

The medicine wheel and the cartography of the shamanic universe seen from a transpersonal and holotropic perspective

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Introduction

The theoretical introduction presented here seeks to illustrate and summarise the Native American medicine wheel within the shamanic cosmological framework, also from the perspective of perennial philosophy, transpersonal psychology and Holotropic Breathwork.

I will discuss the connection between the holotropic Inner Healer, the Great Spirit within, and Jung's process of individuation. The Inner Healer can be seen as an inner teacher and shaman and the centre of the process of individuation. However, this topic may be explored further in the future.

In this summary, I integrate my transpersonal and holotropic experience with various shamanic teachings I have followed over the last few decades: Foundation for Shamanic Studies and those of Michael Smith, a Cherokee shaman and Jungian psychotherapist, precisely because he bridges the transpersonal and shamanic paths.

This writing is a first theoretical lesson, but it can be developed at an experiential shamanic level.



The three worlds represented on a Sami shamanic drum, 19th century

Sacred and profane time and space

Each of us is a tiny link, a stage in the process of life that precedes and follows us, begun in time immemorial. We are part of the whole from which we originate, but when we are born into this world we lose our memory of it and perceive ourselves as separate beings. However, within us, beyond this 'ontological oblivion', lies the memory of the entire universe. Although this memory is not normally accessible, since ancient times humans have explored the inner psyche in order to know and heal. Shamans explore non-ordinary states of consciousness. Mystics from different latitudes, as described in Aldous Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*, have described the unity of the whole. The tree of life, Axis Mundi, is an archetype present in many ancestral cultures that represents this unity and awareness: moving from profane unconsciousness to ontological consciousness, from the labyrinth, from chaos, to the search for the meaning of life and the order of the sacred.



Tintagel, Cornwall. Labyrinth: in search of order, orientation, and meaning

According to Michael Harner, shamans have long believed that their powers were the powers of animals, plants, the sun and all the fundamental energies of the universe. Thousands of years before Charles Darwin's discoveries, members of shamanic cultures believed that humans and animals were linked by kinship ties.

In ancient cultures, the perception and notion of time and human life itself were circular and closely linked to the cyclical rhythms of the day, the seasons and the phases of the moon. Sacred time was in turn represented topologically through the directions of Sacred Space, present in many cultures: in Indo-Buddhist mandalas, at Avebury and Stonehenge, in Romanesque churches, in the representation of the Tree of Life (Axis Mundi) and in the path of the heart represented in the Native American Medicine Wheel. The medicine wheel is essentially a 'mandala'. Mandala in Sanskrit means circle and is a representation of the cosmos and the microcosm, one of the many ethnic representations of sacred space and time, one of the ancestral cosmologies, one of the ancient transpersonal cartographies that has survived to this day. It represents sacred space, the mystery of life and the cosmos, the process of bringing inner order to the individual, but which has its external expression in society and the universe. That Self in which the sacred dwells, which in transpersonal terms corresponds to that described in Advaita Vedanta: Tat Tvam Asi, that is you, in which Atman and Brahman are identified as one, or as Grof writes: 'In extreme forms, individual consciousness seems to embrace the totality of existence and identify with the universal mind' [1978, Grof, Halifax].

In shamanic traditions, we seek to bring order to chaos, to restore or bring us closer to the sacred transcultural centre (Mircea Eliade) of spiritual traditions; 'illness' is the result of violating or distancing ourselves from this. As Michael Smith teaches, the medicine wheel represents an archaic process of individuation. We will also see how the characteristic of the shamanic path of proceeding towards the centre has analogies with the holotropic path.

The shamanic universe

Shamanism is the oldest known method of exploring non-ordinary dimensions. Shamanic cosmology, while differing in various regions of the Earth, has a cartography with common transcultural elements, has analogies in different geographical areas of the planet in many different traditions and latitudes, North and South America, Asia, Oceania, Africa and even in ancient Europe (Chauvet, Lascaux, Les Trois Freres, Altamira, Celtic culture, etc.). For a shaman, reality has a deeper nature than it may appear on the surface; everything that exists in the world has a living force within it. For Joan Halifax, this vital energy, the mana of the Polynesians or the wacanda of the Sioux, is conceived as a divine force that permeates everything. The work of the shaman consists in communing with those who are receptacles of energy. In this cosmology, every living creature is endowed with a soul. The shaman therefore has great respect for nature, as his soul has no individuality of its own outside the universal soul of which it is a part. Black Elk said: 'The Great Spirit dwells in the heart of every creature, even the smallest ant'.

