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Nonshamanic Native American Healing

Jerome S. Bernstein

This article focuses on making clearer distinctions between nonshamanic and shamanic indigenous healing practices. Not all indigenous healing is shamanic in nature. Shamanic healing relies on the powers of the shaman to heal/cure/take away the illness, and many rely on the use of consciousness-altering substances. In contrast, nonshamanic indigenous approaches, such as the Navajo, are much more psychodynamically based and offer wisdom and techniques that can be more directly adapted and applied by Western practitioners. The author employs his theory of borderland consciousness as a bridge between depth psychology and Navajo healing. The latter is most reflective of Jungian clinical theory and techniques and therein offers a depth of wisdom and a psychological perspective that can be of significant clinical import. Clinical examples from the author's practice are offered.

Western science, following Roger Bacon, believed man could force nature to reveal its secrets; the Sioux simply petitioned nature for friendship.

—Vine Deloria, Jr.

My “charge” in writing this article is to write about my work in shamanism—how it has influenced the ways in which I work with individuals and with my own dreams. So, I should say at the outset that after these introductory paragraphs, I will not be writing about shamanism. Mircea Eliade (1974) observed:

Since the beginning of the [20th] century, ethnologists have fallen into the habit of using the terms “shaman,” “medicine man,” “sorcerer,” and “magician” interchangeably to designate certain

individuals possessing magico-religious powers and found in all “primitive” societies. By extension, the same terminology has been applied in studying the religious history of “civilized” peoples. (p. 3)

Probably the best definition of *shamanism* was coined by Michael Harner, who writes:

The word “shaman” in the original Tungus language refers to a person who makes journeys to nonordinary reality in an altered state of consciousness. Adopting the term in the west was useful because people didn’t know what it meant. Terms like “wizard,” “witch,” “sorcerer,” and “witch doctor” have their own connotations, ambiguities, and preconceptions associated with them. Although the term is from Siberia, the practice of shamanism existed on all inhabited continents. . . . The practice of shamanism is a method, not a religion. (www.shamanism.org)

Thus in modern-day parlance the word *shamanism* is a catch-all term into which is thrown any kind of indigenous (i.e., “nonordinary”) reality or practice, and has unconsciously become a dumping ground for a number of indigenous practices that are not shamanic in nature or method. For example, Navajo healing is a method of applying their cosmology, religion, and philosophy for healing and is not shamanic in that it does not require the medicine man to enter trances, out-of-body experiences, or to take on and transform the illness of the patient. Some North American Native cultures do practice shamanic healing, such as those along the North Pacific Coast and Alaska, but some of these can have a more negative impact as well as a healing one (Swan Reimer, 2012). My observations lead me to believe that most North American Native healing is not shamanic.

Because shamanic and nonshamanic systems are significantly different in their methods and techniques of healing, often much is overlooked and lost by those interested in indigenous healing. I have come to view all North American nonshamanic healing¹ and religious practices as “reciprocity-based indigenous healing.”² I view Western and some shamanic healing (and religious) practices as “dominion-based medicine” (Bernstein, 2012a).³

BORDERLAND CONSCIOUSNESS

Upon leaving my first week of consulting for the Navajo Tribe and my first contact with Native Americans, I was greeted by a group of three Navajo men who had been waiting for me. I ended that week with the feeling that

this was a culture and people that I found very attractive and appealing, but one that I did not understand. I concluded that I had nothing to offer them that they needed. The spokesman for the group said to me, “We’ve been waiting for you. We’ve been listening to you listen. We think you can hear us. We want you to come back.” His statement was like a thunderbolt. I had never conceived of “listening to someone listen.” I was never the same after that encounter.⁴

Over time I learned from the Hopi and the Navajo to listen and notice in a completely different way. One can’t hear rocks speak or receive the blessings of eagles that have come for that purpose if one is not open to noticing what is not familiar or what one’s family, friends, colleagues, and peers consider *nonordinary* or worse yet, weird or crazy.

I began listening differently in my practice. Over time I began to notice that some of my patients were having *transrational*⁵ *experiences* similar to those that I had grown accustomed to hearing from my Native friends.

One day a patient came to her regular session and began talking in a way I had never heard her talk before. She was bent over, almost in a crouch. I could not see her face and could barely hear her voice. Her head was turned away from me. She began to tell me about an encounter she’d had with a horse and some trees. She spoke of the messages she got from them—the horse, in particular, was insistent on his message to her. She was obviously very moved, and it was clear that she was telling me something that she had not told another living soul.

