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## American Indian healing in the land of fire and ice

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### Abstract

While visiting Iceland during the summer of 1994, I conducted two American Indian healing rituals that produced impressive results. The first part of this essay describes the spiritual landscape of Iceland, which I believe was an important influence on therapeutic outcome. The second part discusses the healing interventions, one for a patient with multiple sclerosis, the other for a patient with brain cancer. They are presented as anecdotal evidence of the efficacy, flexibility, and holistic approach of American Indian healing.

### American Indian Healing

History bears witness to the power of American Indian healing. It has been in continuous use for at least 40,000 years and, as part of *indigenous healing*, it is representative of the most widely practiced healing method in the world today. Although American Indians have access to allopathic medicine, many still rely on traditional healing as essential complementary therapy.

There are always four factors in American Indian and other forms of spiritual healing: the person, the time, the place, and spirit.

*Person* means that the patient must be ready for healing and the healer feels an ability to help. Some American Indian healers require a sense of personal or spiritual affinity with the patient. (This makes randomized, double blind experiments an impossibility!) The personality, spirituality, and power of the healer is also a strong influence on therapeutic outcome.

*Time* signifies that spiritual power can only be assimilated if the right dose is given at the correct time. The patient must be willing to accept help and to change personal habits that may be reinforcing the disease. American Indian medicine emphasizes intensity and meaningfulness of therapy over duration. That is, one powerful healing ceremony is more effective than months of less concentrated sessions. Nevertheless, several treatments are often required for optimal benefits. This was not possible with my two patients. At the very least, a single treatment can instill hope and deepen a patient's understanding of the spiritual dimension of life. The latter is extremely important for terminal patients because it can lead to a more graceful and meaningful transition into death.

*Place* is extremely important in healing. Religious traditions throughout the world emphasize the importance of pilgrimage and sacred space in healing. American Indian healers sometimes travel to sacred sites to gather the power to heal specific conditions, or they advise their patients to make these journeys. It is unfortunate that western CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) healers generally ignore the *where* of healing in favor of the *how*. A positive place makes a positive therapeutic outcome more likely.

*Spirit* is the recognition that the healing current flows most strongly when the boundary between self and other dissolves. American Indian healing is based on prayer, which in some Indian languages translates as “to speak as one with.” Both healer and patient pray in order to open themselves to the Great Spirit, the highest and deepest source of help and guidance.

### **Why Iceland?**

I went to Iceland on a spiritual pilgrimage and as a way of fulfilling a dream that had been recurring for several years-- that I was traveling to the home of the North Wind, which in my dream was always symbolized by Iceland. In American Indian philosophy, we travel North in order to find strength and wisdom. The North is the direction of the cold, purifying winds. It fortifies the spirit in facing life's difficult challenges and tests. The North is the zenith between West and East and thus symbolizes the spiritual power that brings us out of the old (the West, setting sun) and into the new (the East, rising sun). The North Wind helps people find meaning and purpose in life.

According to many American Indian Nations, the human family is presently in an age of testing, transition, and purification, symbolized by the North. The beginning of the millennium is a “dark night” for the human soul. To prevent continued ecological destruction and to preserve the beauty of nature that waits for us in the East, we must renounce greed and learn the wisdom of simplicity. To prevent technology (another symbol of the North) from destroying us, we need to tap the powerful and renewable energy of the environment--sun, wind, and water. And perhaps the most difficult challenge of all is a personal one, how to release envy, prejudice, stubbornness, and small-mindedness so we can live with the earth and each other in peace.

Iceland, originally called *Ultima Thule*, “the island at the end of the world,” is an ideal place to meditate on the lessons of the North. The pure air, crystal clear water, non-polluted food, and wild landscape nourish body, mind, and spirit and are certainly more healing than any amount of yoga. The awesome strength of the North Atlantic is a constant reminder of humankind's place in nature, lending the people a rugged individualism, yet teaching humility. (In some of the Icelandic fishing villages, it is rare to find a family that has not lost a relative to the sea.) The powerful, volcanic terrain of Iceland is conducive to inner transformation. Anyone who doubts that the Earth is alive need only visit this dynamic, living landscape. Iceland, with an area of 103,000 square kilometers, is

the largest volcanic island on Earth and is blessed (or cursed, depending on your viewpoint) with more than 200 volcanoes. The Mid-Atlantic Ridge rises up through the country from the North Atlantic floor, forming a series of volcanic fissures, cones, and immense lava fields. Iceland sits on both the Old and New Worlds. As the North American and Euro-Asian continental plates clash and drift, earthquakes and volcanoes continue to reshape and recreate the land.

