

## **Soul Loss & Psychotherapy Blog**

**Blog for Apprentices in Shamanic Counseling & Coaching**  
23 Mar 2009

### **ON SOUL LOSS AND RECOVERY      BLOG**

#### **With Brief Shamanic and Psychotherapeutic Introduction**

**[rough draft—FOR APPRENTICES EYES ONLY] :)**

**Mikkal**

**C. Michael Smith, Ph.D.**

The interface and integration of shamanic and psychotherapeutic methods and resources has come a long ways sense I originally penned the book, JUNG AND SHAMANISM IN DIALOGUE. Today it is not so difficult to bridge the modern psychological and ancient and indigenous shamanic health care systems. Care of the soul and recovery of the soul are the common ground of ancient indigenous shamanic systems of healing, and modern dynamic and depth psychologies, and indirectly, even of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). The word “psychology” means expression of soul, logos or intelligible account or study of soul. The word “psychotherapy” means service or healing of soul. Of course shamans have ideas, practices and skill sets that differ in conception and understanding from modern psychologies, but this can be a plus because shamanism brings a time-tested and highly effective way that can educate the modern psychologist in powerful and effective methods of finding and bringing back on line parts of the person that have flipped off due to trauma, shock, childhood abuse, accident, serious sickness or major surgery.

Psychology also recognizes that parts of the self can become pathologically disconnected via repression, dissociation, or projection and need to be recovered (reconnected, de-repressed, re-associated, withdrawing projections and owning the content, integrating it). Psychotherapy, depending on the school, has methods that can help put the patient back in touch with ‘lost parts’, and bring many of them back on line. Some of the common psychotherapeutic methods include dream work, free association (Freudian), active imagination and journaling dialogues (Jungian), psychodrama (Moreno, Gestalt), focusing on a felt-sense (Gendlin / Rogers), use of empathy and introspection (Rogers/Kohut), clinical hypnosis (Colin Ross. Milton Erikson), and NLP retrieval of resources, Ericksonian methods of reframing and anchor collapsing.

Cognitive therapy can help dismantle barriers to finding joy and satisfaction in living, clearly helping make possible for something vital to come on line that various beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes had prevented. D.W.

Winnicott knew how important it was to reach the “sacred and incommunicado element” of the person, and was skilled at getting beneath mental structures and cognitive habit patterns, facilitating a process of allowing the patient to drop into formless play and creativity, thus gaining access the “whole self,” before it became marred and fragmented, or split off—i.e., the *vital core* of the person, which we may again call ‘soul.’ A therapist well-schooled in shamanic systems and methods is able to see the clinical phenomena, and the clinical psychologies, with fresher and sharper eyes to what is going on and exactly what needs to occur to facilitate healing or therapeutic change, and what the psychotherapeutic model and skill sets can or can’t itself accomplish (hence needing supplementation).

Shamans have ritual structures and sacred ceremonies within which to structure a deep life transformative and healing process, and psychotherapists have professional protocols and stepwise sequences that constitute modern or secular rituals of soul care.

The basic conceptual systems of shamanism and depth psychology are similar, yet the shamanic is more highly structured. Ellenberger (1970) has documented the evolution of modern dynamic psychiatry and depth psychology from its origins in shamanism, through temple healing, to mesmerism, to hypnosis and modern psychoanalysis (Freudian, Adlerian, and Jungian) and with some ambiguity, reveals that something is lost in the movement from the direct experiential and powerful impact of shamanic healing on the client, and the modern understanding of our history and symptoms. Today it is increasingly possible to interweave the best of both worlds, and many psychotherapists trained in shamanism are doing it. One can find many psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, and life coaches in the USA, Canada and Europe listed in the directories of the *Society for Shamanic Practitioners*, of which I am a Member, along with my Membership in the *American Psychological Association*.[\[1\]](#)

The major difference regarding the soul loss concept is that the region into which the missing pieces go is different. For the depth psychologist it is the undifferentiated zone of the unconscious and one hopes to entice it back to the surface from somewhere in those amorphous depths so that the client can make use of it. For the shaman, the missing pieces are located in a highly structured and personally elaborated *mundus imaginalis*, often referred to today as “Non ordinary reality” to contrast with the everyday consciousness termed “ordinary reality.” As Eliade mentions, the shaman knows the regions to which the soul can be carried away, as well as has discrete methods for locating it, bringing it back, and ceremonies for helping the afflicted receive it back on line and integrate it via use of ceremony and tangible symbols (e.g. talismans and fetishes) that help the patient keep a hold of it.