Abruptly, she stopped talking. Still bowed and her head facing the floor, she asked, “Do you think that is ‘woo woo’ or crazy?” I said, “No, I don’t. I think you are sharing something sacred with me and I feel honored to be trusted to hear it.” Her head turned towards me, she sat straight up, and looking at me (which she hadn’t the entire session), she said, “Okay. Now I can trust you.” Thus began an entirely different relationship than we’d had in the prior two years.

There is much to tell about borderland consciousness and the borderland personality—but not in this short space. What I’ve come to realize and have written and lectured about for ten years is this: It was Western humanity, the precursor to Western civilization, that got thrown out of the Garden of Eden. From that point on it was split off from nature

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nature and the spirit world
associated with it.

and the spirit world associated with it. And from that point on until the present, the earth was seen as matter, as a soul-less, spirit-less commodity to serve the perceived needs of our species. This is the dissociation that Jung (1954) spoke of in his last essay, "Healing the Split," written shortly before his death. However, the indigenous psyche was never ejected from the Garden of Eden, and what is left of its people still live within the psychic paradigm of reciprocity and all of the dynamics that characterize it, albeit seriously contaminated by the dominant culture and the trauma of genocide.

By then I had formulated the concept of borderland consciousness. It is my contention that the Western psyche, the Western ego construct, is being thrust into reconnection with nature. This is the result of evolutionary processes, one of the consequences being the increasing prevalence of borderland consciousness in the collective and within individuals. This process of archetypal redressing of a dissociative split is very rapid, and one can see multiple examples (data) on any given day in newspapers, on TV, and in ordinary conversations if one takes the time to notice. Readers who are particularly interested in this concept are referred to my book, *Living in the Borderland: The Evolution of Consciousness and the Challenge of Healing Trauma*.

NAVAJO HEALING

Although for our purposes, here I will emphasize what Western medicine and psychology can learn from Navajo clinical approaches, I do not intend to set up any kind of dichotomy by saying that one is better than the other. With any given patient, as a clinician in any given session, I could be seen as using object relations theory, classical Jungian and Freudian theory, cognitive behavioral therapy, 12-step philosophy, and in some cases referring patients for medication, explaining Navajo concepts of healing, preparing a patient for the possibility of a Navajo ceremony, or any combination of these. My primary emphasis is on the idea that if indeed the very nature of psyche is shifting, as reflected in the increasing prevalence of borderland consciousness, then our clinical models must adapt if we are going to be able to understand and work with psyche as it presents itself and with our patients. The Navajo paradigm has given me the most access to adapting my own clinical work to the 21st-century psyches that I encounter in my practice.

In exploring the Navajo approach to illness and healing, it is important to remember that theirs is a psyche that has never been split off from nature. Here I am talking about the psyche itself, not any one individual's ego. Theirs more resembles the psyche from which the Euro-American psyche emerged as a result of evolutionary process than ours does (Bernstein, 2013a).

My formulation is that Genesis gave the Western psyche an evolutionary mandate for “dominion” over life (Bernstein, 2005, Ch. 3). Vine Deloria attributes this power of dominion simply as being given the authority and the capacity to name what is other than our species. That was the psychic division point, the archetypal parting of the ways, so to speak, of the Western psyche and the indigenous psyche. It is worth noting that in the Navajo language there is no word for *animal*. Humans are simply the “five-fingered”—that is our name—in the panoply of life. We are one among many. There is no hierarchy in indigenous naming. There is relationship, but not hierarchy. Being such, there is *no mandate for dominion*. Let me put this concept into clinical terms:

A woman who lived her entire personal and professional life in an urban setting found herself applying for a job with a non-profit organization whose mission was to steward the protection of a wilderness area. Previously she had worked primarily with large, profit-making, highly competitive, bottom-line-oriented companies. She had this dream the night that she received word that she was selected for the job:

I walk into a clearing in the forest. It is twilight. One by one, the following animals come out from the shadows of the tall trees: coyote, bear, squirrel, fox, deer, bison. They stand and gaze at me with their soft and silent eyes and the feeling is one of “Welcome” and “Thank you.” As they turn to leave and go back into the forest, fox lifts her tail and sprays me with an orange substance from her body, which I know “marks me” for life as a member of her tribe.

So what is the dream of this non-native woman expressing? And into what “tribe” has she been initiated?

