

The 12 steps and Shamanism

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in Harvest's Yule edition, 1989.

Recently a local charecter in Alcoholics Anonymous here in the Worcester
MA. area died. His name was "John the Indian" (he identified himself this
way) and he was well-known as an AA speaker all over the world, although he
lived near central Massechusetts. John had about thirty years of sobriety
and was a great power of example to many people including Betty Ford who
told him she had listened to tapes of his talks while she was in detox.

John's story intrigued many people. An Indian who had been orphaned on the
reservation when Tuberculosis wiped out his familly, he had ended up on
skid row after serving in the Canadian army during World War II as a
dishwasher. He came to AA in his mid-twenties, an illiterate wine. (my
note - this is NOT to imply that most alcoholics are on skid row. In fact
most of them are people with nice famillies, a place to live, a car or even
two, a job, etc. etc. etc. Less that 2% of the alcoholics in this country
are on skid row) He ended up owning his own construction business after
learning to read (from a elderly woman in AA who was a school teacher) and
marrying a lady in AA with whom he raised a lovely familly.

Because John had inspired me and so affected my life with his gift of
simplicity, I was inspired to do a shamanic-style rite in his memory. I
had always felt sorry for John because, in the process of his recovery, he
seemed to have lost touch with the beauty of this heritage. Then it hit
me; John WAS a shaman and anyone who truly worked a 12-step program was
one too.

In BIRTH OF A MODERN SHAMAN by Cynthia Bend and Tayja Wiger (Llewelyn
Publication box 64383, St. Paul MN. 1988) it states

" A shaman is hard to define. There are no two alike..... what
happens, a shaman goes through a catastrophe or a string of
catastrophes that enhance certain abilities within him (or her!)
.....Most often the Shaman has to go through a severe trauma, a severe
illness or a severe psychosis and recover from it before he learns the
recovery process that he can use."

The authors are quoting Tsonkawa, Tayja's teacher on the Shamanic path. (
a Native American Medicine person)

Many other authors on Shamanism; Sunbear, Lynn Andrews, Amber Wolfe and
Micheal Harner, to name a few: echo this truth. A shaman is a person who
goes through great suffering, usually in the form of a mental or physical
illness, and then goes on to heal himself or herself. They are then able
to use that same process to heal others.

This is what happens in a twelve-step fellowship. Through the process of
healing ourselves, we come to the point where we can help others by
"carrying the message" after having had a "spiritual awakening" as the
result of taking the first eleven steps.

Here are some books that can help any Pagan, Shaman, Druid, Witch, Practitioner of Feminist Spirituality, or other Magickal folk as they walk the steps in the process of recovering, while retaining their own unique spiritual path.

TRUTH OR DARE by Starhawk (San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1987) This contains many references to the 12-step programs, especially Alcoholics Anonymous and Adult Children of Alcoholics, in a work on Wicca by a well-known priestess of the Craft who is also a psychotherapist.

CRYSTAL CLEAR by Connie Church (New York, Willard books 1987) It contains a good section on how to use quartz crystals to help in relieving yourself of bad habits, compulsions, and obsessions, specifically for use with the various twelve-step programs. (note - amethyst is traditionally said to help in all these areas)

BIRTH OF A MODERN SHAMAN, mentioned above, tells the story of a blind Native American woman who was a survivor of Child abuse and had been Psychotic as well as Alcoholic. This is the story of her complete recovery, including her eyesight, (documented by doctors) and the discovery of her Psychic gifts with her Native roots. Her healing occurred through a process that began for her in Alcoholics Anonymous.

THE TWELVE STEPS FOR EVERYONE published by Compcare (Minneapolis MN.) this is a non-sexist book on the steps by a grateful recovering member of Emotional Health Anonymous written in non-sexist language. The author draws heavily on the Eastern traditions of spirituality as well as the traditional Western monotheistic ones.

EVERYDAY A NEW BEGINNING Published by Hazelden corp. (Also in Minneapolis, MN. I believe) This is a daily meditation guide BY women in Anonymous fellowships and FOR women in these same self-help groups. Unlike the TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY book (published by the same company and widely used in AA) it doesn't use quotes from the Bible. Instead it uses quotes from various women authors. Many men also claim to have benefitted from it due to it's non-religious approach.

PAGANS IN RECOVERY a networking newsletter for Magickal folk, Shamans, Druids, Feminist Priestesses, Witches, Pagans, Pantheists, etc. who are in recovery via a 12-step fellowship of any type. It has contacts, reviews, articles, recovery techniques and more. It is a great source of support and inspiration to any Pagan in any of the Anonymous support groups. It is \$8.00 a year and the address is P.I.R. c/o Bekki 6500 S.R. 356 New Marshfield, OHIO 45766

ADDITION TO READING LIST

REFLECTIONS IN THE LIGHT by Shakti Gawain, published by New World Library, San Rafael, California 1978. While not ONLY for the 12-step programs this book does go into the problems of addictions in light of the New-Age, Psychic Awareness as well as many other subjects. It provides a inspirational message and/or a creative visualization exercise with a non-sectarian affirmation for each day. The book is neither sexist nor sectarian and is truly a beautiful aid to anyone seeking to work the program of recovery. It is also a great way to share what you are doing with friends who share your spirituality but not your program, as it makes no direct references to the 12-step groups at all. It is very useful to

those of us who prefer a daily meditation to the "prayer" people in the monotheistic Churches and Synagogues tend to use in their application of the program to their lives.