## **Contemporary Statements on the Shamanic Conception Soul Loss**

### **By Psychologically Informed Writers**

We now shall exhibit a few statements by a number of prominent psychotherapists and psychologists who are either shamanic practitioners, or who are shaman informed by modern psychology, or vice versa. This set of descriptions has been collected to show the relevance of the shamanic conception of soul loss and soul retrieval in modern psychological idioms. It is all too brief, but will convey, as does this paper as a whole, the areas of potential integration between the shamanic and the psychotherapeutic practice.

## **AI GVHDI WAYA, Cherokee-metis shaman**

SOUL LOSS is about losing or giving away part of our energy, who we are, to another person or situation. This energy is seen as 'soul' to some, and to others, a facet of our personality. The labels are meaningless, because something is lost that was once yours. Soul loss is usually undetected at first, but over time, the individual who has suffered the loss feels it in many ways.... p1.

Spiritually, one can lose a soul piece by giving power away to someone/something else. Mindless belief in anything courts disaster when you underestimate the power of the individual involved. Spiritual "brainwashing" often takes a piece of a person's soul. Look at the religions known to practice a mindless "believe in me or else" sort of belief.

Native Americans believe that following your own inner guidance is the best way to learn and to respect your unique individuality. To surrender this to anything or anyone is unthinkable. p.3

SOUL RECOVERY Is about regaining the fragments of one's soul energy that have become trapped, or lost or stolen either by another person or through traumatic incident that has occurred in one's life. Taking back control of your life is at the heart of this shamanistic healing method.

...without our pieces we are out of balance and are out of harmony with ourselves. Mother Earth is out of balance and she is now doing a great deal to shift and come back to her own center. INTRO

## **Jean Achterberg, Ph.D., Psychologist**

It is becoming increasingly clear that what the shaman refers to as soul loss—that is, injury to the inviolate core that is the essence of the person's being—does manifest in despair, immunological damage, cancer, and a host of other very serious disorders. It seems to follow the demise of relationship with loved ones, career, or other significant attachments.

–from The Wounded Healer

**Marie Louise von Franz, Ph.D. Jungian Analyst**

Soul loss can be observed today as a psychological phenomenon in the everyday lives of the human beings around us. Loss of soul appears in the form of sudden onset of apathy and listlessness; the joy has gone out of life, initiative is crippled, one feels empty, everything seems pointless.

Projections and Re-Collection

**Sandra Ingerman, MA, Psychotherapist and Shamanic Teacher**

Important parts of your essential core self may not be available to you. If so, the vital energy and gifts of these parts are temporarily inaccessible.

-Soul Retrieval 23

When any living creature is fully infused with its own spiritual force or soul, it will radiate energy and vitality. Any creature whose spirit is fully at home in its body will feel a deep resonance with that same spirit in other living things. By contrast, when any creature loses a part of its spiritual essence, a profound depletion and alienation from the rest of creation occurs.

-Soul Retrieval 18

**The Soul Psychology of James Hillman**

In a marvelous passage by James Hillman where he writes about the ancient shamanic condition known as “soul loss,” he documents how loss of soul pulls you out of life and the richness of relationships to life in-the-world of society, culture and nature, such that rituals and traditions become lost, and connectedness to family, totem, and nature are gone. Then he writes with a nuanced eye about other afflictions of the soul’s intricate texture:

