

# **Sometimes Miracles Happen**

**On Saami Shamanism and  
Traditional Healing**

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# Introduction

By now I have studied the phenomenon of shamanism and traditional healing in depth for three decades. Besides extensive theoretical studies I have done field work during numerous journeys in northern Sweden, Norway and Finland. This has resulted in a several books on these topics, among them

- **Var tids noaidi – Samisk shamanism** (*A Noaidi for Each Time – Saami shamanism*)
- **Vandrare i två världar** (*Wanderers in Two Worlds*)
- **Samisk shamanism** (*Saami Shamanism*)
- **Blodstämmare och handpåläggare – folklig läkekonst och magi i Tornedalen och Lappland** (*Blood staunching and the laying on of hands – traditional healing and magic in Tornedalen and Lapland*)

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I have myself also for many years now been working with shamanic trance-methods in order to explore both the ordinary and the non-ordinary reality. In 2003 and 2008 I had the opportunity to deepen my studies in the Saami shamanic tradition by journeying in *Sápmi* and doing interviews with Saami shamans living in Oslo. I have studied the Saami way of healing mainly because it is a continuously strong, living and dynamic tradition. But I have also interviewed non-Saami healers in both Norway and Sweden. All in all I have had extensive talks with around 15 active healers, but there are many more persons in this northern region who are active as healers or problem solvers. This is a living tradition that will continue to be practiced and developed as long as people have a need for it.

This booklet was originally written in 2004 and it is an attempt at a systematic analysis of shamanism and traditional healing. What is happening when the healer stops bleeding or sends away pain? Which explanations do they give themselves? Is there at all any theoretical model that can explain this way of curing diseases? My view is that one can both analyze and learn from the phenomena that are bunched together under concepts such as traditional healing and shamanism and I invite the readers to take part in this analysis that took me 30 years to work out.

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# An ancient and living art of healing

Shamanism has been defined as a pre-technological basic art of healing for Life's all crises. Diseases have probably been around just as long as there have been human beings, and just that long people have used different methods to cure or prevent diseases.

The oldest rock paintings, that are at least 30.000 years old, are swarmed with shamanic motives, just as the rock carvings in Alta and Nämforsen. They depict human beings with animal heads or wings and humans being transformed into animals and vice versa, i.e. a symbolic description of the oldest doctors of all, the shamans.

The word *shaman* comes originally from the language of the Tungus people of Siberia and simply means the one who knows. In most cultures these persons have been characterized by terms that are derived from words connected to knowing and seeing. Among the Saami the shaman has been called noaidie, which means the one who sees, and in the Swedish tradition we hear of wisemen and wisewomen.

The shaman is thus a person who knows or sees things that most other people don't. This sort of doctors/problem solvers have existed in most cultures all over the world, and still today there are living shamanic traditions in Indian cultures in North and South America, among the Inuit, the Saami and other Arctic peoples, in Siberia, Korea, Tibet and among the Aborigines in Australia, just to mention some of them.

Both men and women could become shamans in most cultures, even if the anthropological research first of all has studied male shamanism. Most often because the researchers have been male with no access to a female shamanic sphere, but just as often due to gender prejudices. These researchers could not imagine that the women in the cultures they explored had their own spiritual traditions and a healing art of their own. Therefore it is not until recent times that it has been disclosed how extensive and advanced the shamanic tradition has been also among women e.g. among the Saami and the Aborigines.

What characterizes a shaman is that he/she can cure diseases and solve all sorts of important problems, both for the individuals of their own society and for society

as a whole. It can be a question of tracking down strayed reindeer, figuring out where the game resides, bringing about rain to the crops, averting frost, keeping predators away and trying to see into the future on behalf of the society. The shaman is talked about as a mediator between a spiritual dimension and this world, as a link between the spiritual world and the humans. Among the shaman's tasks is also included a responsibility to see to it that his/her own tribe lives in the right way, i.e. follows the rules of conduct laid down in the myths of the tribe. The shaman has also acted as a ceremonial leader in order to maintain a desirable balance between the human beings and the spiritual world.

The anthropologists who have studied shamanism have also defined shamans from the methods that are used to fulfil all these tasks. The most characteristic trait of the shaman is the trance or, as others call it, the ecstasy. It means that the shaman with the aid of drum, dance, fasting, song/yoik or drugs goes into an altered state of consciousness, where his/her consciousness is expanded in order to make it receptive to information that is otherwise hidden. If you express that in a more traditional shamanic language, you could say that the shaman sends his/her soul to other worlds (upper or lower world) in order to receive knowledge and get into contact with his/her spiritual helpers (protective spirits, power animals, spirit teachers) who assist the shaman in the tasks that are to be carried out.

### **A swarm of forms**

The interesting thing is that the shamanic traditions are so similar around the globe, even in cultures that have never been in contact with each other. That indicates that shamanism has arisen directly from the needs of the human beings instead of being spread from a centre to the different corners of the world. That the methods have become so similar is quite simply an expression of the fact that they have been interpreted as rational and that they have worked.

Shamanism is not a religion even if it has a spiritual dimension. On the other hand one might say that it is a precursor of some religious practices. Because shamanism so downright relies on individual experiences and not on doctrines, it ended up in opposition to the religions that gradually developed into centralized and authoritarian churches. As a result of many and prolonged confrontations with above all Christianity, and also more modern doctrines of faith as Stalinism, shamanism either more or less went underground or entered into symbiosis with elements from the new religions. During that process Authority simply killed off shamans, e.g. in Sápmi, or drained shamanism of much of its core methods, above all ecstasy and drumming.

This has brought about a shamanism that has assumed a myriad of different forms. Here we find everything from traditional and original ecstasy shamanism, e.g. in Siberia and North America, via Catholically influenced ceremonial healers in South America, to persons who have a mastery of only a small part of the original all-embracing shamanism, e.g. blood staunchers in Tornedalen.

The original tasks of the shaman have been split up in a multitude of different functions carried out by different persons. A person in Tornedalen who masters

only the power to staunch blood should therefore not be called a shaman, and that is why the term healer has been introduced.

The shaman is a very versatile and all-capable person, the one who sees and knows. The healer on the other hand is specialized in one or a few tasks, e.g. staunching blood or putting away pain. But there are big differences also among the healers. Some of them take care of all sorts of diseases, including cancer, and receive patients from far and near. We can call them great healers. Others work more in secret, helping their own family or the closest village circle, and they usually master only one or a few diseases. We can call them small healers.

Of course there is a very great scope regarding the degree of knowledge and power, but let us remember that also the small healers trace their origin from shamanism, the pre-technological basic art of healing for Life's all crises. Besides, I want to underline, that all these categories do exist at the same time and side by side in today's world – here we find everything from great shamans in the original sense to family healers. The ancient shamanic tradition has a great variety of forms and it is “still alive and kicking”.

# Rational or magical cure?

Traditional healing is present as an undercurrent even in the age of modernity. There are many explanations to this. People call on traditional healers because the distance to the health centre and the educated doctor can be too long, both in a geographical and cultural way. Or the health centre or the hospital has not been able to cure what one suffers from. People consult the help of a healer as a last resort. Or the situation is so acute that one needs help more or less instantly, e.g. if one cuts oneself and suffers from a severe bleeding when working in the reindeer pasture. Then the man or woman who can staunch bleeding might be the only alternative. Or one might consider the ailment so trivial or awkward that it is possible to look for help only in one's closest circle.

Concerning the interest in shamanism, the great art of healing, one can notice that it has increased considerably in many indigenous cultures for the last decades, e.g. among the Saami. This shamanic renaissance is part of a much greater trend in today's globalized world, namely the search for a cultural identity of one's own and the struggle for political power and self-determination. That modern Saamis reconquer and renew their shamanic tradition is simply one of the expressions of the fact that the Saami have entered the historical scene as subjects.