The shaman experiences non-ordinary states of consciousness and travels to invisible dimensions or worlds. The universe and the shamanic worlds are an experience, structured in a cartography:

a Middle World or intermediate world, the world known in our daily experience, but which for the shaman also has a spiritual dimension and depth.

b Below is the Lower World or underground world, populated mainly by animal spirits (archetypes).

c above is the Upper World, populated by benevolent disembodied spirits with human appearances.

d The three worlds are interdependent and must be in balance. They are interconnected through the Axis Mundi, which allows the shaman to 'travel' within these dimensions. The connection between the various levels of the shamanic cosmos is represented in different but similar ways, such as a tree, a vine or a ladder.

These energies and entities can become allies of the shaman, helping him in his experiential and cognitive dimensions, as well as in his role as healer or psychopomp.

For Michael Harner, learning in the Shamanic State of Consciousness also includes a deep respect for all forms of life and a humble awareness of our dependence on plants, animals and even inorganic matter. The shaman knows that human beings are connected to all living forms and that these are 'all our relatives'.... The shaman therefore enters the shamanic state of consciousness with a sense of reverence for Nature, for the inherent power of animals and plants and for their tenacious ability to survive and thrive over the billions of years of the planet's existence. He believes that if, in an altered state of consciousness, we approach Nature with respect and love, it will reveal to us things that cannot be known in the ordinary state of consciousness.

The Middle World - is the world in which we live most of the time. It has a visible and an invisible form. It is also the world of plants, mountains, animals, seas and rivers, animate and inanimate objects... Each of these elements of the material world has a perceptible spiritual dimension. These spirits of Nature are all intrinsically linked in the permanent dance of life and death. The notion of balance is central... the imbalance of a single element has repercussions on the whole world.

The middle world also includes the souls of the dead who need compassionate burial and accompaniment by the shaman in his role as psychopomp.

The lower world is the world of Earth energies, a realm of the subconscious and inner energies, closely linked to Mother Earth, her psychic, emotional and instinctive interiors, power animals and spirits, archetypal expressions all have their place here. The lower world is populated mainly by animal spirits (archetypes). Powerful telluric energies, linked to 'animal spirits', guide the shaman on his shamanic journey. These animals are called 'power animals'. In this world, instinct prevails. There are various techniques for 'descending' in order to find one's power animal and establish a relationship with it. This encounter will give you considerable spiritual power, teachings and knowledge you did not expect before, joy, compassion, balance in ourselves and others, and vital forces are nourished.

The world above - The higher world is a more subtle and lighter world, that of purely spiritual energies. The higher world is a little more evanescent than the lower world and our ordinary experience. It is populated by benevolent spirits who want to help us and who manifest themselves in human form. This is where the deities, Masters, great sages, guides and angels reside for those who have an affinity with Catholicism, or saints. They can take various forms: mythological figures, deities, ancestors, those who have been dead for some time, liberated souls, men of the past, even strangers who can become allies. In the upper world there are layers or levels. It is the world that welcomes souls who ascend at the end of their earthly life, and is therefore the home of our Ancestors. This world is the bridge that connects us to the wisdom of these Beings, to spiritual connections, teachings, advice... They can teach us wisdom, various types of knowledge, spiritual, philosophical and healing. There are various techniques for ascending, in order to find a spiritual guide who can lead us. Ascension is an experience that all mystics have had.

The Great Spirit without form - is beyond the world above. It is in all forms and cannot be conceptualised or represented in the cartography of the three worlds.

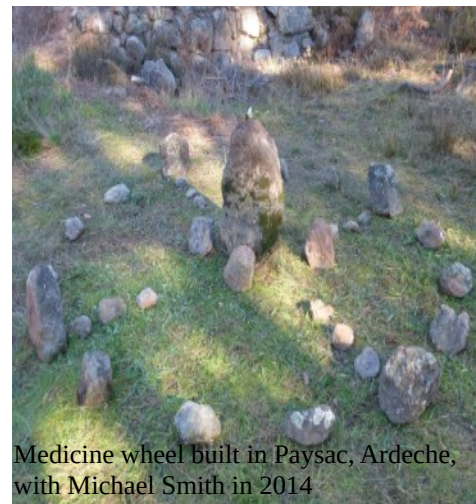
The specificity of the Medicine Wheel archetypes

The Medicine Wheel is the Amerindian version of the shamanic cosmology of the three worlds, connected through the Axis Mundi, but it is also a guide to personal growth in the middle world. Here I will refer mainly to the Cherokee teaching of my teacher C. Michael Smith, which I will try to connect to the transpersonal and holotropic experiential vision.