One can view this dream as a *borderland dream*. The dream story is not unlike the kinds of experiences described by some American Indians. If we take out the word *dream* and insert the word *vision*, this dream might be, word for word, what an American Indian might describe as her experience in a “vision quest” ritual. It is also not unlike some life experiences in their waking or nonsleep states described to me by many borderland individuals with whom I have worked clinically. It is an example of the Western psyche being moved toward a reconnection with nature and the resultant psychic experience taking on a reality more resembling the indigenous psyche. It is important to remind ourselves here that the dreamer is white and comes from the hard-driven competitive economic mold of East Coast America. At the time of the dream, she’d had little or no contact with American Indians.

In the context of borderland consciousness, the “tribe” that the dreamer has been initiated into would be “Fox,” remembering that the Navajo language (and as far as I know, all other American Indian languages) has no word for “animal,” each being its own tribe.

Thus, the experience of the borderlander is that of being a member of the animal realm, connected and communicating in a direct way with nature, not separate from, or superior to, other living beings. It is a reality based on the psychic principle of *reciprocity*. The reconnection with nature that I speak of here and that is depicted in the dream reestablishes a living and reciprocal relationship between the dreamer and a whole other dimension of her psyche. In *logos* terms it is what I am referring to when I speak of those *transrational* experiences that are common to the borderland personality. It heals the fundamental wound and dissociation upon which the Western psyche has been built—a wound that takes its genesis in the command that humanity *should* have dominion over the earth and the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep upon earth.

FREUD AND JUNG

One can almost feel the circularity and timelessness of this [Navajo] cosmology as compared with the linearity of the Eurocentric psyche.

I would say that Freud’s psychology became the *logos* psychology of Western culture and that Jung’s psychology had one foot (at least) still stuck in the tar of the indigenous psyche from which our Eurocentric psyche has emerged. Jung’s initiation as a shaman—as is clearly evident in *The Red*

Book—equipped him to develop a theoretical frame that enables the Western psyche to grasp and reframe and hopefully come to terms with a new psychic dimension being thrust upon it by an evolutionary process, what I call *borderland consciousness*.

DOMINION AND RECIPROCITY

As I have observed the indigenous psyche at work, most particularly in religious and healing contexts in both the Navajo and Hopi Tribes, I have come to understand the psychic principles upon which their psychic reality seems to function as being one based on a dynamic of reciprocity. (I think that *dominion* is the appropriate word to describe the Euro-American

psychic realm.) The word *reciprocity* is limited and limiting in the context of my experience of that psyche. However, I haven't been able to come up with a better noun. The English word *reciprocity* simultaneously has too-sharp and not sharp-enough edges. From the Navajo perspective, the word I am reaching for in place of reciprocity would be an amalgam of two Navajo words, *hózhó* and *beehaz'áanii*, two words I can't even pronounce correctly. *Hózhó* is discussed below; *beehaz'áanii* is translated into English as "Navajo law," but the word implies much more than that. In the Navajo language its literal meaning is "something fundamental . . . something that has existed from the beginning of time. Navajos believe that the Holy People 'put it there for us.' It's the source of a healthy, meaningful life. Navajos say that 'life comes from *beehaz'áanii*,' because it is the essence of life (Frank Morgan, Navajo cultural translator, personal conversation). "The precepts of *beehaz'áanii* are stated in prayers and ceremonies that tell us of *hozhooji*" (Yazzie, 1994, p. 29). One can almost feel the circularity and timelessness of this cosmology as compared with the linearity of the Eurocentric psyche.

There is another reason why these distinctions are important. In my experience—and I have had over forty years experience with Navajo culture and healing ceremonies—their system of healing is the closest approximation of depth psychology and specifically Jung's approach to healing. There are times when I feel (not think) that they are one and the same systems (Bernstein, 2005). In Navajo healing the medicine man does not do the healing. He mediates between the patient and the Holy People (spirit beings) whose presence he invokes on behalf of the patient. The Holy People do the healing (Dennison, 2012, pp. 170–171). In Jungian terms we might say that the medicine man mediates the Self.⁶ The ceremonies that he performs are the drama that the Holy People bring in the form of chant, ritual, sandpainting ceremonies, and archetypal enactment of parts of the Navajo cosmological story on behalf of the patient. This is what I think my work is as an analyst—to mediate the Self.