Here we can also find a connection to what is usually called New Age, even if the "neo-shamanic" practitioners stress that they devote themselves to something that ought to be called Old Age. There is a great openness for and interest in alternative ways of thinking, both in general outlines and small details. Healing, which is one of the shaman's methods, is a phenomenon flourishing in the modern brew of alternative forms of therapy.

Alternative therapists have incorporated elements of healing traditions from all over the world. At the same time there has been a feedback from modern, alternative methods back to the world of the traditional healer. Today we can see Saami healers working with crystal therapy, talking about chakras and buying their medicine from the health foods shelter in their co-op. Everything is allowed. The patient hardly cares if the method that brings cure is a concoction from many different sources, or if it is a pure and uncorrupted traditional method that has managed to withstand several centuries of persecution from the authorities and the church. What is functional survives.

## **Saami, Finnish, Swedish**

The art of healing that is being practiced in the northern regions I have studied comes from three different cultures – Saami, Finnish and Swedish. They have existed side by side for many years and mutually cross-fertilized each other. But still today you can see several differences between them. The Saami tradition is more bent on interplay with the forces of nature, such as the healer bringing forth power at certain sacred places, or working with conceptions such as *spiritual companions* or *protective spirits*, or applying healing methods directly connected to nature, reindeer or reindeer herding.

The Finnish tradition can be described as a more ritual art of healing with the murmuring of invocations, the use of knives or other magical objects and drastic methods such as blood-letting. And of course, with the sauna as a central place of power and healing. The Swedish tradition could then be described as a more soft art of healing bent on the laying on of hands and using different herbs. But in these regions crossing borders is an everyday act, and the different traditions have intertwined in a way that has brought about a great diversity. Furthermore healers in general have very strong personalities and they do of course put their own touch on the methods that they have inherited or acquired in other ways. The healer is a dynamic person seeking new knowledge and correcting and developing his/her methods in order to be as functional as possible.

Thereby the healers have created an abundance of different methods that have been used and still are being used in the traditional art of healing. I will describe just a few typical methods since I am not interested in the differences but in what connects these methods, i.e. the underlying way of thinking and acting.

### **Thought, gaze and hands**

The most frequent remedy of the healer is his/her own thought. He/she thinks of his/her patient, whether the patient is present in the room or far away. For the healer it is simply a matter of directing his/her mental energy and concentration towards a certain person. And this can be done in such a concentrated way that the healer enters a kind of trance. The thought can also be combined with a prayer or an invocation that the healer reads out loud or silent to himself/herself. The most common practice is to just murmur the prayer so that the patient perceives that something powerful is spoken but not exactly what is spoken. The prayer can take form of a song or a yoik, which was the original method. The healer is yoiking forth his/her spiritual helpers and orders the disease to leave the patient in peace.

The thought can also be combined with a piercing gaze. There are numerous evidences that the healer could muster a really terrifying gaze during the healing ceremony, e.g. during blood-staunching. This can express that the healer has entered an altered state of consciousness (trance), but it can also express that gazing is the primary method of the healer. In Kautokeino there are healers today who use their gaze as their foremost method. They simply say that they *look at* the diseased place to make the patient well. It is basically the same method as when other modern healers say that they *think* of their patients to make them well.

In Saami traditional shamanism the drum was used when curing diseases. The purpose of this was to put both healer and patient in an altered state of consciousness, where they were accessible to the energy that was needed in order to make healing possible.

The mental concentration is often combined with the laying on of hands. The healer puts his/her hands on the diseased place or on the head of the patient. It can be a tranquil laying on of hands or a more active massage. The underlying thought is that the healer in this case constitutes a link between a healing power and the patient. Almost always the healer is of the opinion that the power comes from the outside, from God, or cosmos, depending on which theoretical explanatory method that is used.

These basic methods are often combined with different objects, ointments or herbs. It can be objects connected to the different elements (earth, water, air, fire), it can be steel, other metals or minerals that are considered to have a protective function, and it can be animal parts such as teeth, claws or feathers that can give extra power to the healer. The objects with the utmost power are objects connected to death, such as earth from a cemetery, splinters from a corpse's board or even parts from a human corpse. This has often been associated with so called black magic, i.e. methods to put evil on others, but has in reality mainly been used within the ordinary, constructive art of healing. This is because diseases were considered to come from the sphere of death, but even more so because death was considered as a great source of both wisdom and power.

### **Driving out and retrieving**

All these different methods and remedies rest on two main foundations. In classic shamanism and healing cure was achieved through

- 1) removing what had penetrated the patient and caused the disease
- 2) retrieving or adding what was missing by the patient and caused the suffering.

What had penetrated the patient could be a disease spirit or a destructive power that someone else had sent in the form of a so called *gand* or *trollskott* (magic arrow). If the disease on the other hand was diagnosed as a lack, it could be the soul or a part of the soul that had left the patient and must be brought back. That could be very tricky because it might even be in the realm of death, and fetching it back from there was a task that was associated with great danger to the shaman.

These original understandings have survived for long in a modernized and diluted form. It was considered that you could catch a disease if you put up your tent in a place where the underworld people lived, or if you threw away laundry water where the elves had their dwelling place, or if you angered the protective spirit at a certain place (the *husatomte*). And even in modern alternative therapies these conceptions have made a comeback, but with new names. And there are hardly even any modern physicians who do not agree that most physical diseases also have a mental dimension.

Shamanism and the traditional art of healing have been an object of scientific interest for a long time. From the beginning it was a directly hostile interest,

branding these traditions as superstition, blind faith and quackery. Later they were seen as a more harmless phenomenon, a phenomenon in the process of withering away as modernism gained a footing. Dissertations on Saami pre-Christian religion with titles such as "*The end of drum-time*" show that also contemporary scholars are out of touch with what is cooking in the popular depths. To be quite honest I must admit though that something seems to be in progress even within the scientific disciplines, above all in Norway. The university of Tromsø has e.g. devoted considerable energy to the study of traditional healing both among Saamis and non-Saamis and this has been done in a non-patronizing way, as an expression of a different tradition of knowledge.

### **A functional tradition**

The reason why traditional healing still survives, and even makes a comeback in its more classic shamanic form, is of course that it has proved to be functional. It cures and comforts human beings. At least to such an extent that makes it possible for it to survive. One aspect of traditional healing, that is quite easily accepted by scientific medicine (and the pharmaceutical industry), is the rational one. Many of the herbs and animal parts, that have been used, contain substances that unquestionably can alleviate pain or stimulate the immune defence system of the body. This booklet however is not dedicated to the rational side of traditional healing but to its magical side, something that modern science not quite has grasped.

The healer in most cases has an alternative, magical, theory of knowledge. Where the modern scientist, in a traditional medicine herb, sees its biochemical property to alleviate pain, the healer certainly can agree about that, but at the same time has an alternative opinion of what really is happening. In the tradition of the healer exactly this herb might have a spiritual quality, a sort of magical incarnation, which is considered to be more important. One of the best examples is the peyote cactus, which contains substances that can bring about audiovisual hallucinations with simultaneous effects of soothing and alleviating pain. To those American Indian cultures that use peyote the rational explanations are uninteresting. To them it is Mother Peyote who is responsible for the favourable effects, and the important thing is the meeting with the spiritual aspect of peyote. I am convinced that many of the medicine herbs and animal parts, that have been used (and still are used) in traditional healing in northern Sweden, Norway and Finland, have been selected just because they are considered to possess a special spiritual energy. Even in the rational there is a magical/spiritual aspect.

Regarding the healing methods that usually have been termed magical, e.g. the power of thought and the laying on of hands, we undoubtedly have to do with an alternative tradition of knowledge and conception of the world. But the term magic indicates something that has to do with mumbo jumbo, and that leads our thoughts in the wrong direction. Instead I want to talk about a holistic tradition of knowledge, that doesn't see any decisive or impenetrable borderlines between man and his surroundings, between man and animal, between man and a spiritual dimension.