In shamanic cosmology, the Axis Mundi is represented at the centre of the medicine wheel and here too, divided into three levels: the upper world or Father Sky, the lower world or Mother Earth, and the Middle World, the intermediate world, the one known in our daily experience, which for the shaman also has a spiritual dimension. In the Medicine Wheel, however, there are seven archetypal directions, and the Middle World is further divided into the four cardinal directions, which can be represented graphically with a circle with a cross passing through the centre.

Michael Smith said:

"When an Ojibway calls out the directions, he kneels and touches Mother Earth, who includes the Lowerworld as her deep inner psychic-spiritual life. When he points to the sky and says Kitchmanitou! he is not simply pointing to the sky, but through it to the Great Spirit'.



Medicine wheel built in Paysac, Ardeche, with Michael Smith in 2014

In the centre is our heart, the inner manifestation of the Great Spirit, which coincides with the sacred fire that the Cherokee call Ishkudé. Fire and heart coincide; they are the seventh direction to which the archetypes are connected, corresponding to the cardinal points. The medicine wheel is not just a map, it has many levels of representation: as a sacred space, it is a temple and represents the cosmos, the cardinal points correspond to the periods of the day through the rising and setting of the sun, the seasons of the year and those of human life, and with its ritual representation, a ceremony can be opened and closed. As the Way of the Heart, the Medicine Wheel also represents a methodology of inner growth that has connections with Holotropic Breathwork. Most of the time we live in the middle world, and the Medicine Wheel guides people in it, offering directions as existential and experiential orientation and portals to archetypes and the transpersonal. It represents that initiatory process, a path of inner, spiritual growth of the inner archetypes connected to the



Medicine wheel with fire at its center.
Thank to Benjamin Dupont for the image

periods of the human life cycle. In it, we have the opportunity to apply the Way of the Heart: the heart, the fire, Axis Mundi, the meeting point between the vertical and the horizontal, where the Great Spirit dwells within us. In animist cultures, everything is alive and has a soul. Michael Smith (aka Mikkal) often quoted Black Elk: 'The Great Spirit dwells in the heart of every creature, even the smallest ant'. The Great Spirit therefore also dwells in our hearts and can be called the Great Inner Spirit. In Native American teachings, learning to listen to one's heart is a path to listening to the Spirit and bringing out our authentic nature from deep within ourselves, beyond the blocks,

neuroses and domination of the mind over the heart. It is the healing power that corresponds to the Great Spirit, which each of us carries within, similar to the holotropic Inner Healer.

When the shaman heals the patient, he places him at the centre of the medicine wheel or close to it. The same applies to sacred rituals: vision quests, pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges. Even holotropic breathing, when placed ritually at the centre of the Medicine Wheel, becomes a shamanic ceremony.

The Medicine Wheel as the Way of the Heart represents that inner process based on the archetypes of directions, specific opportunities, tools for personal growth, and guidance for doing inner and spiritual work in our ordinary middle world. Learning to listen to the voice of one's heart or Great Spirit within and surrendering to it is a process that has similarities with the experience of the Inner Healer, whose listening can accompany and guide us in our daily lives and personal growth. Each direction points to the depth and dimensions of the archetype, while at the same time helping us to live fully in the material world.

The Four Directions are archetypal metaphors that have multiple dimensions:

East = morning, birth or rebirth, spring, childhood

South = midday, summer, play, growth, creativity, youth

West = evening, autumn, death of the ego, letting go, middle age

North = night, winter, ancestors, old age, wisdom.

These are all Archetypes, each of which must be experienced and recognised with great respect.



The East archetype: vision

The east is the direction from which the sun rises, representing the beginning of the day and beginnings in general. It is the archetype of rebirth, of the sprouting of vision, of new things, of potential and talents to be implemented, the acorn that has the oak tree within it. It is the direction of dreams and dream time. It corresponds to childhood. In the cycle of the seasons, it represents spring, when the light continues to grow, the days lengthen and nature returns to expansion, animals and plants emerge from winter after their autumn and winter retreat.

What is the teaching of the east? To bring attention to our potential, our dreams and visions, and consciously connect them to the process of individuation. It is the transition from the essentiality, substantiality, wisdom and compassion of the north that leads us to the exuberance of the south, that is, listening to the 'heart', growing, expressing and implementing. But this exuberance must start from the sacred centre of our uniqueness, not from the ego, but from our being as manifestations of the Great Spirit, from our inner vision. Making our life a creative act, becoming artists of the spirit. Something similar to what we do in the holotropic path.

The animal often associated with this direction is the eagle, which flies higher than any other bird. This direction is dominated by the element of air.