There are significant differences as well. For example, the Navajo language has no word for *guilt*, among a number of other terms and concepts (Frank Morgan, personal communication). We Western practitioners would tend to think of the absence of this word and concept as a *lack*. However, contemplating and imagining a healing system that has no word for guilt can be intriguing and can open more doors than would seem to be closed intrapsychically, to the extent that we are willing to notice what it brings in addition to what it lacks.

Similarly with regard to the word *animal*. Imagine a patient bringing a dream in which a frog or a water monster tells the dreamer about a mysterious healing to cure illnesses. This (oversimplified for our purposes) theme is at the heart of the Navajo Nine Night or *Yei-Bi-Chai* ceremony, a powerful

ceremony for healing and restoration of the patient's body, mind, and spirit.⁷ I have had the experience of a non-native patient bringing a dream with these themes. He'd had no contact with Navajos in any form and was quite amazed at where this dream led his process—to the center of that myth and the restoration of his body, mind, and spirit.

Typically, Euro-Americans of all stripes—scientists, teachers, philosophers, medical practitioners, and psychologists—refer to what I call *borderland consciousness* (Bernstein, 2005; see Part I) as *nonordinary reality*. *Logos* thinking is dualistic, wedded to rationalism, and rigid in terms of what it can accept. One very strong rigidity has to do with rational and “nonrational” experience. *Nonrational* is a term that is fairly neutral and does not challenge the idea of rational thought. But *logos* thinking, by and large, will not accept even this rather benign distinction between rational and nonrational thought. Its preferred term is *nonordinary* reality. Nonrational, for *logos* thinkers, carries the automatic implication of *irrational*, a word that can be personally threatening and destabilizing (Bernstein, 2005; see pp. 36–37). In other words, it defines nonrational thought and experience in terms of what it is *not*, with the implication that it would be preferable if it were rational; that is, rational is better and more real than nonrational (irrational). At the same time it does include the word *reality* in the phrase *nonrational reality*, which is a step forward from where it was 40–50 years ago, and many steps forward from the burning of witches 200 years ago. My *experience* of what I call the *transrational* is that such experiences are “real,” in the sense that the individual experiences them as such, and that they are objectively as well as subjectively syntonic with the *psychic* reality and cohesion of the individual, not only on an emotional level. Jung (1954) commented on this phenomenon when he observed the following:

In the primitive's world, things do not have the same sharp boundaries they do in ours. What we call psychic identity . . . has been stripped off our world of things. It is exactly this halo, or “fringe of consciousness,” as William James calls it, which gives a colourful and fantastic aspect to the primitive's world. We have lost it to such a degree that we do not recognize it when we meet it again, and are baffled at its incomprehensibility. With us such things are kept below the threshold: and when they occasionally reappear, we are convinced that something is wrong. We are so used to the rational surface of our world that we cannot imagine anything untoward happening within the confines of common sense. If our mind once in a while does something thoroughly unexpected, we are terrified and immediately think of a pathological disturbance, whereas primitive man would think of spirits . . . or gods but would never doubt his sanity. (p. 205)

THOUGHT VERSUS THINKING

It is a subtle but crucial point clinically to distinguish between *thought* and *thinking*. In Western *logos* dualistic thinking, God *created* day, night, sky, land, animals, and humans, giving humans the charge of dominion over the earth and all other living things, etc., by *speaking* His thought/wish. If God had not *spoken* His commands, presumably the latter would not have come into being.⁸

In Navajo cosmology all of life comes into being first as *thought*—not thinking, but thought. For the Navajo *thought*, really, *thought-form*, is more than a mental construct, which it is in the context of the Western ego. Navajo use of the word in this context is closer to Jung's (not Freud's) concept of libido, or psychic energy. Thought, for the Navajo, embodies such additional concepts as attitude, symbolization, intention, focused feeling, the imaginal, intuitive knowing, and above all else, mythological truth. It includes magic and the magical dimension, but is not synonymous with it. It is a constant, aware, meditative state of being and inextricably includes the spirit dimension. The Western concept and usage of the word *thought*, for the most part, is as a mental construct separate from spirit and soul.