# An alternative tradition of knowledge

In addition to curing diseases, among the many tasks of the shaman we also find influencing wind and weather, looking for lost objects, persons and animals, tracking game, cornering predators and thieves. These are tasks not only mastered by shamans, but also by small healers who have specialized in separate tasks. And these are tasks performed even today. I will give a few examples.

To influence wind and weather can be of utmost importance to societies living on the margin in barren regions, e.g. Indians supporting themselves on growing corn and beans in the semi-deserts of South-western USA, or reindeer herding Saamis who are dependent on favourable snow and ice conditions. Among American Indians the Hopis residing in Arizona are considered to be masters of rain-making. They achieve this by regularly performing rain ceremonies for the purpose of maintaining the delicate balance of their barren region, and make sure that the rains arrive at an appropriate time. Among these ceremonies is included one that might be the most famous to the world around, i.e. the rattle snake dance, where the dancers carry captured rattle snakes between their teeth while dancing.

I have myself witnessed a very special event of a similar kind, but in quite another setting, when an extremely old Hopi spiritual leader blessed an international conference. This happened in Rotterdam in 1980 during the inauguration of the Russell Tribunal dealing with the unfair treatment of the indigenous peoples in the Americas. After the inauguration ceremony, which was performed in the Hopi language and which we Westerners didn't understand a bit of, Rotterdam was that night hit by an unusually violent thunderstorm. When I was awakened in my hotel room in the middle of the night by the flashing lightning, I immediately connected the thunderstorm to the Hopi elder. Right or wrong?

I have also close at hand seen how shamans with the help of a rain ceremony and quite contrary to the weather forecasts from the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute, managed to break a prolonged early summer dry spell. And the modern Saami shaman Eirik Myrhaug in Oslo claims that he, on a couple of occasions, have been able to influence the weather, e.g. making fog lift or making a snowstorm abate.

It is common knowledge in today's popular tradition that there are clairvoyant people who can find lost objects and human beings. In his/her own mind the clairvoyant person usually sees the object and such details of the surroundings,

that it is possible to locate what is looked for. Eirik Myrhaug has told me about another method, where he helped finding a lost person by using his own thought to open up the mind of the lost person's father so that he got an intuitive knowledge of the place.

### **Thought influences matter**

There are hundreds, maybe thousands of stories about healers cornering thieves. A classical variant is about the healer who utters a formula with the purpose of freezing the person who has stolen his property. In the morning the thief stands there as frozen with his hands on the desirable object. The healer gives the thief a strong slap in the face so he comes to and runs off. Even today you can hear such stories. The blood stauncher Yngve Perthu in Pajala has told his own variant to me;

Once someone stole a couple of expensive tools from my garage. When I discovered it I said to myself, what the devil, he must come back with my things. The following night I heard someone coming to the garage and in the morning I saw that the tools were back. Who it was? Well, I'm not sure but I have my suspicions.

We don't have to bother about the possibility or the difficulty in verifying stories of this kind. The interesting thing is the way of thinking they express, and I will try to summarize that in a modern language. The basis is that you, with your thought, can influence not only yourself and your own actions but also other human beings, animals, and natural phenomena such as rain, snow and wind. The healer is together with all other beings situated in a common energy field. In this field not only actions, but thoughts as well, have significance. The thoughts and actions of the healer, and everybody else, have effect on other beings in the common field. And vice versa. The healer is, like everyone else, influenced by what others think and do. What differs the healer from ordinary people is that he/she has trained a special ability to concentrate and direct his/her mental power in a conscious way.

Everything is alive and the energy is in everything. I can command and influence that energy to a certain extent. Everybody has access to this energy, but some people have a greater talent (Eirik Myrhaug).

The active intervention by the healer therefore has a higher quality and a more profound effect than the thoughts and actions of ordinary people. And in the same way as the healer wants to influence more strongly than other people with his/her directed energy, he/she also wants to avoid being influenced in a negative way by the thoughts and actions of other people. The healer wants to maximize the effect of his/her own thoughts, but minimize the effects on himself/herself from the thoughts of other people. I will now give examples on how the healers themselves describe and explain their activities.

# The divine power

## Miracle Mikkel

*Mikkel Gaup* was one of the great healers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Finnmark. He passed away a few years ago, and I met him in 1986 when he was living in Eiby south of Alta. At that time he was around 70 years old and very vital and powerful. In popular speech he was called *Miracle Mikkel* (=Miracle Fox). He had a drum, which he said that he used at his sacrificial place and he had inherited his power from his grandfather.

*Mikkel Gaup's* method of healing was apparently simple. He could bring his patient into his bathroom and then he started working with his hands over the patient's body. From the top downwards with circling massaging movements. Then he shook off his hands at the window or by the washbasin. He also devoted himself to healing at a distance. Then he could request the patient to lie down on a bed and close his/her eyes. Then *Mikkel* sent his power by thinking of the patient. I was myself treated in this way at a distance of more than 1000 kilometres. When resting in my bed I had visions of *Mikkel* together with several animals. I mentioned this to *Mikkel* when I met him in person. He chuckled joyfully.

- *It is telepathy. Many people who have these visions for the first time get scared, but I think you are used to it.*
- *I stick to the old Saami belief. It is ten thousand years old. The white man's religion has just brought the atomic bomb.*
- *The Great Spirit is in everything. All human beings have part in the Spirit, but Christianity takes that away from the people and calls it the devil. But there is no devil. The only devils are people who do evil to nature and to other beings. That we have come so far away from The Great Spirit is the cause of the evil things happening in the world.*

*Mikkel* wouldn't reveal anything more of his method. It was supposed to be passed on to his own children. Without a doubt he can be characterized as a shaman and a great healer who drew his power from nature in a very traditional way and primarily cured with the power of his thought, his part of The Great Spirit.

## **Henrik Kuhmunen**

*Henrik Kuhmunen* who was a reindeer herdsman living outside Jokkmokk had a different attitude. He was much more open than Mikkel Gaup and he manufactured his own ointments and decoctions. He was famous for his skill in curing eczema, wounds and other affections of the skin with his ointments and the laying on of hands, but he also took care of more difficult ailments, and he could cure with mental power at a distance. An important element was the formula reading, i.e. the words of power that *Kuhmunen* read out loud over his medicine and to his patient.

*Henrik Kuhmunen* was a very humble man, who had amalgamated Saami and Christian terminology. He stressed the dualistic character of life, especially the antagonism and the struggle between the light and the dark power, which he called The Holy Spirit and The Black Master respectively. Once, a very long time ago, he decided to work exclusively with the power of The Holy Spirit.

- *The Holy Spirit has created everything and has the greatest power and it is more effective to cure with the help of that power, because that is the power that constructs the universe.*
- *I acquire my power by believing in and praying to The Holy Spirit. And I acquire my power in the forest. Not in any particular place. I acquire power from the whole of Nature.*

## **Per Simma**

The Saami craftsman *Per Simma* resides in Lannavaara and is known as a healer in a large area. His father was a healer and so is his brother Lars, also living in Lannavaara. Per plays down the importance of the tradition he works in and he stresses that he walks his own way. He can use ointments and massage, but his main method is the laying on of hands and prayer.