Iceland is new and growing. Walking over deserts of lava and ash, one has the impression of walking through Genesis. Although the country is presently only half the size of Great Britain, it may be the seed of a new continent.

Iceland has been called "the Land of Fire and Ice." The *yang* volcanic fires are balanced by the *yin* of ancient glaciers, including Europe's largest glacier, Vatnajökull. In many places these yang and yin forces have come together, creating a visible alchemy: volcanoes erupting under a glacial blanket, red lava flowing into the cold North Atlantic, icy rivers and boiling hot springs. Even the climate is paradoxical. Iceland sits just under the Arctic Circle, yet because it is warmed by the Gulf Stream, the temperature rarely drops below 0 degrees Centigrade in the winter. Parts of Iceland are black and barren. But much of the country is green and beautiful, blessed during the short, bright summer with wildflowers, grassy fields, thick moss covering the older lava flows, and certainly the most beautiful waterfalls in the world. "Greenland," on the other hand, is cold and inhospitable, a true ice-land. The outlaw Eric the Red wanted to entice his Icelandic friends to follow him into exile by suggesting that his newly found home, which he called "Greenland," was even warmer than Iceland. This is far from the truth.

I went to Iceland to soak in the power of fire and ice and to explore the historical roots of Iceland's extraordinary harmony between people, land, and spirituality. Iceland was first settled in the ninth century by Irish monks, bringing both Christian and Celtic influences. This was followed by waves of Scandinavian (mostly Norwegian) farmers and, of course, Vikings. What about the aboriginal Icelanders? Some people confuse Greenland, an Inuit (Eskimo) country, with Iceland. In Iceland, the indigenous people are European! it is perhaps the only country in the world where the first European settlers did not colonize or displace other ethnicities or tribes. In fact, Icelanders, like the American Indians, suffered under foreign colonialism. For more than 650 years they were ruled, first by Norway (beginning in 1262), and then Denmark (beginning in 1387). The combination of a merciless Danish trade monopoly, despotic rule, terrible smallpox epidemics, and the Black Death plague (1402-4, claiming a third of the population), left the country starved and decimated. Iceland finally freed itself from this yoke, proclaiming independence at the site of the ancient Viking Parliament, Thingvellir, on June 17, 1944.

Icelanders speak the most ancient living European language, a form of ancient Norse, virtually unchanged for a thousand years, thanks to their geographic

isolation and cultural strength. To travel through Iceland is to journey through a Saga landscape. The sites of ancient warriors and lovers, the places described by the Sagas or where the Sagas were written are everywhere evident and help form the Icelandic cultural identity. I was reminded of the Dreamtime world of the Australian aborigines, who in a similar way, read their cultural history and myths in every mountain, river, and valley.

Although most Icelanders identify themselves as Lutheran, the pagan religion of the *Æsir* (Norse Gods and Spirits) is officially recognized and has a large following. It seems only logical that where people's lives are so influenced by outside geological forces, these powers might be personified as temperamental spirits, sometimes benevolent, sometimes malevolent, but always demanding respect. Reykjavik, the capital city, is probably the only modern city in the world where one can purchase a map showing the location of trolls and elves. Highways are still routed to avoid displacing or offending boulders that may be troll residences. Please don't misunderstand me. Iceland is a modern European country. There are as many cell-phones, laptop computers, and modern conveniences in Reykjavik as in any city in Europe or the U.S. Like the landscape, Icelanders have found a dynamic blend of old and new.

Nowhere is this earth-alchemy more visible or the harmony between people and land more evident than at the Icelandic holy place, Snæfellsnes Glacier. This area, near the Western Fjords, has always been considered strange and mysterious. Jules Verne chose Snæfellsnes as the scene for his book *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Iceland's Nobel Prize winning author, Halldor Laxness, wrote about Snæfellsnes in his novel *Under the Glacier*, as a place where there is little distinction between past and present, between the mundane and the supernatural. Snæfellsnes is like a giant spiritual magnet that draws people to it.