Clinically, this subtlety can make a profound difference. Thinking takes one into *logos* thought and dualistic ideas that too often split thinking as mental process from spiritual awareness, that is, away from connection to the Self. Ironically, the Navajo connotation for the word *thought* is closer to what we would think of as the *imaginal*. In clinical sessions with patients who say something like, "I've been *thinking* about killing myself," I might ask them if they have been *thinking* about killing themselves or if they have *experienced thoughts* about killing themselves. Often patients will own that these thoughts come to mind as disconnected thoughts, and then they start ruminating about the process of killing themselves. When I ask patients to focus on the *thoughts* (not the thinking process)—"Tell me the color and smell of the thoughts, what comes with them," etc.—this process often takes us down a totally different avenue with startling connections. It can have the effect of unsticking a stuck relationship to the imaginal. When I distinguish between thought and thinking, the patients respond matter-of-factly, as if they knew that distinction all along, while at the same time being shocked and dazzled by the insight. I have found this to be particularly true with scientists. I see this as testimony that this mental subtlety, characteristic of oral traditional languages, is a psychic vestigial remnant of the indigenous psyche that the Western psyche retains from a time before what was to become Euro-American humanity was cast out of the Garden of Eden and separated from its inherent psychic connection with all of life, nature.

THE TRANSCENDENT FUNCTION AND HÓZHÓ

The Navajo are ever conscious of holding the tension of the opposites . . . in balance, if possible. In Navajo cosmology energies that become chronically out of balance constitute the definition of illness for the individual and . . . the community, and a healing ceremony is sought.

As we know, Jung stressed the importance of holding the tension of the opposites—a very rich and creative concept, most particularly when applied on behalf of individuals and collective “individuation.” Jung contends that if we hold that tension long enough without acting out, we are sometimes graced with the sudden emergence of a transcendent third that goes far beyond the definition, logic, and limits of the opposites that have been held. Elsewhere I have suggested that the transcendent function, more than any other single dy-

dynamic, brought about the collapse/transformation of the Soviet Union.⁹

The Navajo are ever conscious of holding the tension of opposites. Indeed, they are always held in balance if possible. One never sees a symbolic depiction in a sandpainting of Father Sky without seeing one of Mother Earth in the same context; female holy figures are always present with male figures; there is female rain and male rain, both referenced in the same context; Monster Slayer is never seen without his twin brother, Child-Born-for-Water. In Navajo cosmology energies that become chronically out of balance constitute the definition of illness for the individual and often for the community, and a healing ceremony is sought. Introducing the word *balance* makes a huge difference in considering Jung’s concept of tension of the opposites as a creative force. Another word used along with balance is *harmony*. These concepts, or thought forms, when held by the individual and/or the healer/medicine man/therapist/analyst, tend to round the edges of holding the tension of the opposites. The tension can be great, but rounded edges do make a difference. In Navajo cosmology this is the natural way of the cosmos, and the five-fingered (humans) have a responsibility to work to restore harmony when those energies are out of balance. The medicine man with whom I work once said to me, “Balancing the individual balances the world.”

“In beauty I walk; it is finished in beauty” are the final words/chants that one hears in the Navajo Blessingway and other healing ceremonies. The Navajo word for beauty is *hózhó*. It is the word one hears most in many Navajo healing chants. Unlike the Western use of the word *beauty*, *hózhó* is a word of power. It connotes harmony and the restoration of psychic and spiritual balance within the individual and in the cosmos as well. The stem, *zhóó*, conveys concepts such as beauty, perfection, harmony, goodness, normality, success, well-being, blessedness, happiness, pleasant, good, worthy, ideal, perfect, holy, or sacred—ultimately, “perfection so far as it is attainable by humanity.” To experience the essence of *hózhó* is to feel it resonate in the cells of one’s body—literally.

The Navajo view of psyche is very compatible with the Jungian concept of the Self. Both clinical approaches hold to the concept Jung called the *collective unconscious*, which is a *source* as well as a repository of psychic reality. Therein each modality addresses archetypal energy and the transpersonal dimension as an integral part of healing. Given that the Navajo psyche has never been split from nature (as has the Western psyche, as mandated in the Garden of Eden), their language and oral tradition have a more direct access to the archetypal dimension of healing.

What I have learned in my practice is that some people function very well from within a *logos*-dominant language and worldview. Their psyches strive for a transcendent attitude to self and life, and above all else, it gives them a sense of meaning no matter the obstacles.

Other people have a similar outlook but do not fare as well and struggle mightily in their therapy and analysis. My impression is that these people have one foot in both worlds and are pretty well defended against their connection with the psychic paradigm of reciprocity.