- *There are no oddities in curing. Nature has remedies for everything. Nature must run its course. There is always a reason why you are in pain for example. When you find that reason then the pain will disappear.*
- *The most important thing is faith. I don't cure with my own power. It is the patient's faith in my ability to cure him, that makes him well. Faith can cure everything. In the last resort the cure comes from God, and he can work through me because I believe in his power.*
- *It is the same thing when you staunch bleeding. You don't have to see the patient. It is enough to know that the person needs help, and that he believes that you do something. Those who use formulae when staunching blood need the words because they believe that they need them. And that's why the words work also.*
- *There is a good power and an evil power. It is the good power that cures, and the evil one that gives rise to diseases and other sufferings. When I cure I pray to God that he shall take care of it all. I can not cure. I only function as a channel for a greater power. I don't have to know when people were born, or where they live, or such things that other healers ask*

*for. God knows who needs help, and I can only pray that the person who has asked me for help, will get well.*

### **Adolf Kelottijärvi**

*Adolf Kelottijärvi* originally comes from northern Finland but for many years he worked as a miner and a factory worker all around Sweden. When he retired from working life he moved to Övre Soppero, where he began working as a healer after he one day heard a strong inner voice urging him to start helping sick people. Nowadays he lives in Haparanda and often *Today's rose* in the local newspaper shows that he has helped many people. *Adolf Kelottijärvi* is a healer working with his hands and mental power, often via the phone.

- *I am not a Christian, but I have got my power from God and I am very grateful for that. I have had the gift for many years but it was not until 1987 that I began using it.*
- *I never promise to cure anyone. I tell them that I will try. I put my hands where the patients are ill, or where they have troubles. They say that warmth radiates from my hands. I think that the patient will get well, and I have succeeded rather well I think. At first I was amazed that it worked so often and that I had received the gift.*
- *When I lay my hands on the patient, I concentrate deeply, and I have no other thoughts than that the patient must get well. And I think of words from the Bible that I use. I concentrate for 5-6 minutes. Sometimes there is an inner voice telling me where the patient is in pain.*
- *The patient's faith means very much, perhaps 90-99 percent of the cure. But if people come here, they do it because they believe in my ability.*
- *It is more difficult to cure over the phone, but that also depends on what disease it is about. It is important that I can hear the voice or read the handwriting, so I can get a picture of the patient.*

Why does healing at a distance function?

- *You will have to ask God about that. He gave me the gift. But the thought moves very fast.*
- *To become a healer you must have been ill yourself. Then you know how sick people are getting on. A healer also must be a soft human being. He must love his fellow beings just as much as he loves himself, and it is necessary that he wants to help them. This doesn't suit everybody. Only certain humans get this gift.*

### **Yngve Perthu**

*Yngve Perthu* is a retired truck driver in Pajala, who is known for his ability to staunch bleeding and removing eczema. His abilities are associated with the formula for staunching blood that he got from his grandmother when he was 18-19 years old.

- *I have no idea about what is working. But it is obvious that it works. The words I use come from the Bible. This is no magical trick, but I don't know what it is that works.*
- *You must have an image of the human being, therefore it goes best with someone you know. But it doesn't matter if that person is far away. I think of the words and then it stops bleeding. Grandma said that you have to be calm. You must keep the words in your memory, and they shall be read out three times. You are not allowed to write them down on a piece of paper. I finish off with counting backwards from seven to nought. When I come to nought the bleeding has stopped.*
- *You feel a bit strange when you have staunched bleeding. It is a sort of fatigue. You are not quite yourself afterwards. It remains in your thoughts for quite a time, but when you start doing something else, you come back to normal again.*

*Yngve Perthu* follows an old local tradition, which says that you can teach others to staunch blood if they are younger than you. Otherwise you will lose your power. *Yngve* told me that he had taught his son, a daughter and a niece. His son, *Anders Perthu*, who is a bus driver in Pajala, has later appeared on TV as a blood stauncher, and so has *Anders'* own daughter *Teresia*. She is around 20 years old, and it is very unusual that such a young person masters the art and, in addition, comes forth in public with this ability. Both *Anders* and *Teresia* stress that they are not Christians, and that the formula that they use doesn't have any Christian contents, something which is uncommon in Tornedalen.

### **Torbjörn Arnold**

*Torbjörn Arnold* works as a male nurse in Jokkmokk and once got the opportunity to learn the art of blood staunching from an old man who was his patient. *Torbjörn*, who, among other things, has devoted himself to the study of the Saami use of medicine herbs, has in his turn taught several young Saamis how to staunch blood. What happens when you staunch blood?

- *The veins seem to contract. It is not the blood that is coagulating. The veins are controlled by the autonomous nervous system. It is possible that you can influence that. It is really about an enormous effort. Mentally trying. I am quite exhausted afterwards.*
- *When staunching blood I am in a light trance. That was part of my teacher's story about how you should behave. Although he used words as strain and concentration. I get an inner image of how it is whitening around the wound and then stops bleeding. Soon after, this occurs in reality as well.*

### **Randi Irene Losoa**

*Randi Irene Losoa* is a Saami freelance journalist just over 50 years of age, who lives in Bugöynes by Varangerfjorden in the far eastern part of Finnmarken. In her book *Veiviserne* (The Guides) she describes how the healing power came to her. It

is a detailed description of a classic shamanic initiation. *Randi* has remarkable visions, dreams, audiovisual hallucinations and physical sensations that torments her and makes her bewildered. In spite of the fact she has grown up in a culture where healers are everyday phenomena, she has no one to help her to cope with these events in a constructive way. Not until she makes contact with the shaman *Eirik Myrhaug* in Oslo. He realizes that she has to do with an initiation, and he can help her to receive, process and interpret the experiences. It appears that the experiences come from an American Indian spiritual teacher, who is trying to reach *Randi*. Gradually she accepts her healing power and she reluctantly shoulders the responsibility that accompanies the power. When I meet *Randi* in Bugöynes in the Autumn 2003 she radiates a clarified peace.

- *The power came gradually. In the beginning it was terrible. I was frightened. Had no control whatsoever. Now I can decide myself when the power shall come. It is an intelligent power that knows what it does. I can communicate with it. It comes when I need it and then it goes away.*
- *I am sure that this healing tradition has existed within my family, but that it has disappeared due to the Christian oppression. My grandmother interpreted dreams, and my grandfather have shown up in my dreams.*
- *Nowadays the power feels just like a physical sensation. I don't think so much about it any longer. It just comes when I need it.*
- *Most often I help others via the phone. People call about their problems. I ask them to relax, close their eyes and put their hand on the painful or sick place. Then the power comes to me immediately. It comes into my head and moves out in my arms and I can send it away.*
- *Possibly there is a light change in my state of consciousness when the power arrives, but I am fully present here and now and I have control.*

How would you like to categorize this power? Some healers talk about God.

- *I call it the divine power. Everybody has it inside but it is just as with musicality. Some people have it stronger.*
- *You can do a lot of things with the power. Cure diseases, influence things. But you are not allowed to use the power in a negative way. If you send away evil, it will come back as a boomerang.*
- *Most people who call me are interested in their own spiritual development. But it must all be about more than "my self". I try to make that clear. The world has greater needs. We must contribute to the efforts to put an end to wars and destruction of the environment.*

## **Eirik Myrhaug**

*Eirik Myrhaug* comes from a Sea Saami family in Sörtroms. There have been shamans in his family, but *Eirik* himself has walked a winding path before eventually coming forward as a healer and shaman. *Eirik* is an educated construction engineer and has worked with the building of roads and power stations both in Norway and Sweden. When working as an engineer he developed a theory of ecological economy and initiated so called exchange circles, where people exchange goods and services without going via the system of capitalist

commodity production. When *Eirik* was in his thirties his father passed on his healing formulae to him, and later *Eirik* learned shamanic drumming from the Saami shaman *Ailo Gaup*. *Eirik* is 57 years old and since 1992 active in Oslo as a full-time healer. Since 1996 he arranges workshops in shamanism with Saami contents.

