SHAMANIC HEALING: A TOOL FOR RECOVERY

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Shamanism is an ancient method of spiritual practice, perhaps tens of thousands of years old that is used for spiritual and physical healing as well as for personal growth. Shamanic practices exist in many tribal cultures around the world and are experiencing a renaissance in modern cultures. It is understood that in the shaman’s world everything in existence has a spirit and is alive, and that all of life is interconnected through what is called the “web of life”. It is through cultivating this deep connection with Nature and all things that we learn how to bring harmony and balance into our lives.
Shamanic Healing utilizes a holistic approach to healing addressing four levels:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Spiritual

"Shamanic healing involves helping people see how their emotional patterns manifest in physical reality, and then helping them realign with the more holistic patterns of universal consciousness. I call this "looking into the Spiritual Mirror."

- Martin W. Ball, PhD.
“Traditional shamanic healing is a holistic approach to health encompassing body, heart, soul and Spirit. Modern research only recently is discovering what traditional healers have known for millennia, that disease exists not only on the physical plane but also in the emotional energetic fabric of an individual. Often physical symptoms are a collection of negative emotions. Everything is energy. The key to healing is transforming the energy of illness into the energy of health.” (Alberto Villoldo, 2001)
Shamanic Healing Practices

- Drumming & Rattling
- Journeying
- Ceremony & Ritual
- Energy Clearing
- Storytelling
- Soul Retrieval
- Vision Quest
- Medicine Walk
Shamanic Practices utilizing rhythmic auditory stimulation such as drumming or rattling have long been known to induce natural altered states of consciousness. Research studies indicate that these practices:

- Reduce tension, anxiety and stress
- Create a sense of connection with self and others
- Release negative feelings, blockages and trauma
- Produce deeper self-awareness
- Help experience resonance with natural rhythms of life
- Access the entire brain supporting retraining and integration
- Help control chronic pain (Talking Drum Publications, 2011)
THE SHAMANIC JOURNEY

Shamanic journeying is a powerful meditative state. The journey process creates a natural altered state of consciousness that helps an individual to connect more deeply with themselves and to access spiritual connection and guidance.

Benefits of Shamanic Journeying:

- Problem solving
- Deepening of creativity and self-expression
- Developing a regular spiritual practice
- Healing of childhood wounds and trauma
- Developing a sense of personal power, integrity and authenticity
- Connecting to spiritual guidance and support
- Developing a personal relationship with Nature and the environment we live in
- Cultivating a sense of place and purpose in life
“In a speculative sense, it may be argued that the drumming journey can be seen as a metaphor for a person’s life. Birth happens through the birth canal (symbolized as the tunnel), and one enters into a still unknown world (as in the drumming journey) where many things happen to us as humans. Some of these “just happen,” others are under our control (theme: active vs. passive role), we encounter and interact with other beings (theme: encounters) and we learn and evolve during our lifetime (theme: inner wisdom and guidance). The theme “reflections on the drumming journey” is analogous to our reflections on our own life. The beat of the heart make our lives possible, just as the rhythmic pulse of the drum sustains a journey through an alternative perception of life.” (Kjellgren & Eriksson 2009)
Drumming, journeying and other shamanic altered states of consciousness activities can address the multiple needs of addicted populations. These include:

- **Physiological dynamics**, including the relaxation response and restoring balance in the opioid and serotonergic neurotransmitter systems

- **Psychodynamic needs** for self-awareness and insight, emotional healing and psychological integration

- **Spiritual needs** for contact with a higher power and spiritual experiences

- **Social needs** for connectedness with others and interpersonal support *(Winkelman, 2003)*
“The shamanic paradigm may be particularly appropriate for addressing addictive psychodynamics because of its basis in innate modules that represent self, other and cognitive-emotional structures and processes. Shamanic practices also have potential utilization as treatments for drug abuse because of their psychophysiological effects. Shamanic ASC (Altered States of Consciousness) reflect many different procedures that induce common physiological changes involving ‘transcendence’ (Mandel, 1980) or an integrative mode of consciousness (Winkelman, 2000). Shamanistic ASC evoke the basic relaxation response characterized by activation of the parasympathetic nervous system, producing a regenerative and recuperative state.” (Winkelman, M. 2001)
Soul Loss: A Shamanic Perspective

In shamanism, it is believed that a portion of the human soul is free to travel and leave the body. The shaman travels to do healing work and the soul often travels during dreamtime. A soul part will also leave the body to protect itself from potentially damaging situations be they emotional or physical. In situations of trauma, the soul fragment may not return to the body on its own and a soul retrieval may be needed to assist it.

There are many reasons a soul loss may occur. If a person was in an abusive situation part of one's soul may leave to protect itself from the abuse. Sometimes as a child, fighting parents may prompt a soul part to hide because the child is scared. If a traumatic accident is about to occur, the soul may leave so that it won’t be effected by the force of the accident. If a loved one is lost, the soul part may go until the person is ready to deal with their grief. All of these are very healthy mechanisms of protection.

Many clients coping with addictions have had some type of soul loss. By regaining lost soul parts, addictions clients are more able to move forward into their journey of healing and recovery.
Identification of Soul Loss

- Significant physical or psychological trauma
- Feelings of dissociation and numbness
- Feeling disconnected from the body
- Depression
- A sense of feeling incomplete

Souls wander the universe
Lost or stolen
Cut off from loved ones
Split off from love
Gently, carefully
We call them back to us
Searching for them in dark corners
Blowing them to life
With our breath
We welcome them home

- Ellen Jaffe Bitz
Sandra Ingerman, a therapist and shamanic practitioner has investigated the shamanic treatment of soul loss intensively, and states:

“The phenomenon of feeling dissociated is a common complaint for people surviving physical and emotional abuse as well as other traumas including accidents, illness, surgical operations, and loss of loved ones and important relationships.

Survivors of such trauma as these often psychologically “leave” in order to live through the incident, and remain dissociated – that is they feel that their essence or being is not whole – that parts of their essence have been separated from their bodies and have not returned. One reason that psychotherapy may fall short of success in cases where clients have suffered childhood as well as adult trauma is that not all parts of them are “home” – the parts that escaped to survive have never returned. Soul retrieval can enhance psychotherapy since you cannot work with someone (a soul part) who is not there.”
# Integrating Shamanic Healing Practices with Addictions Treatment

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“The shaman succeeds for the same reason all the rest of us (doctors) succeed. Each patient carries his own doctor inside him. They come to us not knowing this truth. We are at our best when we give the doctor who resides within each patient a chance to go to work.”

-Albert Schweitzer
References


Resources

Sandra Ingerman – www.sandraingerman.com

Foundation for Shamanic Studies – www.shamanism.org

Shaman Ross Bishop – www.rossbishop.com

The Four Winds Society – www.thefourwinds.com

One White Horse Standing - http://onewhitehorsestanding.com

Shared Wisdom – www.sharedwisdom.com

For additional information on Shamanic Healing and other Holistic Resources for Addictions Treatment or to schedule a program, visit www.betheTerrence.com or contact Beth Terrence at beth@bethterrence.com.