I arrived at the town of Hellnar, just under the Glacier, in late July, in time to participate in an annual New Age Festival dedicated to healing, spiritual development, and world peace. This was the site of the Native American healings that I will describe later. The geography was striking. A grassy meadow bordered on one side by the great glacier and a giant volcanic cone, naturally shaped like a black and brown pyramid, and on the other side by basalt cliffs and the North Atlantic. At the edge of the meadow is a sacred spring where the Virgin Mary appeared to an Icelandic bishop a thousand years ago, and still renowned for its healing waters. I have no doubt that the power of the land and the sheer number of individuals attending the Festival was an important factor in the efficacy of my healing work. Consider the percentage of the Icelandic population which has been attending these yearly gatherings, between two and three hundred out of a total population of approximately 250,000. This would be equivalent to a gathering of 300,000 people in the U.S.! Scientific studies have documented that social support-- the presence of friends, family and like-minded individuals, plays an important role in healing.

The close bonds formed by shared language, ethnicity, landscape, cuisine, hardships (especially the sea, the wind, and bumpy roads!), and culture make the "community factor" especially strong.

I was very much at home and found the Icelandic land and people a pleasant respite from North American busy-mindedness. I have such fond memories of sitting with Icelandic friends around a camp-fire and listening to hour after hour of Icelandic folk songs. In how many countries could you insult someone by saying, "He can't even compose poetry!"?

I found Iceland to be very receptive to indigenous healing practices. If one digs really deeply in the Icelandic consciousness, one finds a strata of shamanic spirituality, older than either Christianity or Paganism. The sagas speak of spirit guides (*hamingja*), land spirits (*landvoettir*), totemic forces, and spiritual warriors. There are also healers, counselors, and prophets able to interpret and control natural phenomena much like shamans. In the 13th Century historical adventure *Njal's Saga*, when Svan of Svanhill has a premonition that he will be attacked by Osvif, he takes a goat-skin and swings it around his head, while chanting, "Let there be fog and phantoms..." At the same time, Osvif and his men are surrounded by a thick bank of fog, followed by a great darkness which blinds their eyes, causing them to fall off their horses and lose their weapons (Magnusson and Palsson, p. 61-2). Later in the same epic, Njal is forewarned of his friend Gunnar's death when, one restless and sleepless night, he sees the menacing spirits (often called "fetches," *Fylgja* in Icelandic) of Gunnar's enemies (Magnusson and Palsson, p. 157-8)

Almost a thousand years ago, Thorgeir, the leader or "Lawspeaker" of the Viking Parliament, covered himself with an animal robe for a day and night, emerging with a vision that led to a period of greater national harmony. He realized that only if Icelanders accepted one faith, one path--Christianity--would there be a chance for peace. Isn't it fascinating that a shamanic experience led directly to Iceland's adoption of Christianity!

Thorgeir's method of vision-seeking demonstrates an influence from ancient Lapp or Nordic shamanism (*seidr*). In *Under the Cloak*, Icelandic Professor Jon Hnefill writes, "Old Nordic sources contain accounts of people lying down, covering themselves with clothes or locking themselves in, when they resorted to sorcery or underwent metamorphosis...Lappish and North Norwegian sources tell of a similar metamorphosis by Lapps for the purpose of gaining information from distant places" (Adalsteinsson, p. 142). Similar accounts are found in old Icelandic sources. We see further evidence of Lappish influence from records of contact between Lapps and Icelanders. For instance, we know that Thorgeir's son, Finni the Dreamwise, had shamanic gifts, learned from both his father and mother, who was probably a Finn or Lapp. In a manner similar to Thorgeir, ancient Icelandic poets would meditate under a cloak in order to find spiritual

inspiration. There are also Saga tales of poets covering themselves with robes and making out-of-body journeys to distant locations (Adalsteinsson, p. 142).