- *I usually talk about three pillars of my activity. The teachings of Jesus, Buddhism and Nature.*
- *My father's prayer formulae had a Christian terminology, and I was surprised that they immediately worked for me. Later I have changed the formulae and created my own prayers, but just like my father I always use The Lord's Prayer. We can ask for things. But we do not decide, and I can not promise anything. The core sentence in The Lord's Prayer is "and your will be done".*
- *I get a lot of inspiration from the teachings of Jesus. At first I felt resistance to shamanism. I was frightened and thought that it was too mysterious. But when I came into the healing power, I simply had to accept it.*
- *I perceive myself as a Christ-shaman. The awareness in the myth of Christ with crucifixion, death and resurrection has parallels to shamanism. It has to do with the importance of death. Our Saami ancestors went into the sacred mountains, Saiva, when they died. It was possible for shamans to make contact with the dead people in Saiva and get help from them.*

How does healing work?

- *The explanations of quantum physics that everything is connected is the only explanation I can think of. Everything is connected. The subject influences the observed object. Mental energy can influence matter.*
- *If the healing is to work, the client must also be prepared to receive healing. There is a right time and place. And sometimes there are miracles.*

Now *Eirik* devotes himself mainly to healing at a distance, via the phone, but he also receives patients in his consulting room, and there he uses a drum and the laying on of hands in combination with prayers.

- *I am in an altered state of consciousness when I perform healing. I feel that I am in contact with the power, but it is a light trance. I am inside the energy, but at the same time I am present in the room.*
- *To many patients it means an opening that I use both the drum and The Lord's Prayer. It is positive to many people. Some even say: you have taught me how to pray.*

## **Ailo Gaup**

*Ailo Gaup* came forward as a shaman in the late eighties, and with his sharp profile and his persistent workshop activities he has had an immense importance to the renaissance of Saami shamanism. Many persons, that I have met, talk with

great respect of how much *Ailo* has meant to them. He was born outside Kautokeino in 1944 but was brought up in a foster-family in southern Norway, and he had to reconquer his Saami identity as an adult. After a career in Oslo as a journalist, and later as a praised poet and author, he has for the last ten years worked full-time with shamanism. After living in Kautokeino for two separate periods he now lives in Oslo again. First of all *Ailo* devotes himself to advanced training courses but also to healing and the making of drums.

- *My starting-point is Saami and the local Saami tradition of power animals, yoik and the elements of nature. Then I have proceeded from the local tradition to the world heritage. This is everywhere. Saami shamanism has local characteristics, but the experiences are the same in all traditions and belong to the world heritage. I have been inspired by many different shamanic traditions.*
- *Shamans have different functions. Teacher, healer, clown, artist. I work with all these archetypes. I work much for the sake of my own curiosity and creativity and the inner mystery. I am a shaman in the classical meaning. I have a holistic approach.*
- *I use the drum and yoik in healing. It is primarily about giving energy or taking energy away. I talk with the patient for about 20 minutes, then I drum and yoik and then we talk. A healing session lasts for around two hours. But I don't want to be a full-time healer. I insist that I will not shoulder the role of the therapist.*

What prospects do you see for the shamanic work?

- *Shamans delivered premises for the right way to live. They raised a meaning with the different phases of life, a meaning that they rooted and expressed within their tribe. Today it is all about how the power can be expressed in our age.*
- *It is about liberation from ways of thinking, power structures and hierarchical conceptions. Liberation of the individual human being. To dissolve limiting concepts that people have about themselves and their place in society.*
- *There is a state that is free from limitations that you yourself or others have placed upon you. My way of thinking is here inspired by Buddhism. I want to be as I really am and let others be as they really are.*

# Quantum physics and ritual drama

In the previous chapters I have shown that shamanism and the traditional healing art, in the northern parts of Scandinavia, is a living and dynamic tradition with a capacity of adjusting to a changing world and a changing social consciousness. It also has the capacity of spreading in space, partly because people move to urban centres, partly by utilizing modern means of communication such as Internet.

Two of the shamans most talked about today, *Eirik Myrhaug* and *Ailo Gaup*, have transferred their main activity from the Saami principal area to Oslo, urban centre and cultural melting-pot. Furthermore they have their own websites, where they describe their activities, advertise their own courses and so on.

This is something new. Previously shamans and healers were mainly active in a local community. In which communities are the shamans of modern times active after transferring their business to the big city?

- *Some shamans were more tightly bound to their local community, but many shamans were also travelling about. I stand between the worlds. I work with people in Kautokeino, but my tribe consists of the groups taking part in my three-year educational programme. Those groups consist mainly of non-Saamis. (Ailo Gaup)*
- *The shaman always worked in relation to his local community. Today the work is founded on networks. My network is people who come to see me and who attend my courses. (Eirik Myrhaug)*

## **Shamanism and modernity**

The shamans have moved on to the big city and the world wide web, where there is a certain risk that they are merely regarded as spicy elements in the huge brew of miscellaneous alternative therapies. But there is enormously much that distinguishes *Myrhaug* and *Gaup* from the majority of the alternative therapists. They really stand out from the New Age crowd. I think of their background in traditional Saami culture, their frank account of which impulses they have melt together and their ability to, nevertheless, stand out as Saami shamans.

At the same time they are part of a greater movement among the Saami and other indigenous peoples, a movement striving for self-determination, strengthened cultural identity, and political power. Both in Norway and Sweden the Saami have such a powerful position that it would be impossible today for an ordinary Norwegian or Swede to learn a few shamanic methods and then pose as a Saami shaman. On the other hand it happens that Norwegians or Swedes learn a few American Indian ceremonies and then start acting as some sort of plastic shamans in Indian outfit.

The majority of the healers, however, stay up north, active in their local community, even if some of them are connected to the world through Internet. It really is the year 2004, even in Lannavaara and Bugöynes, and my impression is that Saamis very easily accept and make use of new technology. If you visit the Saami portal [www.same.net](http://www.same.net) you can see a really great variety of Saami web sites – enterprises, shops, associations, parties, the Saami parliaments, newspapers, museums and so on.

Thus there are different ways of adapting to the present-day globalized stage of post-modern capitalist commodity production. That shamanism and the art of healing succeeds in doing this is an expression of their inherent strength, and of the fact that they are still considered to be functional by both the practitioners and the clients. Traditional healing is not associated with static conceptions and dogma. Because cultural conditions and people's ideas of diseases continually change, traditional healing will also change.

Nowadays the media pay great attention to alternative methods of treatment, and the healers themselves can propagate their names with the help of Internet. Everything is possible and most things are allowed in the post-modern world, where neither the State nor the Church any longer has a monopoly of how to interpret reality and what people should think and believe. Globalization has not, as many people have feared, lead to stupidity, but instead to an increased variety of systems of thought, spiritual traditions, healing arts and all sorts of other cultural expressions.

### **Dynamic tradition**

Shamanism and traditional healing is not a museum phenomenon but a dynamic process that offers its users functional and, to them, relevant forms of treatment.

The anthropologist *Marit Myrvoll*, active at the university of Tromsø, has studied Saami neo-shamanism and modern neo-religiosity and she stresses the continuity between old and new shamanism.

- *As I see it, the Saami neo-religiosity builds on contents, values and traditions that are connected to pre-Christian Saami religion and its rituals.*
- *There is really no contradiction between new shamanism and old shamanism. There is an evident continuity between these two. What is a break with tradition in new shamanism is that the individual can learn this on his own initiative. In traditional shamanism no one wanted to be a*

*shaman. It was dangerous knowledge. You were pointed out by the spirits or by active shamans. But there are also new shamans who feel pointed out by others. It is all about seriously seeking, spiritual persons.*

- *New shamanism should be regarded in connection with the social development. Modernity has opened the door for an individual religiosity that is built on one's own religious experiences, and the notion that everyone is his own master. This should be viewed in connection with the general social development and the increasing concentration upon the individual.*
- *Religiosity changes form along with society. The old Saami community needed a shaman and the shaman needed a community. Community was then much more collectively orientated. The new shaman is not necessarily a healer but can be more like a religious guide to other people. The difference now is that the new shaman has a geographically and culturally larger space to work in.*

What trends can you see developing in shamanism?