Still others, particularly those individuals who have experienced early childhood trauma, do not fare well at all, and for some, their therapy can become another traumatic experience and/or a reactivation of earlier traumas. This is particularly true of borderland personalities for whom the interpersonal dimension of relatedness is spoiled and the only safe, trustworthy and constant self-object is in, and with, nature. I have had more than a few patients tell me that they have left previous therapies because the therapist could not witness or otherwise accept their worldview that nature is the only dimension that is trustworthy. Although ultimately these individuals need to be able to engage on an interpersonal level in the outer world before they can heal, the path to that reconnection must begin with the therapist’s witnessing and acceptance (not necessarily agreement with) the patient’s worldview, and above all else, the *fact* of their *transrational experience*.

Remember that in archetypal terms the Euro-American ego construct takes its roots ultimately from the same psychic pleroma as the indigenous

psyche pre the Garden of Eden drama; as nonindigenous people we still carry vestiges of those predualistic psychic roots, including a capacity for resonating with oral traditional language structure (Bernstein, 2012a).

What does all of this mean? It means that when we step out of a dualistic mode of thinking (as best we can), we open ourselves to noticing other forms of consciousness and other dimensions of being. It means that if we don't insist on forcing experience into preexisting forms that make rational sense to us, we open ourselves up to other realities. For example, the ending of the film *The Life of Pi* gives the two protagonists a choice between two stories and a free choice as to which each "prefers." The question is still posed in a dualistic framework: Do you like this one better *or* do you like that one better? A choice is made in the film, and each of the two is happy. Each, I'm sure, could have given a rationale for their choice. But if one can hold the idea that an "experience" is exactly that—an *experience*—then the question is not whether it makes sense or is "real," but rather what effect did the *experience* have on the situation. Phenomenologically, the experience itself is a given. Returning to *Pi*, the relevant questions would be, "Would Pi have survived without Richard Parker, and would Richard Parker have survived without Pi, and how did each change the other?"

Navajo healing opened this door for me clinically, and I believe it has made a profound difference in the quality of the analytic process, the transference, and countertransference. And to be clear: I am not proposing this model or approach in opposition to a dualistic one. Both are possible within the same frame, within the same dream.

Earlier, I referred to the psychic paradigm of Western culture and the Western ego construct as one based on the principle of dominion, and I referred to the psychic paradigm of most North American indigenous cultures as one based on the psychic principle of reciprocity. I have outlined their respective characteristics below:

PSYCHIC PARADIGM OF DOMINION

- Patriarchal monotheism.
- Dominance of left brain consciousness.
- Cartesian duality.
- Splitting, without consciously holding the tension of the opposites, and therefore prone to missing the potential for emergence of a "transcendent function."
- Power-oriented towards supremacy of the ego due to absence of the mediating influence of a living relationship with nature—i.e., an archetypal deficit in the capacity for humility.
- Shadow dynamics typically are seen as pathology.

- Dominion denies and is threatened by the idea of an archetypal dimension of reality capable of overriding ego control; as a result it carries a phobic need to deny engaging the possibility of *transrational experience*.¹⁰
- Beholden to a human-centered concept of psyche—i.e., that psyche exclusively resides in, and emanates from, the minds of humans. Nature, thus, exists outside of psyche.

PSYCHIC PARADIGM OF RECIPROCITY

- Right-brain predominance balanced with left-brain consciousness.
- Principle of balance, harmony, and repair—not “fixing” or “curing.”
- Duality as balance and harmony, not as splitting.
- A balance of masculine and feminine energy at all times, in all things.
- Experiences shadow dynamics as normative but in need of management.
- Healing based on restoration and repair without guilt. (There is no need for guilt when the presumption is the need and possibility for restoration. The Native languages I am familiar with have no word for guilt.)
- Principle of restoration does not instinctively seek out the transcendent function.
- Psychic principle of reciprocity embraces archetypal awareness.

These paradigms framed the essential choices given at the end of *The Life of Pi*—to look at Pi’s story/experience *either* through the lens of dominion *or* through the lens of reciprocity. Each chose. I would say that the challenge for the world in the age of global climate change is for each, the psychic principle of dominion and the psychic principle of reciprocity, to view the present and coming drama through the lens of the other. Were this to occur we, the five-fingered species *Homo sapiens*, perhaps could then find a way to *relanguage* our relationship to life at *this* point in history. We might then begin to approach it as a coevolutionary partnership towards a transcendence that preserves the life of our species and the sacredness that we feel when we take the time to notice. This, in the end, may have been the *telos*, the *final cause* of that split that took place in the Garden of Eden. The indigenous psyche, with its knowledge of and relationship with the earth, and the Eurocentric human, bringing the wondrous inventions of science and technology, *together* may be able to form a partnership within nature to protect what is sacred to us all.