Some of the Norse pagan gods, such as Thor, the most worshipped in Iceland, are similar to shamanic personifications of Thunder, Wind, and other natural forces. The Norse gods are frequently accompanied by animal helpers (e.g. Odin's ravens) who seem truly shamanic in their role as intermediaries between the spiritual and mundane worlds. However, the belief in land spirits and "hidden folk" (*huldufolk*), such as dwarfs, elves and trolls, is a true parallel to Native American tradition. The Northern Utes consider the *pitukupi* (dwarfs) the greatest source of healing power. The dwarfs are described as "about two feet tall, usually dressed in green, though sometimes in red and other colors. They live underground and can be located by a small amount of smoke coming out of a hole in the ground" (Smith, p. 155) The Cherokee know of a race of "Little People", the *Yunwi Tsunsi*, "who live in rock caves on the mountain side. They are little fellows..well shaped and handsome, with long hair falling almost to the ground. They are great wonder workers and are very fond of music, spending half their time drumming and dancing" (Mooney, p. 333) The Little People are known to be kind-hearted and frequently help lost children find their way home. However, it is considered dangerous to follow the sound of their drumming or to disturb them, lest they cast a spell over the trespasser and cause him or her to wander in a daze.

Icelandic holy places, such as the holy mountain Helgafel, renowned from the ancient *Eyrbyggja* and *Laxdaela* Sagas, are remarkably similar to vision quest places of the Native Americans.[1] They were and are places of spiritual communion. Helgafel was once believed to be an entrance to the land of the dead. There is an ancient custom that climbing Helgafel confers good fortune. Pilgrims still make the ritual journey to the top, walking in silence, looking straight ahead, and standing in the stone shrine at the summit, facing east. If one makes three good wishes and tells no one, the wishes will be granted. In *Iceland Saga* author Magnus Magnusson writes, "...the landscape was a potent factor in the Settlement, alive with supernatural beings...Icelandic folklore is full of tales about these creatures; belief in them was probably deeper and more pervasive than formal paganism, or even formal Christianity, and lingers still to this day . . ." (Magnusson, p.52).

Iceland progressed from shamanism to Paganism to Christianity. The American anthropologist Stanley Diamond wrote that one of the tragedies of western civilization is that we have tried to deny and move beyond the wisdom of the primitive without first integrating its teachings. This may not be as true of Iceland, where geographical isolation allowed a cultural continuity rare in today's world.

## THE HEALINGS

I was invited to the Snæfellsnes gathering to lecture about healing traditions, but

not to specifically offer healing. I had not planned to practice Native American medicine, but agreed to it after I was sincerely asked by some attendees. The healings were conducted impromptu, outside of the scheduled festival events. In keeping with Native American ethics, there was no fee for my services. Native healers believe that healing is a gift from the Great Spirit that should never be reduced to a quantity or dollar value. Yet a patient does need to offer something as a "sacrifice," a token of humility, respect, and dedication to the Great Spirit, source of all healing power. It is up to the patient to make a voluntary offering, whether it be a donation or a gift. I received a piece of beautiful Icelandic pottery and a book from my clients.

### **The Method**

Although I have studied many indigenous healing traditions, I was intuitively moved to follow the basic structure of Si.Si.Wiss medicine, literally "Sacred Breath," in both healings. Si.Si.Wiss is an ancient intertribal spiritual tradition from the Puget Sound region of Washington State. In retrospect, I realize the appropriateness of Si.Si.Wiss in Iceland. It was created by an ocean going people, like the Icelanders, and is filled with teachings about creatures and spirits common to the American Northwest and the Icelandic landscape, including wolves, whales, and salmon. I have studied Si.Si.Wiss medicine since 1988 with the Nuu-chah-nulth healer and storyteller, Johnny Moses, and would like to express my gratitude to Johnny, to his family and elders, and to *Si Cel Siam*, the Great Creator, for their guidance.

A Si.Si.Wiss healing ritual is a community event in which the medicine person or elder healer (these are synonymous) acts as an orchestra leader, coordinating the timing of prayers, songs, dances, and other ceremonial activities. Every person who attends the ritual is a participant-- there are no spectators. Any member of the "orchestra" can offer healing to a patient, as spirit and intuition move him or her. Several people may also work on one patient simultaneously. The medicine person may also offer healing, but he or she is merely an outstanding "soloist."

Participants sing specific healing songs to the beat of deeply resonant single-headed drums. They may also dance to the songs, either improvising or dancing choreographed steps that honor and call present their spirit helpers ("powers"). The patient is seated in the center of the circle of singers. The healer(s) applies non-contact therapeutic touch or very light laying on of hands. He/She may do so silently or accompanied by prayers. The healer may also periodically cleanse and purify the patient by waving either candlelight or the smoke of burning cedar around the patient's body. The healers do not take credit for the results of the ceremony. According to Johnny Moses, spirit powers and personal power are mere adjuncts to the highest source of healing power, "God's Love."

