A Message from Mikkal

If you are seeking an apprenticeship with me from a long distance, it is important to read, understand this article, and ask me questions about it if you have them. It would also be good to read the Jung and Shamanic Healing articles on this website, subtitled: "Restoring the Sacred Hoop/Retrieving Soul." Let’s start with some definitions.

A shamanic Initiation calls you to your shaman self. Everyone is called by the Great Spirit to be an authentic self. The shaman is called to be a shaman-self, and to live and work shamanically. A shamanic initiation is two-fold 1) Ecstatic: initiation by the spirits in journeys, dreams and visions, and 2) Initiation into secret knowledge by knowledgeable ritual elders to help guide, ground, and extend the ecstatic process into terms and practices meaningful for your society. Both aspects of Initiation are highly experiential. An apprenticeship helps you with both the ecstatic (spiritual altered states and alternate realities) and the human and cultural side of the process. Shamans must live and work in both the ecstatic (or non ordinary) and the ordinary daily realms.

An apprenticeship is 30% reading and 70% experiential work, punctuated by guidance and processing of your experiences with me, in Fire Talks, which are the main vehicle of Hollow Bone Initiation and Apprenticeship. Fire Talks are primary; workshops are secondary, but important.

Hollow Bone means the process clearing of your inner life so that you are a channel of the Great Spirit, and your shamanic allies and spirit guides. Apprenticeship means the process in which this clearing out and transmission of special knowledge takes place.

What Role Does Jungian Psychology Play?
It plays two basic roles. 1) Some apprentices are psychotherapists who want to deepen their work with the shamanic path and healing practices. Because of my long background in Jungian psychology, and decades of work at integrating it with shamanism, I am in a position to provide guidance in how to integrate shamanic healing and Jungian psychological work. I have written some papers and two books on this topic, but the place to start exploring this literature is my book, JUNG AND SHAMANISM IN DIALOGUE: RETRIEVING SOUL / RETRIEVING THE SACRED [Paulist Press, 1997, Trafford 2007]. 2) The second role that Jungian psychology plays is that it offers a language to understand shamanism in terms that modern culture can now accept. There are a number of shamanic journeys (guided) that involve journeying to, accessing, and integrating archetypes, such as the Shadow, Anima, Wild Child, Paleolithic Hunter, the Shaman Within in, the Wounded Healer, the Death/Rebirth the Great Mother, and the archetypal Self,- font and central core of the psyche. To be clear, this is Not imposing Jungian concepts onto shamanism, but recognizing the archetypes at work in the shamanic way of life and practice. A traditional indigenous shamanic Initiation activates many archetypes as part of the expansion of consciousness and the development of shamanic powers and abilities.

People come into apprenticeships at different places, so I must assess where they are at and build from there. A beginning place is the introduction of two guided journeys that are archetypal in nature and launch the Initiation/apprenticeship process. The first is called “Awakening the Shaman Within”, and is a journey to discover and activate your shaman-self, a version of the archetype of the Old Wise Man or Old Wise Woman. This experiential transmission puts the apprentice in immediate touch with the shaman-self, necessary for accessing the non-ordinary reality and working with allies, spirit-guides and higher powers. The second practice is based on the archetypal-shamanic initiatory motif of “Reduction to a Skeleton” (Skeletization) and is a profound connection to the death/rebirth archetype. This experience, which I underwent spontaneously, and which my spirit-guides helped me prepare as a guided-journey, is aimed to help the apprentice learn to identify with every content except for the pure subject, the Self, the spiritual core of being. It is an experience of death and what lies on the other side of death and loss. This experiential knowledge is extremely important
in shamanic work. After these guided journeys of initiation, the journey work becomes directed by the apprentices own guides, and by virtue of the Intent which they set from their heart. Apprentices are taught a way to listen to the heart that is analogous to using all Four Functions Jung described (thinking and feeling, sensation and intuition) plus the Transcendent Function, and knowledge of how to access all that through the heart and bodily feeling…felt-sense or gut sense body knowledge.