- *There seems to be an ever increasing acceptance among ordinary people of religious practice. Modernity's tight grip on us will loosen. It is increasingly legitimate to believe in things that were previously branded as idiocy and superstition. That provides a greater spiritual openness and that will of course favour shamanism.*

### **Refining and simplifying**

At the same time as shamanism has been urbanized and modernized it has also been refined and simplified. The vast abundance of aids that have previously been used – knife, earth, steel, minerals, ointments, herbs, animal parts, complicated strings of words and movements, number magic and so on – have been reduced to four basic methods;

- Thought
- Hand
- Prayer
- Drum

With prayer I also refer to formulae and so called reading, that seems to assume a more and more simple and concentrated form.

Some persons would perhaps talk about the original tradition being watered down or degenerated. I see it as an adjustment to the world around and to changing ways of thinking, and as a refining of something that is really working.

Well, what is it then that makes traditional healing work? As we have seen above there are among the healers themselves a number of individually coloured, more or less vague, explanations. Here is my own attempt.

The methods of the healer are themselves rather uninteresting. They simply function as aids to increase, concentrate and direct the healer's thought, his/her

mental energy. It is also evident, from the stories of the healers, that they have a basic understanding that it is this mental energy that is the important thing. Then there are different ideas of where this energy comes from, but that is another thing, that I will return to later.

The material aids and methods function as keys to the power of faith as *Per Simma* has expressed this phenomenon. If the healer believes that he/she needs a knife to protect himself/herself from evil, well then he/she needs the knife. If the healer believes that he/she needs to read out a magical formula three times to stop a bleeding, well then he/she needs to do exactly like that. If the healer is more flexible, like *Per Simma*, then he/she realizes that the method can be adjusted to the patient and what the patient believes is effective. If the patient wants an ointment for his aching arm then the patient should be given such an ointment. If the patient wants the healer to pray to God, well then he/she does so.

This discussion is not only about the “small” aids that I have exemplified. It is also about that which traditionally has been associated with the utmost power, namely the drum. Already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century book *Lapponia* by *Schefferus* there is a description of a Saami shamanic way that doesn't contain the drum, or, as I would rather put it, a way that goes *beyond* the drum.

- *They become so knowledgeable that they even without a drum can see things that are very far away, and so possessed by the devil, that they see them whether they want to or not.*
- *There are some, however, who can find out what happens afar even without a drum; they succeed the best and come in close intercourse with the sooth-saying spirits.*

In short, there were shamans who were so powerful that they both could see and conjure up their spirit helpers without drumming.

### **Shamanic non-methods**

The different shamanic traditions of the world are distinguished from each other exactly by the methods. They give the local colours. The core, the activity of the mental energy, is the same when you peel off the cultural differences.

Theoretically one can imagine a shamanism, where the practitioners have learnt to foster, concentrate and direct their mental energy without any external aids or rituals whatsoever. Where the four basic methods, that I enumerated above, have been reduced to just one – the thought. And the thought can not be seen, although its effects of course can be seen. The shamans have then attained a state where they simply are accessible to the power through an inner on-and-off button. They no longer have to exert themselves to attract the power. they just open themselves up to it. It seems as if *Randi Irene Losoa* is developing her work in that direction. Nowadays the power comes to her when she needs it, i.e. when a human being has asked for her help. This is true as well for *Per Simma*, who just tells the person phoning him for help: *I will pray for you.*

Fully developed, this would become a shamanism and healing art lacking local colour and substantially less spectacular than the traditional form, even if it, with

its “non-methods”, would be able to achieve the same effects and be just as functional as the traditional and more artful shamanism. Such shamanism would maybe not attract practitioners and patients in the same way as the traditional and the modernized version of shamanism does today. There is indeed an attraction, a temptation in this thing with the drum, the trance and the channelling of power through the hands. *Shaman-ship is showman-ship* as someone so appositely expressed it. There is an air of show in the healing ceremony. But who knows what future shamans might be attracted by?

### **Working directly with the energy**

There is a basic understanding among the healers and the shamans that the important thing is the energy, the power, even if they have a theoretical superstructure that partly talks about other things. With his/her actions the healer can only function as a channel to the power, as a mediator, a link, between the power and the patient. And the actions and behaviour of the healer must be functional, so that he/she can act as a channel and not as a hindrance to the power. When *Adolf Kelottijärvi* says that the healer must be a soft person, he gives an extraordinarily good and sententious summary of the need for right attitude. The healer’s *way of conduct* decides if he/she is able to channel the healing power. A big and hard ego will definitely stand in the way.

The power is said to come from God or just be there as a cosmic or divine power, the source of which one doesn’t know and maybe never will get any knowledge of. It is a power that some people call The Great Spirit or The Holy Spirit, a power that is in everything and that certain persons have the ability to interact well with. *Eirik Myrhaug*, with his engineering education and modern shamanism influenced by Buddhism, looks for an explanation in the theoretical model of quantum physics, where energy and matter are seen as fluid phenomena. Energy turns into matter and matter turns into energy. Mental energy can affect matter.

Other healers choose to pick up and use the traditional concepts and interpretative models. Such a traditional shamanic map of reality is populated by various spiritual beings as power animals, ancestral spirits, disease spirits and so on. And this map holds several different worlds – this world, the upper world and the lower world. To use a traditional shamanic map can of course be functional, but modern human beings can also understand this as obsolete mysticism where the sell-by-date marking expired a couple of hundred years ago.

On the whole a modern shaman can certainly have the same experiences as a shaman a few hundred years ago, but he/she can *not possibly* interpret the experiences in the same way as then. Concepts such as power animals, upper and lower worlds will nowadays be interpreted as symbolic descriptions of inner states. Then one must ask if it is not giving oneself unnecessary trouble, when a modern human being first acquires a traditional map of cosmos and then treats this map as a symbolic one. What instead attracts me is that which is simple and stringent. It is the *power/energy* that is the important thing, not its varying forms of revelation and interpretation. The ability to concentrate and direct this power/energy is more important than the myriad of methods to achieve this. The

interesting thing is the ability to see the energy *directly* and work with it *directly* without mediating filters, forms of revelation or constructions of thought.

### **Healing as ritual drama**

When we have a clear picture of how the healers think and act and what energies are at work from their side, we also need to analyze the patient and his/her role, in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the healing process.

In a healing process there are at least two parties, the healer and the patient. In traditional healing ceremonies also relatives of the patient and members of the local community can take part. The healer, for his part, can have several assistants with different roles to play. In the classical descriptions of Saami healing ceremonies the noaidie could have one or several assistants, who, with their yoik, were to guide the soul of the shaman during its wandering in the other worlds. During peyote-ceremonies in South-western USA the leader of the ceremony, the road man, can have four or six assistants. Such healing ceremonies have been described as ritual dramas.

Even in a situation with only a healer and a patient, which seems to have become the most usual model, we have to do with a sort of ritual drama. The healer and the patient play different roles, which follow an agreed manuscript. What is not already determined in the manuscript is whether healing will take place in reality. Sometimes the patient doesn't experience anything, sometimes he/she feels that something really happens during the healing act, sometimes something happens not until afterwards and gradually.

The basis is that the patient has a thought model in common with the healer. More often than not this is the case. The patient calls on the healer because he/she knows that the healer is an acknowledged and skilful person, who ought to be able to help. The patient can also call on the healer, as a last resort, after many and fruitless visits to the ordinary doctor. In that case the patient maybe hasn't any thought model in common with the healer but is so desperate, that he/she is ready to subscribe to anything just in order to get well. There is an abundance of stories of how sceptical patients reluctantly have called on some sorcerer and to their great surprise have noticed that they in fact have been helped. The patient then is in a state where he/she is prepared to accept the healer's thought model in the same way as you gladly receive a life buoy when you have fallen into the water, without wondering what the life buoy looks like or if it has any commercial print.