### **Case #1. Jon [2]**

Jon is an Icelandic man in his late 40s who has suffered from Multiple Sclerosis for many years. He is able to walk for short distances with the help of a walker,

but even so is very unstable and frequently loses balance. He also has soft tissue damage around the left knee, causing chronic severe knee pain and an inability to place his full weight on the left leg. He has sought the help of both allopathic and natural healers in Iceland and abroad but has never received anything but mild, transitory relief of pain, without improvement in his functioning. Jon had never experienced Native American healing before and knew nothing about it. He came to the Snæfellsnes Festival looking for a particular healer whom he had met the previous year. Since the healer was not attending, Jon was referred to me.

I asked for twenty volunteer "helpers" from the conference to meet at an outdoor arbor and form a circle around the seated man. I gave one of the helpers my drum, taught him the proper beat and led the group in a healing song. As I began to work on Jon, I felt that something was not right. Only about half of the helpers were actually singing, and even these were barely audible. I motioned to the drummer to stop. I exclaimed loudly and severely, "If you are here only for entertainment or because you think 'Wouldn't it be fun and amusing to try out Indian Healing?' then please leave! Leave this circle right now! You are being disrespectful to the Creator, to this man and to myself. If you are going to stay, then put your whole body, heart, and soul into it!" I waited a minute. Nobody left the circle. When the drummer again picked up the beat, everyone was singing powerfully and trying their best.

I cleansed Jon with a smudge of local bearberry leaves (*uva ursi*) and juniper. As I waved the smoke around his body with my hands, I also imagined that Grandmother Ocean (within view) was purifying him. I then placed my hands on Jon's spine, one palm at his sacrum, the other above his seventh cervical vertebrae. I rested my palms there for a few minutes, to both "read" the energy in his spine and to focus healing and loving power. I then held his knee lightly between my two palms, focusing with the same intent. After this, I did non-contact treatment, primarily over Jon's head, focusing on the brain itself. I held my hands a few inches from his skull, one hand in front, one in back, then one hand to the left, one to the right. I continued, holding my palms above his spine, moving them gently up from the sacrum towards the crown and then down the front mid-line of his body. As I continued with non-contact treatment, I prayed in a soft voice, yet loud enough for Jon to hear me, and with a tone, rhythm, and intensity that harmonized with the sound of the background singing and drumming. In Native American traditions, prayers are spoken spontaneously from the heart, so I cannot recount exactly what I said, but it went something like this, "Oh Creator, I ask for healing for this brother. Let him learn his lessons through your guidance and wisdom, not through pain. I pray that whether this condition was caused by inner or outside forces, whether originating from this time or any time in the past, whether intentionally caused by offended people or spirits or caused by chance--let the pain and disability be lifted and released in a good and natural way."



The healing ceremony lasted approximately forty minutes. At one point I motioned for the drummer and singers to come to silence. I asked Jon to open his eyes when he was ready. He seemed calm and very relaxed. I helped him to stand and was about to move his walker over to him, when he said, "No, wait a moment. I feel something." He began to walk without assistance, slowly but with an apparently normal gait. He showed no sign of unsteadiness and was able to use his left leg easily. I walked along side of Jon, expecting him to lose balance and fall. Instead, he turned towards me, embraced me and said, tearfully, "Thank God! Thank God! It's a miracle. I can walk! I can walk!" He continued walking with the same ease for the next hour that he remained at Snæfellsnes.

An hour after the healing, several conference participants spotted orca whales in the nearby bay. A few days earlier, when I had first arrived at Snæfellsnes, I had felt the spiritual presence of whales and told my Icelandic hosts that whales would visit the conference site. They said that this was not likely, since whales had never been spotted in the bay, perhaps because it was too shallow. In Northwest American Indian tradition, orca whales are considered messengers who carry prayers and thoughts from distant friends or relations across the ocean. I felt that the whales were an indication that spiritual people from other continents were intuitively aware of the Snæfellsnes gathering and were sending prayers of support and friendship.

