareness, and points out that "the elevation of myth to subtle illumination is rampant in counter-cultural spirituality."

Does this mean that power animals and angels, as well as the gods and goddesses do not exist? Not at all--the fact is they are quite real. But we have to progress beyond belief and faith in order to experience them directly as they really are... as the light beyond the form, and the formless beyond the light. This is the power of the core journey method we teach because it provides you with a simple and robust system to have your own authentic direct experience.

**Beyond Law of Attraction to Being of Service...**

Does this also mean that the so-called law of attraction or the power of intention are invalid? Not at all--again they are quite real. They simply need to be experienced and worked with beyond the limiting values of belief and faith. When we engage with the compassionate archetypal forces who are poised to help us directly, everything becomes available to us... but it's not about worship. It's about relationship.

Something else that is important is your intention as you do journey work and start to enter into relationship with transpersonal forces. Are you seeking connection to 'get something' material? Or are you doing the work from a place of service for the highest good for yourself, those around you and those you are connecting with? If the former then you may be stuck in the negative polarity of the ego's wants and this may influence the outcome.

Finally we might also mention here something about the common practice of using card decks for guidance. Instead of pulling a power animal card or an angel card from an oracle deck and then reading in a book (or on the card) to see what message it has for you, you can make a shamanic journey into your sacred garden, into your personal place of power and healing, and once there you can call in that animal power or angelic symbol you've drawn. Then ask it directly why it has come to you and what it's guidance for you may be. In this way you transform the practice from a magic and mythic based reading to a personalized divinely guided experience.

As many of you know, this is what we teach and do in our workshops, and with relation to organized religion and spirituality in general, Hank is fond of observing that it's definitely time for an upgrade.