In both these typical cases the ritual drama can take place. Both parties can play their roles according to a schedule, that is many thousand years old, and the result can be positive. The patient experiences healing or at least improvement. But is healing really taking place? If one really wants to get well one might over-interpret improvements and belittle pains that still continue. To get an answer to that question one should have to carry out a long series of tests with people, who have been treated by healers, and then compare their development to similar patients, who have not been treated by healers. An impracticable project, not least since everybody doesn't want to put on show that they have visited a healer.

## **The will of the patient**

Most patients that call on healers really want to get well, just as they wanted when they called on the ordinary medical care. The person calling on a healer, as a rule, has positive expectations, and to some healers this positive attitude is of utmost importance to the therapy. *Adolf Kelottijärvi* says that the faith of the patient means 90-99 percent.

Another important aspect in the ritual drama is its non-hierarchical character. The patient usually regards the healer as an equal, as an ordinary fellow being blessed with a special ability and big empathy. Usually the healer doesn't promise more than trying to help, and the patient knows that this help also means a certain kind of self-sacrifice. A healing act takes time and other resources, and the healer may have acquired his/her power after a disease of his own or through some other kind of suffering.

Exactly what the patient's faith, in combination with the healer's thoughts and actions, sets in motion is not possible to get a comprehensive answer to. Concepts such as *spontaneous healing* or *self-healing* do not explain what really happens in the depths of the ritual drama that takes place when patient and healer meet. Energy and matter mutually influence each other in a way that is favourable to both the patient and the healer. For a sufficient number of years sufficiently many people have been sufficiently much helped in order for shamanism and traditional healing to survive and develop.

When it is about a case of emergency, such as urgently staunching blood, those suffering don't usually have time to think so very many thoughts before a knowledgeable person intervenes and stops the bleeding. That kind of healing confirms that the faith and expectations of the patient not always are of great importance, even if a human being in her subconscious depths of course is prepared to receive any kind of help in case of emergency.

I have myself witnessed healing at a distance where the patient experienced an unexpected and distinct improvement without knowing that a healing act had been performed. Neither do all healers believe that the patient's faith plays any important role. *Per Simma* says outright that the patient's faith is not necessary for healing to occur, referring to the fact that also unconscious and unaware persons can be helped.

Much can of course be explained with concepts such as *spontaneous recovery* (what *that* now might be), but if you study shamanism and traditional healing more deeply you will sooner or later arrive at the same conclusion as *Eirik Myrhaug*;

*Sometimes miracles happen...*

## Miracles

I will give a few examples of how the ritual drama and miraculous healing can take place. My intention is not to convince the readers that healing really works, and I am not a promoter for anyone of the present-day shamans. Neither is my intention to critically examine if they live up to their undertakings. I just want to give the readers a hint on how healing can be experienced by those involved and by those around. Those readers who want more examples are referred to my previous books on this subject.

My first example is a story that I heard from *Johan Mäarak*, a retired Saami vicar in Jokkmokk. The event occurred some years ago and expresses how intensely certain healers detested having to put their abilities on show.

From his home district *Mäarak* knew an old Saami woman who was skilled in removing eczema. One evening he is phoned by a desperate Saami man. His two years old daughter is suffering from a very severe eczema. The parents have not been able to sleep for an entire night since the girl was born. No ointments from the medical care have helped, and now the parents are desperate. Does *Mäarak* know anyone who can help them?

*Mäarak* knows the parents well. He has married them and he has baptized the girl. So he phones the old Saami woman and tells her about the girl with eczema, but the healer refuses flatly. She doesn't want to help. The father phones the vicar again and asks how things are proceeding. No, she doesn't want to help, *Mäarak* says. Can't you please try again, the father appeals. *Mäarak* phones the woman a second time, but she still refuses. When the desperate father contacts *Mäarak* for a third time, and *Mäarak* again calls the woman, she says that she doesn't want to help, that she is so old, that she probably can't cope with the task and so on, but it is not the same categorical no any longer.

*Mäarak* tells the father where to find the woman and says that they now have to try themselves. The parents immediately go to her place and the woman receives them very kindly, treating them to food and conversation and then she bathes the little girl in spring water. What else she does *Mäarak* doesn't know, but some day later the father tells him, beaming with joy, that the parents now have been able to sleep for an entire night for the first time in two years. The eczema had already improved and later disappeared totally. When *Mäarak* several years later confirmed the girl, she was still free from eczema.

- *Certain persons had received the divine power to help other people, says Mäarak. And they still exist – especially in the wilderness.*

I have myself at close range witnessed and even been part of another and maybe more remarkable ritual drama. It happened an evening in October 1986 when I visited *Henrik Kuhmunen* in his little cottage in Vaikijaur outside Jokkmokk. When we had been talking for quite a while, I asked if he thought that he could help a relative of mine, who, for some time had been suffering from a severely aching back, that the ordinary health service had failed to cure. I told *Kuhmunen* who it was and where the person was living – approximately 1000 kilometres to

the south. Well, I suppose I could try to help, said *Kuhmunen* and then the most remarkable thing happened. He nodded at a small Saami shamanic drum that he had just showed to me and said:

- *Maybe you can drum for your relative.*

What to do? Well I grasped the small drumstick made by bone and started drumming. *Kuhmunen* himself sat perfectly still at the kitchen table, and I didn't want to disturb by looking at him, so I don't know what he did. After a while I heard his voice, I don't remember what he said, but I stopped drumming and we continued talking about other things for a while before I drove back to Jokkmokk again.

The day after I phoned my relative just to hear how things were getting on and I got the following reply;

- *Well, can you imagine .... the pain in my back is gone. It just went away yesterday evening.*
- *Aha, at what time?*
- *Well, I guess it was somewhere around six or seven o'clock?*
- *I paid a visit to a healer here in Jokkmokk right at that time, I said. It seems as if he did something.*

I can add that the back pain didn't return. One thing that I have thought about, and that I will probably never get an answer to, is which role *Kuhmunen* in reality gave to me in this ritual drama, if he gave me any role whatsoever.

# Getting along with the world

Traditional classic shamanism has a map of reality that can be called mystical. This mystical description of reality has survived in spite of the fact that it has been hard pressed by Christian missionizing and also by more modern, scientifically inspired, ideologies. It has been developed and simplified, but also rendered more effective, exactly through these confrontations.

In the post-modern world this mystical map nowadays can be accepted as an alternative to other maps of reality. Not as a sort of B-map that is inferior to the A-map of science, but as an alternative tradition of knowledge. It is alternative in the meaning that it not only gives a different view of reality but also because it treats phenomena that according to science don't exist at all, or maybe don't exist.

My studies of shamanism and traditional healing have shown that these traditions are alive and developing. They are dynamic, and their practitioners adjust the traditions in a creative way to changing external circumstances and changes in the general consciousness. The practitioners who don't possess this creativity gradually vanish. I have also shown that new healers are recruited. This recruiting is of two kinds. On one hand it is a traditional recruiting which means that young people, e.g. in the principal Saami areas, acquire and start practicing traditional healing. People then talk about young Saamis with warm hands. On the other hand it is a process of recruiting via modernity, where urban people are trying to go back to their original cultures in order to reconquer a cultural identity. In that process they can innovate shamanism by creatively, and without being biased, making use of impulses from other shamanic cultures and religions, which are within easy reach in the post-modern world. But innovation nevertheless takes place on a traditional basis, and therefore those creative shamans still move within the framework of their own, dynamic culture.