The most personally moving aspect of Jon's healing was the peaceful, angelic presence that seemed to hover over the land. Even those who had not witnessed the healing remarked on a strange glow that bathed Snæfellsnes and which lasted until the brief setting of the midnight sun.

### **Comments**

Frankly, if I had observed this healing from the sidelines, I would not have believed it and would have assumed that it was a "set-up." An Icelandic journalist wrote an article about the event for a local magazine. He told me that he believed what he saw only because he trusted my integrity and was present when Jon requested the healing.

A few days after the healing I was taking a ferry ride to an island a short distance from Reykjavik. The captain overheard me discussing alternative medicine with a passenger and asked me if I was the American he had heard about. He remarked that he was from Jon's village and had seen him walking about town normally. Nearly everyone in town knew about the "miracle" healing. Of course, some skeptics might say that MS has an unpredictable course, and improvements are always possible. Nevertheless, the speed and degree of Jon's improvement were extraordinary. At the very least, Jon was shown that he had an option, that there is a possibility, a hope for positive change.

### **Case #2. The Priest**

On the last day of the Snæfellsnes gathering, a group of four Swedish people

who had participated in the festival, spoke to me about their beloved seventy year old priest, Father Emanuel. They explained that Father Emanuel was very ill, and although he was also at the festival, he was shy to speak to me about his condition. I asked them to make an introduction. Father Emanuel had a round and well-weathered face, suggesting a love of the outdoors, penetrating yet mischievous blue eyes, and short, neatly trimmed black hair that looked at first like a cap. He had prostate cancer, widely metastasized to his brain and bones. His prostate had been removed almost three years earlier. Bone scans revealed that the cancer was progressing very slowly, probably because of a combination of factors: the nature of the cancer; the love, prayers, and support of his wife, family and friends; his own prayers and meditations; and the chemotherapy he was receiving. He had come to the festival partly for vacation and also hoping to find information relevant to combating the cancer.

Father Emanuel is an extraordinary and truly spiritual man. As we spoke informally about our mutual interest in religion, I found out that while living in a remote location, more than five hours from Stockholm, he had managed to accumulate a vast library and store of information on comparative religion. He had a deep knowledge of everything from Matthew Fox's "Creation Spirituality" to Buddhist Sutras and Sufi interpretations of the Koran. He also had a longtime, deep interest in Judaism and had once lectured in the United States on Hassidic Mysticism. Father Emanuel told me that he was delighted to meet a "Cohen," which he knew meant "priest" in Old Testament Hebrew.

The healing ceremony took place in a room at the Snæfellsnes conference center. I asked his four parishioner friends, the "helpers," to sit in a circle of chairs around Father Emanuel. As in the ceremony with Jon, I taught the helpers a traditional drum-beat and a Native American healing song. I smudged Father Emanuel and the room with juniper smoke to create a healing and sacred atmosphere. After a few minutes, I began to feel that the energy in the room could be stronger. Although the helpers were obviously sincere and dedicated to the task of healing, they could not identify with the song they were singing. I asked them to stop, meditate quietly for a few moments, and then switch to an appropriate Swedish spiritual song or hymn that represented love and healing. They almost immediately began a melodic song, with beautiful, gentle harmony. As they sang, I placed the shell of juniper smudge on a table and continued spiritually cleansing Father Emanuel with candlelight. I looked into his body, seeing with the eye of spirit the places of disease, darkness, and stagnation. I removed these energetically, as though grasping an invisible object, and then snapped my fingers towards the candlelight, intending that the disease be transmuted into divine light. After removing negative forces, I tapped healing power into his body, either waving the candlelight with my palms or just pulsing my palm towards his body. I concentrated my work on his brain, spine, thymus, spleen, and any other places where I sensed imbalance. I placed the candle on the altar and continued to work with my hands, using non-contact therapeutic touch.

I prayed in a soft voice, asking the Creator to teach Father Emanuel's cells intelligence and wisdom, to help his body to rid itself of disease and pain. I asked for these things in the name of the Great Creator and Jesus Christ. I prayed that God's love and power might burn away any impurities in body, mind, or spirit, and that these impurities, unneeded energies, or negative forces be released into divine light. I asked that Father Emanuel have the courage to make the right decisions and to fight the cancer with God's help and grace. I prayed that he might now receive back some of the wonderful love that he had given unselfishly throughout his lifetime to so many others.