Until he regains his soul he is not a true human. He is “not there.” It is as if he had never been initiated, been given

a name, come into real being. His soul may not only be lost; it may be possessed, bewitched, ill, transposed into an object....without his soul he has lost the sense of belonging and the sense of being in communion with the powers and the gods. They no longer reach him, he cannot pray, nor sacrifice, nor dance. His personal myth and his connection to the larger myth of his people, as *raison d'être* [reason for being], is lost. Yet he is not simply sick with disease, nor is he out of his mind. He has simply lost his soul. ....Other relevant parallels with ourselves today need not be spelled out.” Blue Fire 18

**Hillman’s way to soul recovery** begins with caring for soul, showing it some respect, acknowledging its interior diversities of points of view and different desires, its variety of images and perspectives, listening to its still small voices, and giving nuanced expression to its movements, all *without* an effort to identify with these contents, nor to interpret or judge them, but giving each facet, or in mythic idiom, ‘each god,’ its due space and place in your life. The whole procedure involves not simply technique, but a way and style of living that is soulful, or that ‘makes soul’ by living in relation to all of the depths and facets of life, your own life, and that of the world.

### **Identifying Soul Loss in a Psychotherapy or Life-Coaching Context**

The ancient shamanic journey methods can be more precise and more rapidly identify areas of soul loss than psychotherapeutic process. Yet it is possible to use the clinical interview and heart to heart talks (pláticas) in a therapy session to isolate and identify areas of major and minor soul loss, by exploring the client’s history and reports of difficult times, crises, and painful moments in life. Once these areas are identified where soul loss is likely, it is then possible to ask the client this type of question: “What did you have on line and functioning before the traumatic event or accident?” The lost soul part, or part of self that is unavailable will be implicit, if not explicit in the client’s answer.

Here are some of the ways soul loss might manifest when talking heart to heart with a client. I will share an excerpted list from Ai Gvohdi Waya’s book, *SOUR RECOVERY & EXTRACTION*. This is essentially a list of things a client might say that should make you zero in on possible areas of soul loss. The list is limitless, and could be extended to the list of possible new growth directions for a client [Gendlin’s list and my own, at the bottom of this article.]

### **Waya’s List of Common Expressions as Indicators of Likely Soul Loss**

-I just don’t feel whole.

-I know s/he has a piece of me!

-I feel as if there is a gaping hole here, in me.

-I just feel lost, as if I have no direction, no goals

- I can't sleep at night.
- S/he stole part of me.
- S/he has a strangle hold on me.
- I feel as if s/he's still got me even though s/he's dead & buried.
- I'm tired all the time; I just don't have any pep or energy.
- I feel as if I'm an extremist; I can't do anything middle-of-the-road. I have to go to extremes.
- S/he hates me.
- I have dreams about this person; it's as if they are haunting me.
- I feel like I'm a slave to that person.
- I feel out of kilter, out of balance, but don't know why!
- I feel like a cripple but I shouldn't!
- Life is just one grey color to me.
- My senses feel dead; I don't feel any joy or sadness.
- I can't cry.-- I haven't for years.
- I feel as if s/he's controlling me, and I don't have the strength to say no to them.
- I feel as if I'm being torn apart by all of them.
- I feel like a puppet just waiting for my family to jerk my strings.

### **Modern Western Cultural Soul Loss.**

Any time a culture or society undergoes colonial destruction, widespread anomy and soul loss occurs, and meaninglessness, addictions, alcoholism, and violence fill in the void where once a living mythology and tradition served the inner life. CG Jung felt that modern western culture and civilization was suffering from soul loss, with its overly materialistic, rational, and technological view of things that cuts people off from their ancestral traditions, from the earth and their natural instincts, from the heart, from the imagination, and from the living sense of the Sacred/Divine. In ancient tribal and indigenous societies, the connection to ancestral traditions, to nature, the instincts, heart and community was intact, so shamanic conceptions of soul loss did not have to contend, usually with a world view that itself engendered soul loss. But in our modern society, this is the case; we must consider loss of connection with these vital sources of existence and meaning as widespread signs of soul loss. Retrieval of the Sacred, of the visionary imagination, of our instincts and so on is a part of soul recovery today, and those issues and needs reach the therapists consulting room, whether the therapist recognizes it or not.