My studies have shown that these healing methods are functional. Patients, who in these connections always vote with their feet, continue to consult shamans and healers in order to get help and guidance. The patients have developed and changed in similar ways as the healers, and the ritual drama, which is constituted by the healing act, has also gone through a dynamic process. Many testimonies, both publicly in the media and by word of mouth, spread positive experiences from the healing and help recruiting new patients.

In my studies I have, for more than 20 years now, tested different shamanic trance-methods, and I have myself gone deeply into the shamanic maps of cosmos. Furthermore I have through deep interviews and close studies of healers in action tried to uncover the core of their activities. What are they *really* doing? What is behind and beyond the external attributes? I have peeled off their distinguishing methods, objects, definitions and thought constructions in order to concentrate the interest to the absolutely basic aspects of shamanism and traditional healing, namely mental energy/thought and way of conduct/attitude.

That mental energy/thought and way of conduct/attitude do exist is a statement which I think even the most science-oriented people do agree with. However they would surely say that ancestral spirits, power animals, upper and lower worlds don't exist. A traditional shaman would firmly claim that he/she *knows* that these phenomena do exist, because he/she meets them when in a trance, and because he/she can conjure them and get help from them in a healing ritual. We can choose to interpret the shaman's claims in a symbolical way. What he/she talks about then is symbolical manifestations of the energy/thought. The shaman's mental filter/interpretative model treats energy/thought as manifest forms, e.g. power animals, in order to be able to treat it in a constructive way, and because he/she has learnt to work with it in that way.

If we interpret the shaman's claims in a symbolic way, we must also interpret the world view of the Western thinker symbolically – a world view that claims that the shaman's spirits and power animals don't exist, while they can't be measured, weighed or video-taped. The Western scientifically influenced map corresponds rather well with reality. Nevertheless we must realize that it, like all other maps, is approximate. It doesn't give any exact picture of reality and even among the Western thinkers, the top dog himself, *Stephen Hawking*, has now established that science will never be able to give an exact picture of the birth of the Universe.

The Western map of reality is functional, when it comes to building cars or cellphone networks or carrying out surgical operations on the coronary arteries. In a similar way the traditional shaman's map of reality is functional, when it comes to staunching blood and miraculous curing. The maps exist simultaneously and it shouldn't be any problems to accept their different relevance and functionality.

The shaman's map moreover has something that the Western map lacks. It can explain what happens when diseases are cured. It can be an explanation that states that the shaman has fetched back the patient's soul from the realm of Death, or that the shaman has exorcized a disease spirit from the patient. The Western map on the other hand is forced to introduce concepts as *spontaneous healing*, *miraculous healing* and the like for that, which it can't explain. It is the Western explanatory model that talks about supernatural events and miracles. The shamanic explanatory model doesn't have to be a bit mystical within its own framework.

A question that I have often been asked is if the power animals really exist and, in that case, where? Or if the upper and lower worlds do exist in reality, in another dimension or just in our consciousness? Or if the power/energy exists at all?

My answer is – that depends on which map we use when we interpret reality. On the shamanic map they definitely exist – and not just in our consciousness – but totally independent of our own thoughts and volitions. If we use a Western map they don't really exist, except possibly as symbols, as internal thoughts and pictures in our minds.

But the power then? Does it only exist on the shamanic map? Sometimes I have equated energy and thought, which I furthermore have connected to the concept “way of conduct/attitude”. I have chosen an explanatory model that says, that the basis of existence is an energy that permeates the whole cosmos, nature and all living beings. The shaman sometimes interprets this energy as a gallery of power animals and spiritual beings, in order to give it a form that is easy to handle for our consciousness. That also explains the local and regional differences in the shamanic traditions, since our consciousness is shaped by culture, family, social milieu, nature, climate and so on.

Energy exists, and this energy is in addition something more than the biochemical processes that constitute all living beings and fuels the intricate processes, that take place in our brains. Energy is also something more than thought, as it is defined by the Western map of reality. It is furthermore possible, with the help of thought – the brain – to concentrate and direct this energy for certain purposes, on condition that one has the right way of conduct/attitude. It is really very simple, but at the same time it is very difficult for our thinking to understand and accept this.

Now I will point out some consequences that this thought model can have to other people than shamans and healers. In short – what can we others learn from the shamans/healers and how can we use this knowledge in our own projects of life?

It is evident, from the stories of the shamans, that they feel great respect for nature and its powers. Even if a shaman is considered to be able to influence wind and weather, he/she hardly regards himself/herself as a master of nature, but as a part of it, neither superior nor subordinate to other beings. What the Western thought model regards as dead matter, e.g. mountains and stones, is in a shamanic thought model seen as living beings. Partly in the sense that they are alive themselves, partly because they can house different spiritual beings, e.g. ancestral spirits, animal spirits and the like. The shaman wants to work for balance and harmony of this great whole, between human beings, between human beings and animals and between human beings and nature. The natural state of the world is experienced as “*beauty*” and a popular shamanic expression is *walking in beauty*. This means to behave in a way that is gentle to all species and beings. Someone might call that *ecological*, but is *ecology* beautiful? The context *beauty* goes further.

Another useful concept that I have met is *getting along with the world*. This means that you don't try to flee from the world or dominate it but try to come to an understanding with the world. What is possible to influence, what is not possible to influence, where and when should you, possibly, intervene? You can't command all circumstances of life. Here it is possible to see similarities with the relaxed attitude to life that you can find in Buddhism, taking the world with equanimity. But I consider the shaman to be much more of a political activist than

the Buddhist is. The combination of *walking in beauty* and *getting along with the world* expresses a shamanic basic attitude towards the world.

A third concept that I have come across during my studies is *biting off the threads of fate*. It was in order to achieve this that Saami shamans must have their own teeth intact. Biting off the threads of fate could mean that you check or cure a disease. But it could also mean that you liberate yourself from limitations that you or others have imposed on you. Biting off the threads of fate could be a way to liberate yourself from internal as well as external limitations. In that way shamanism contains a dimension of liberation, for the practitioners, for the patients and for everybody else.

A fourth concept I have picked up from the pre-Christian Nordic tradition, where wisdom was defined as *insights into the secret*. The shaman in different ways acquire insights into the things that are normally hidden to most people, but the shaman is also a person who combines internal and external knowledge. Therefore I want to widen the concept of wisdom to *insights into the world and into the secret*. The shaman can orientate himself/herself both in this world and in non-ordinary reality, and he has an analysis of both the *inner* state of human beings and the *outer* state of society. From this analysis the shaman can work in both of these spheres.

A fifth concept that I have used in my text is *attitude/way of conduct*, where I have pointed out that for the shaman it is all about *making himself/herself accessible to the power*. That is something quite different from calling forth and subjugating the power. *You have to be soft*, as *Adolf Kelottijärvi* said. The power and knowledge that the shaman seeks is available in every given moment, if you just open up to it. This also means that it is in ordinary reality, that you meet your true or best teachers. It is all about extracting knowledge from everyday situations and from encounters with ordinary, friendly or unfriendly human beings. Every moment is a moment charged with knowledge and power. You just have to realize this and realize what you can learn from a specific situation.

The shaman touches the world sparingly, but with quality. He/she strives for perfection in an *inner* as well as in an *outer* sense. It is at the same time a question of one's own individual perfection and external, social perfection.

But perfection is a state that is impossible to attain, and this understanding is a prerequisite of the concept *getting along with the world*. It is the *striving* that is the essential thing, because it is in striving that the creative forces of the individual and of society are set free. And it is in striving that the liberating potential of shamanism can be of real significance to everybody.

Let me finish with what *Forrest S Cuch*, a Ute Indian and director of the Utah Division of Indian Affairs, said when I interviewed him in Salt Lake City in 2002;

- *Each individual deserves dignity, human dignity, and respect for being a human being. To be given the privilege of living on this earth and to live with other human beings is a wonderful opportunity and we all need to be aware of that, of that wonderful blessing we all have in this world.*