Jung saw that shamanic initiation and life was itself an individuation process, or archaic individuation, of very ancient origins. A shamanic apprenticeship is an initiation and thus a kind of individuation that focuses on the development of authentic shaman self. The shaman receives the initiatory Call to shamanic-selfhood, or Quests for it, which is a version of the same thing. The process follows the structure of rites of passage and the hero myth theme described by Jung and Joseph Campbell (e.g. Call, Initiatory Ordeal, Return). The difference between this apprenticeship process and Jungian analysis or psychotherapy is that the apprentice is already called to, or being drawn towards the particular kind of individuation, that of becoming a shaman, a shaman-self. The typical analytic or psychotherapy client is also called to be their true or authentic self, but there are many other paths and forms than the shamanic, each highly unique in how they are expressed.

Finally, some apprentices come with very specific experiences and needs that may not involve using Jungian idiom….for example soul retrieval training, or help with their journeying process, or need to heal a personal wound, do a Vision Quest, or learn to combine sacred ceremony, chants, and community with their healing work. Apprentices are a diverse group.

The crux of the apprenticeship process is the Fire Talk sessions, which we shall discuss now.

The Ceremony of Fire Talks & Transmissions
It may help to explain a long-distance apprenticeship by contrasting it, at points, with a local and primarily Face-to-Face apprenticeship.
A local apprentice comes to Crow’s Nest, every other month for 3 days (or for a week-intensive), sleeps in campsites in summer, and in guest cabin or Medicine Lodge in the winter months. We normally have one or two Fire Talks per day, and other ceremonial practices. A Fire Talk is a heart-to-heart communication. The curanderas and curanderos of Mexico and South America call them ‘platicas del corazon’ which means the ceremony of “heart-to-heart talks”. Indigenous shamans of the Americas know that “heart heals heart” (“corazon cura corazon”).

I call them “Fire Talks” because I always do them around a Sacred Fire, with cleansing or smudging (limpias) and with Sacred intent. They are the main Vehicle of Initiation. I have had many such hours around a fire with don Alverto Taxo and Ai Gvhdi Waya. Think of Carlos Castaneda with his mentor don Juan Matus, and you’ll get the gist of these deep dialogues and how they differ from ordinary conversation or psychotherapy. They are much more deeply focused, with ‘Unbending Intent’ on the realization of your authentic and creative self, your personal freedom, the transformation of your perception, and the trusting of the heart, and bodily felt instincts to guide your steps day by day, moment by moment.

Fire Talks are not normal conversations. They are very deep two-way intimate communications in which the personae and surface mind of both of us is set aside. These are ontological-level communications which cut deeply into the heart of the matter, to the core and root concerns of your life. They seek to clear out whatever is in the way of living completely from the heart with mind as its servant. Clearing away any old wounds, traumas, or habits of mind that hamper you from living the authentic, joy-filled and purpose-filled life you are Called to live by the Great Spirit. They are the great instrument of clearing you out---so as to become a Hollow Bone servant of the Great Spirit and of life. The practices and methods are much more direct and potent than those of conventional psychotherapy or counseling. I say this as a psychologist and scholar with more than 30 years clinical experience. This statement is not made lightly. If you are a therapist or life-coach, Fire Talks can bring great potency, effectiveness, and focus to your clinical work.
Fire Talks are healing ceremonies in themselves. They offer the best integration of resources of my own shamanic lineages: Iachak, Toltec, and Cherokee, and all that has become seamlessly integrated with my own Jungian psychological formation. It can no longer be separated. This is the best way to learn shamanic counseling, by undergoing the process of Fire Talks. They are an initiation. The apprentice learns directly and experientially through these Fire Talks, and through the transmissions that go on in them. I sometimes refer to this as “wounded healer work”, for it is by teaching you to find and clean out your wounds, and succeeding at it that you develop your shamanic experiential data-base of experience to help others. So much is learned from this process.