### **Factors Engendering Soul Loss at the Cultural-level**

Loss of connection to the Sacred

Loss of connection to the heart, the soul's core of aliveness and orienting center

Generalized cynicism and loss of purpose and meaning in life

Loss of connection to ancestry

Loss of connection to and disrespect for nature and non-human life

Loss of connection to instincts, felt-sense, NGS, intuition, feeling values

Conformist, politically correct, or fear-based living

Loss of connection to and effective use of the creative imagination

Anomy and terror

Social and Ecological Injustice

**IMPLICATIONS:** For all these reasons, a shamanic-psychotherapeutic perspective must not simply work toward individual soul recovery, but address the spiritual, cultural, and ecological roots of the problem, and work to help clients and society find viable ways to reconnect to cultural and spiritual sources of vitality and renewal. All this is a root form of soul recovery for our time, a **Retrieval of the Sacred** as the ground for Soul Retrieval of the individual. For more on this, see my book **PSYCHOTHERAPY AND THE SACRED**, as well as **JUNG AND SHAMANISM IN DIALOGUE**.

From a shamanic point of view, loss of soul, when culture-wide, engenders many forms of trauma and abuse that lead to individual soul loss, and a wide variety of mental disorders which are the recognized patterns they form as a result of the loss. The most common causes of modern soul loss as listed by Sandra Ingerman, Ai Gvhdhi Waya, and Jean Achterberg are associated with a variety of traumata:

Accidents and wartime injury

Major illness or major surgery

Incest

Physical or Emotional Abuse

Rape

Loss of a loved one (death or heart break: “S/he has a piece of my heart/soul”)

Divorce and loss of a job

### **DSM IV Mental Disorders Associated with Soul Loss**

Keep in mind that from the shamanic perspective, DSM IV disorders are descriptions of the patterns and syndromes that form after soul loss. Simply working on the patterns and trying to release the client from its grip is not sufficient, from a shamanic perspective, until the part(s) that part selves (soul parts) flipped off are returned and integrated. It is a situation where the missing part has to come home before it can be effective in dismantling the problem pattern (pathological form or disorder). The signs of soul loss suggested in Ai Gvhdi Waya’s list can be configured in a number of DSM IV disorders are not specifiers of soul loss. Look for soul loss behind virtually any personality, mood, trauma or dissociative disorder. Sometimes it will be interwoven with organicity, or dangerous conditions as well, in which case psychiatric medication may be appropriate. A shamanic viewpoint today must include knowledge of when medical and psychiatric support or referral are appropriate. Here’s a list of the most common psychiatric disorders harboring soul loss (self-part loss), yet not usually identified as such.

Adjustment Disorders (with depressed mood or mixed emotional features)

Anxiety

Depersonalization and De-realization

Post-traumatic stress

Dissociative identity disorder

Fugue states

Chronic depression, including dysthymia and major depression.

Psychoses: mania, schizophrenia

Addictions and Alcoholism

Eating Disorders

Religious Problem



Personality Disorders: e.g., Narcissistic, Histrionic, Borderline

A psychotherapist targeting such disorders, if informed by soul loss perspective and trained in skillful use of soul recovery methods can be more efficient, timely, and effective in directly identifying the core issue driving the DSM IV syndrome pattern or disorder. Without it, one tends to work for change in the patterns over considerable periods of time. There can be improvement and smaller pieces come back on line, but where the client is stuck, or progress very slow, shamanic perspectives and resources can be of great assistance.

### **Other general psychological Signs of possible soul loss**

Listlessness

Apathy

Profound depletion and fatigue as a general pattern

Loss of sense of purpose / life and things seem pointless

Lots of fear-based living

Being a detached-observer in life.

Lack of personal presence

Loss of memory for a large period of time

Loss of will

Initiative is crippled

Unable to have a voice

Unable to stand one's ground

Unable to open to the point of view of another and find a mutual way forward

## **Appendix: Growth Directions List as Soul Retrieval Assessment and Efficacy Rating Instrument**

### **GROWTH LINE RATING [GLR-Smith]**

#### **Self-Rating Psychograph**

##### **Ordinate Axis**

**100**

Completely On Line  
and Available as Needed

**80**

Is on line most of the  
Time now, as appropriate

**60**

Is on line, but  
only some times  
when needed

**50**

Is sporadically on line  
But client can't yet access  
At will.