As my prayer ended, I motioned the group to silence and began to sing loudly and strongly the Hebrew song, *Shalom Aleichem*, "Peace unto you, Oh Angels of Peace," while continuing non-contact treatment. I closed the healing by chanting several times the Hebrew, *Baruch atta Yahh [3] eloheyenu hey ha'olamim*. "Blessed are you, Creator, Life of the World."

I surprised myself at the use of Hebrew in the midst of Father Emanuel's healing. (Although I am ethnically Jewish, I was not raised within this tradition and know only a little about it.) I am, nevertheless, certain that my Native elders would approve. Their general attitude has always been, if it works use it. During the past century, Si.Si.Wiss ceremonies have been influenced by the American Indian Shaker Church, and it is not unusual to hear a mix of Christian and Indian songs and prayers. Hebrew created an affirmation of Father Emanuel's spirituality and self-worth which Native American songs could not have provided.

### **Comments**

The use of Hebrew was unplanned and spontaneous, yet it seemed entirely fitting. The Cherokee medicine man Keetoowah, one of my elders, used to say, "If it works, use it." There is also a precedent for integrating elements of Western religion with American Indian healing. During the past century Si.Si.Wiss ceremonies have been influenced by the American Indian Shaker Church, and it is not unusual to combine Christian and American Indian Practices. The Hebrew song and prayers provided a powerful healing symbol with which Father Emanuel could easily identify. After the healing, Father Emanuel felt relaxed and refreshed. We counseled together. He spoke of his wish to co-exist peacefully with the cancer. I suggested that he not be too compassionate or accepting, that this is the time to fight the cancer aggressively. (I would not recommend this behavior in all cases, but it seemed appropriate here.) Father Emanuel and the helpers corroborated that from the moment I began to sing in Hebrew until several minutes after the healing ended, they all felt as though they were "sunburned." They experienced a great source of light and heat above their heads, shining down on them.

The most obvious and immediate effect of the healing was an increase in hope and self-empowerment. Father Emanuel felt that he had a clearer mission and reason to continue living. He wanted to immerse himself in the study of religious

mysticism and to write about his life experiences. Another important result of the healing was that I made a new and very dear friend. We corresponded by mail after I returned to the states.

### **Follow-up**

Jon remained completely free of pain or disability for six weeks. After that, some of the symptoms returned. He became depressed and convinced that he could not maintain the improvement on his own. Yet, for the following five years, the MS never returned to its original level, and Jon no longer had need of a walker.

A few weeks after the healing, Father Emanuel had an X-ray which showed no sign of cancer in his brain. He was hopeful about this apparent remission and practiced prayer and healing visualizations daily. He remained in excellent health, vitality, and spirits for eight weeks. After that, he began to have a recurrence of symptoms. His optimism faded, and he neglected his self-healing practices. Within six-months, the tumors in his brain reappeared and caused pain and memory loss. Father Emanuel passed into spirit about a year later.

Although neither patient was "cured," there are some important lessons to be drawn from these two cases.

Regrettably, circumstances only permitted a single session with the individuals. To have the best possible effect on serious conditions, I generally recommend four American Indian healing sessions. Four is a sacred number that symbolizes wholeness (4 Directions, 4 Seasons, 4 Elements - Earth, Fire, Air, Water, 4 Realms - Stone, Plant, Animal, Human).

Healing and curing are not necessarily the same. Healing means to establish or restore wholeness and holiness; it creates improvements in quality of life. Curing is a measurable, quantitative change in the disease. Both individuals were healed. If they had taken additional steps to continue the healing process--perhaps through lifestyle adjustments or self-healing practices, they might have been cured as well.

Curing is ultimately in God's hands. Whether practicing complementary or conventional medicine, we can only influence nature, not control her.

One of my Icelandic friends commented to me, "We don't understand why you Americans reject as 'only anecdotal' or 'non-scientific' a wealth of clinically effective methods of healing. If a method works, even if only in the hands of particular healers [and thus is only partially replicable], you should use it."

### **Endnotes**

1. Icelandic spiritual teacher, Gudrun Bergmann, believes that Helgafell was once a site for fasting, prayer, and vision-seeking.

2. The names and other characteristics of my patients have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

3. Yahh is a barely audible breathing sound used in mystical Jewish chants to represent the 4 letter name of God, YHWH.

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