Fire Talks have a teaching function, supported by preliminary readings and journaling to process their content. Depending on the apprentice a Fire Talk may cover the spiritual autobiography, looking for areas of likely soul loss, developing skills in various practices such as the Smoky Mirror Technique, how to open your heart (oyh) and application of life transforming inventories and recapitulations. Through work on dreams you will learn a rapid way to open and get to the crux of a dream's meaning or purpose. Fire Talks naturally result in you developing skill in using your heart's internal guidance system (I call it the NGS for 'Navigational System'). The NGS is employed in virtually everything we do. In the Iachak path of the heart, in Ecuador, this is called 'flying with the Condor.'

This is also the format in which various shamanic journey protocols, formulas, and consciousness-altering techniques takes place. Progress is monitored between Fire Talk sessions by way of emails.

Long-distance apprentices are encouraged at some point to come to Crow’s Nest for Face-to-Face transmissions. The apprentice who comes to Crow’s Nest for Face to Face transmissions with me participates in many one on one and group Fire Talks, between other activities such as shamanic journey and soul retrieval workshops, energy medicine workshops, Medicine Sweat Lodge and other purification rites, Medicine Wheel and Prayer Pipe Ceremonies. All these are experiential transmissions that cannot be done via telephone Fire Talks or reading.

An intensive Wounded Healer Summer School is participated in concurrent with the S. Manitou Vision Quest, usually the second week of each August. Local apprentices are part of a Crow’s Nest Drum Circle and the Hollow Bone Medicine Society, which addresses the need for spiritual community and support for the shamanic path and practice. Patients are sometimes brought in for soul retrieval and extraction to the Hollow Bone Society, a very ancient powerful group-healing ritual format. Many chants and ceremonial protocols are picked up by osmosis through the entire local apprenticeship.

A Long Distance apprenticeship is one in which the apprentice lives far away in the USA or Europe and cannot easily travel to Crow’s Nest for Face to Face or Group work. Long-distance apprenticeship relies intensively on Fire Talks ceremonies via telephone, scheduled and spaced to fit the apprentices needs financially and personally. Some do these every two weeks, some once per month, some less often, but we are not in a hurry up. We move at your pace. A Fire Talk Session costs the same as a psychotherapy sessions with me, which is $125.00 USD per hour. This is how I put food on the table and support my life and work. These hourly sessions can be spaced for affordability to you. They are combined with some reading and experiential practice between Fire Talks. Emails are used sparingly to supply me with needed information or reports, and brief questions. My website, www.cmichaelsmith.com is the teaching platform for obtaining the necessary reading materials and shamanic protocols and practices. Some apprentice links require passwords, which you can ask me for.

Long Distance apprenticeship can impart many things, including participation in the On Line Hollow Bone Society, a secret and confidential support group for apprentices and shamanic facilitators accessed
currently through Face Book. You are strongly encouraged to come to Crow’s Nest, at some point, to obtain transmissions that must be given Face-to Face, or in community with other apprentices, such as Soul Retrieval and Extraction, or the Vision Quest or Hollow Bone Summer School. For apprentices who cannot physically carry a backpack into the wilderness, -a very powerful Vision Quest in Journal form that you can do. It is very deep and intensive, and will normally take a couple of weeks to do, at about 2 hours per day. But this Questing work can be spaced to suit your situation as well.

**How to prepare for a long-distance Fire Talk (telephone).**
You will be asked to light a candle on your altar or in the room in which you will be talking with me via telephone. You will be asked to smudge or cleanse yourself with some appropriate herb such as sage, cedar or sweat grass, or incense like Palo Santo. This is to help you clear your mind, focus your intent, and ask the Great Spirit and your guides and allies for help in this Fire Talk. All this will help center you. I do the same thing on my end, as I sit by the sacred fire pit outside, or by my altar inside.

**How to I schedule a Fire Talk?**
Simply email me and request it, after reading this paper. My email is ShamanicAR@aol.com We will configure the difference in our time zone and set an appointment date and time which works for both of us. Payment can be made by sending a check to C. Michael Smith, Ph.D. 333 N Second St, suite 304, Niles, MI 49120, or through using PayPal. Outside the USA you must use PayPal or Bank Draft payable in USD funds.

Thank you,
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