**30**

Is seldom ever on line,  
but sometimes  
It does show up

**10**

Client can't recall it being  
On line since childhood

**0**

Client has no memory of  
It ever being on line

**Abscissa**

**Standing Your  
Ground**

**Interrupting  
the Critic**

In order to document effectiveness of shamanic and other therapy techniques I like to align with Focusing and the more than 100 studies on what makes therapy work done by Rogers, Gendlin et al. I can plot growth directions on a GAF type bar graph (psychograph), and have client and myself both assess and rate areas of growth after using conventional therapy or shamanic techniques such as soul retrieval or teaching the client to Journey. Self-efficacy, standing one's ground, learning to integrate sex and loving are examples of growth lines that can be assessed after applications of the shamanic soul retrieval, if those are areas where there was soul loss (some potential not on line having to do with sex and love, or standing ground, having self-efficacy (having a voice).

Both therapist and client should do their own psychograph on the client and compare, seeking consensus. Date each line plotted to show when growth occurred, and note which shamanic technique was used.

### **Adding Growth Lines/directions to the abscissa of the GLR-Smith Rating Scale**

This list of growth directions, or "lines of growth" developed by E.T. Gendlin (University of Chicago, 1986) is only suggestive, and it is more highly discriminating basis of plotting client growth than the usual broad categories such as sex and love, job satisfaction, financial organization, intimacy skills, etc. A list like this can help you pinpoint a few more specific areas where you could use more development to bring something on line, but you can also add to it, make your own list, then rate your development on the GLR-Smith rating scale at 3 month intervals to see how "on line" you have brought it.

"For each item below, imagine a person who has developed much else, but not that. Can you sense life moving forward, when "something like that" comes in someone who has lived many years without that something?"  
[Gendlin 1986/68]

### **Identify or create your own growth directions to be place on the abscissa (horizontal line of your GLR psychograph).**

Speaking up for yourself

Trusting the way *you* see it

Reaching out for someone

Trying to do something you haven't been able to do for a long time

Exploring

Meeting new people

Being sexual

Coming down to earth

Permitting yourself to do something really well with all the care it takes

Letting yourself really learn something

Trying something new

Taking charge of a situation

Telling people how you need them to be

Hoping

Refusing to give up

Grabbing what you want

Not being sick anymore

Feeling you can be cared for

Feeling that you don't have to deserve it, in order to get something

Being a separate person, in your own right

Not taking all the blame

Letting go of parents

Being angry

Not being resigned anymore

Being what is stereotypically "male" and running things

Being stereotypically "female" and receptive

(both of these last two can apply to everyone)

Admitting defeat and starting over

Getting peaceful

Looking around rather than running

Letting another person in

Letting it be ok to feel some way  
Doing or not doing something because of ethics  
Feeling I have control of myself in this. For a change  
Seeing straight, because I'm not angry anymore  
Stopping myself saying. "Wait a minute, maybe they have a point"  
Having a sense of cosmic significance or mystery  
Having a peaceful time  
Letting someone see you as you are  
Being honest  
Being able to ask for help  
Letting it be okay that you love someone

**Addition Heart Psych Growth Direction [C.MICHAEL SMITH]**

*Listening to and Checking with my heart (NGS)*  
*Observing my self-defeating or hurtful habit patterns*  
*Interrupting my habit patterns*  
*Observing and interrupting the Critic*  
*Protecting the heart and what arises from it against judgment and criticism*  
*Standing my ground*  
*Having a Voice, speaking up in situations that concern me*  
*Continuity between therapy sessions*  
*Taking responsibility for my own self-discovery and healing process*  
*Skillful identifying of what I want, and finding what is in the way.*  
*Skill at removing what is in the way and finding a way forward.*  
*Bringing some specific part or potential on line (name the part or potential)*

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[1] *Society for Shamanic Practitioners*. [www.shamansociety.org](http://www.shamansociety.org)

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