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The indigenous psyche, with its knowledge of and relationship with the earth, and the Eurocentric human, bringing the wondrous inventions of science and technology, *together* may be able to form a partnership with nature to protect what is sacred to us all.

One of the most profound learnings I have gained from Navajo medicine comes from their sandpainting ceremony (Bernstein, 2005; see Ch. 14). In my view, sandpaintings are graphic images, mandalas, of archetypal figures and archetypal energies. When they are accompanied by singing and chanting and enactments of the cosmological story relevant to the patient's illness and healing, the experience is one of being in the midst of a mythological drama happening in the now. Navajos

present at the sandpainting ceremony behave with the utmost respect, as is called for in the literal presence of the Holy People.

The Navajo word for sandpainting is *iikaah*. It translates in English as "the place where the gods come and go."¹¹ Navajo sandpainting rituals are included as part of several healing ceremonies. In those ceremonies, large sandpaintings with near-life-size figures depicting some aspect of the Navajo cosmological story are made on the earthen floor of the medicine hogan where the ceremony takes place. The patient is not present when the sandpainting is made. When the sandpainting is completed and consecrated by the medicine man, the patient is brought in and placed in a sitting position on the sandpainting.

During chanting and prayers, the medicine man applies sand from the sandpainting to the body of the patient—foot to foot, leg to leg, torso to torso, arm to arm, back to back, heart to heart, head to head. Over the years I have come to understand this ceremony as applying archetypal healing energy brought by the Holy People from a transpersonal realm. It is difficult to describe the impact of this ceremony, the electrifying energy that is constellated in the hogan, and the *transrational* effect on every single person in the room. The only word I can think of is *numinous*.

I came to understand this ceremony as what we, as Jungians, are endeavoring to do when we do dream analysis: apply the archetypal energy brought by the dream symbols to the psyche and soul of the patient. Our

interpretations are the cosmological story that we read from the message of the unconscious to the patient's ego. In addition, I came to see the individual grains of sand as akin to the individual pores and cells in our non-Native patients. From this I gleaned profound insight on how to facilitate and enliven mind-body connections in my patients. The other thing I learned is that this insight on my part affects the transference and countertransference, whether I allude to it or not and whether the patient knows anything at all about indigenous healing. Eduardo Duran (2012), in his article, "Medicine Wheel, Mandala, and Jung," wrote: "A key difference in my experience is that in scientific based Jungian work the dream is an energy that lives in the psyche and in Native cosmology the psyche is merely a part of the dream. Dreams for Native people are alive, and possess consciousness/awareness; the dream knows the dreamer" (p. 141).

The clinical point is taking the process (ceremony) into the cellular level through *experiencing* the dream organically. The culmination of the ceremony *may* be interpretation. Often, however, beginning there aborts the depth of transformation. Interpretation and meaning are not the goal. Integration and "knowing"/"experiencing" is.

For example, after a very tense and difficult session with one patient where we did do some dream work, she ended the session by saying, "Each of the cells in my body can breathe now." I had not discussed my theoretical formulations with her, as I described them above. One month later, during the course of another session, she offered up, "Every cell in my body is humming."

With some patients, particularly those with environmental illness or what has been diagnosed (by others) as psychogenic/psychosomatic illness, I have suggested that they begin the day with a ritual of asking the cells of their body what is going on; or, giving them warning that they are going out into a fairly charged day and to not take the chaos and commotion "personally." None has resisted the idea; many have done it and experienced a seemingly quieting and healing effect.

As for how my personal process and dreams have been impacted, I will say the following:

- My experience with Hopi and Navajo healers dramatically influenced me personally and provoked a series of profound dreams that led me to become a Jungian analyst. The idea, as an idea, never entered my mind. The "idea" was presented through my dreams.
- About a month ago I was explaining to someone some potent insights that I'd had about myself and was gesturing rather strongly with my hands. I made a certain movement that, like throwing

a light switch, suddenly threw me back into an analytic session I'd had over forty years ago that was devoted to an extraordinary dream with moving symbols but no people and no dialogue. The dream had to do with the subtle differences between the Navajo and Hopi cultures and their worldviews. I relived that entire session in the moment, and that recall continues to impact my thinking and the way in which I see life and my role in it (Bernstein, 2012b).

Recently I had lunch with a friend. He wanted to know how I was progressing in recovering from knee replacement surgery. I told him that the rehab people were telling me that I was healing faster than anyone with whom they had worked. I also told him that since my surgery, I have been experiencing about 20% of the pain I had been experiencing presurgery, resulting from a genetic degenerative neurological disorder.¹²

He asked what else I had been doing and I told him about a Navajo healing ceremony performed for me before my surgery. He then asked, "Do you think your rapid healing and recovery from the surgery and absence of pain from the neurological disorder were due more to the surgery or to the Navajo ceremony?" I told him that I don't think that way. "I simply say, 'Thank you.'"

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NOTES

1. I specify *North American* nonshamanic healing practices because those are the healing traditions with which I have had some personal experience.
2. The word *reciprocity*, as used in English, carries connotations of "negotiation," "reward," "justice," i.e., righting a wrong; something owed, particularly as it relates to property and money, etc. This does not fit with the indigenous or Navajo concept of reciprocity, which has to do with maintaining the *natural cosmic* balance in all things, particularly in recognition of life's/nature's gifts (e.g., rain, good crops, restored health, protection) by giving thanks and reverence and accepting one's role in restoring and maintaining that balance. Morning prayers for indigenous individuals are not only prayers for oneself

and one's family, but also giving thanks to the sun for returning and bringing with it blessings and bounty. It should be noted here that *prayers* for the indigenous are not a form of *worship*, which is power-based. Prayers, in this context, are more akin to reverence and gratitude.

3. This is a much more complicated issue than is apparent on the surface. For example, Hopi indigenous medicine is not embedded in their religious practice, whereas Navajo healing and religion are essentially the same systems. There are many subtleties here because Western dualistic psyche and *logos* thinking make the situation all the more complicated; the only way that Euro-Americans come by their information is through translations of indigenous cultures, religion, and healing practices based in oral traditional language and the indigenous psyche, into Western *logos* thinking, which is alien to their culture and language structure
4. This encounter led to a six-year consulting relationship with the Navajo Tribe and becoming their registered lobbyist on Capitol Hill. At the time I was living in Washington, D.C.
5. *Transrational* is a term I have coined.
6. The Holy People always travel to the place of the ceremony on a rainbow. I would say that at least half of the daytime ceremonies I have attended were blessed with the presence of a rainbow that all could see. See Bernstein, 2005, pp. 160–161.
7. The Navajo would not differentiate these three unless talking to a white person.
8. Nothing is simple: The Book of Genesis in the Bible presents two “creation” stories with regard to the creation of the humans, i.e., Adam and Eve. In the first, Adam and Eve came into being at the same time, made in God’s image on God’s command. In doing so he gave them explicit dominion over the earth and all things that live on the earth, in the seas, and that fly. God then goes on to fashion the Garden of Eden. This version is the prevailing creation myth underlying the mythological foundation of Western civilization and all three Abrahamic monotheistic religions.
In the second, Genesis says that God fashioned Adam out of earth; Eve he fashioned later from Adam’s rib. There is no explanation for why there are two variant myths concerning the creation of Adam and Eve. Then that story is dropped. We then find ourselves in the drama of the Garden of Eden. However, it is important to notice that in this second version God simply *does/performs* the act of creation and does not give spoken commands.
9. For an example of holding the opposites on a collective level during the Cold War see *Power and Politics*, by Jerome S. Bernstein; “Beyond the Personal: Analytical Psychology Applied to Groups and Nations” by Jerome S. Bernstein, published in *Carl Gustav Jung: Critical Assessments*, edited by Renos Papadopoulos (4 Vols.), London, Routledge, 1993; “Archetypal Reality in Politics,” Jerome S. Bernstein, *Spring Journal*, Vol. 78, pp. 1–29; and *The Roots of War* by Anthony Stevens. The United States is only now learning

some of the deeper lessons for our country that the constellation of the transcendent function wrought as a result of the Cold War.

I have never liked Jung's term for this process, i.e., "individuation," because it confounds the dynamic it purports to describe on both the individual (personal) and the collective levels and the interaction between the two. At the same time I should add that I have not come up with a better word to offer.

10. Transrational *ideas* are less threatening.
11. The word *gods* is erroneously used because in English and in our culture we have no concept for "Holy People," i.e., spirit beings. The translation closer to the Navajo meaning would be "place where the Holy People come and go."
12. The disorder is "Charcot-Marie-Tooth" syndrome, Type II. It is degenerative but not directly life-threatening. In Western medical terms, there is no treatment. It can result in constant pain, sometimes of great intensity, as was my situation prior to the surgery.

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