The archetype of the south, the warrior

The south is the direction in which the sun is high in the sky, the direction from which heat comes. The south is connected to light and heat in their maximum expression, to midday and summer, representing courage and assertiveness. It corresponds to the archetype of the warrior. The direction in which the element of fire dominates. It is the natural evolution of the archetype of the east, the sprout of the east grows and matures into a 'tree'. Trees expand in spring, reaching that 'expansion' of which summer represents the peak. The South is the completion of the process of externalisation in spring. It represents and symbolises the peak of empowerment, of individuated growth (Jung) in spring, cyclical like the seasons, time and human life. The South corresponds to those stages of life in which, as in nature in summer, we are in full expansion towards the world. So the archetype of the South is the culmination of outward manifestation and expression, as opposed to the North, which is welcoming and generous, compassionate, reflective and wise. It is the age of exuberance, of young adults who have grown and gone through the process of developing their

talents and expressing them. Liberating and expressing that energy that allows us to become artists of the spirit.

We have all experienced this archetype when we have been courageous and expressed things that would otherwise have remained in the shadows of our inner selves, before beginning the process of internalisation that is characteristic of autumn and middle age.

The archetype of the west, the wounded healer

The west is where the sun sets, a direction associated with shadow and evening, when we turn inward, toward that inner space to be liberated so that our authentic, deep nature can manifest and realise itself without being hindered by problems, ancient traumas, COEX (COEX, an acronym for condensed experiences, are constellations that group together emotional charges from different layers of the psyche in Grof's psychology: biographical, perinatal and transpersonal) and everything that is blocked in our being. Autumn is the season associated with the West. Just as in autumn, the light gradually diminishes and nature gradually withdraws into itself, in the Native American medicine wheel, the archetype of the West is an archetype of interiority, corresponding to the wounded healer. After experiencing and integrating the South, the courage and empowerment that represent the peak of external manifestation, we retreat and turn our gaze inward. The West corresponds to those stages of life in which we orient ourselves towards the invisible, the essential, the substantial, of which winter (North) represents the pinnacle. It is middle age; Jung's midlife crisis can be connected to the archetype of the West.

The animal associated with the West is the bear, which retreats into its cave, a cult present across many cultures, and which cyclically emerges at the end of winter.

The West, where the sun sets, is also the direction of death and rebirth in many ancient cultures. The kingdom of Osiris, god of the afterlife, was located in the West, as was the orientation of some Neolithic burials.

This is the direction dominated by the element of water.

The archetype of the North, the teacher

The archetype of the North is an important experiential stage in the medicine wheel process of bringing out the inner teacher.

The North is the direction of cold, night, winter, mystery, ancestors, old age, wisdom, teaching, help, sacred compassion and empathy. We all know and have experienced this archetype when we have been helped, welcomed or have helped others. The North represents the age of experience, of those who have travelled through the previous archetypes and are Masters of Ceremony. The North is the completion of the process of internalisation of autumn, in which we orient ourselves towards the invisible, of which winter (north) represents the peak.

With the onset of winter, the light begins to grow again and is associated with representing this archaic inner process of individuation. We move towards the spring equinox, the archetype of the sprouting of vision and inner potentials to be realised in life and the individuation growth (Jung) of spring/summer.

A direction dominated by the earth element.

The Centre, Axis Mundi

The seventh direction of the Medicine Wheel is the centre. This is the main bridge between transpersonal psychology and Amerindian shamanism: it connects the Great Spirit within and the Inner Healer. The Great Spirit is represented in the central archetype of the Medicine Wheel, Axis

Mundi, the vertical axis. The sacred centre is in every being. At the centre of shamanic cosmology are both the universal principle and the individual principle, as in the Atman Brahman identity of non-dualistic cultures of India such as Advaita Vedanta. Shamanic cosmology can also be represented as a fractal; we are all centres, at least in potential. When we are in our centre, which coincides with our personal centre, we are also in the centre of the Axis Mundi of the cosmos. Individual sacredness corresponds to universal sacredness. If we analyse holotropic breathing from a shamanic point of view, the inner experience of the Inner Healer can be classified as one of the many ways in which the Great Spirit manifests itself within us. In Amerindian traditions, the Great Spirit speaks to us through our heart, which represents the incarnation of the Great Spirit within us.

When we listen to our heart, we access our inner Axis Mundi. The way of the heart is the way of the Native Americans. In the shamanic view of the world, everything is one and we are a manifestation of the Great Spirit. The heart can become an inner guide. A heart that guides the mind and not vice versa. Michael Smith calls it our inner GPS. There are similarities with Jung's process of individuation and with the holotropic Inner Healer. Living in accordance with the Sacred and not in conflict or disharmony.

Hollow bone

In comparing the shamanic path and the holotropic path, it is important to illustrate the inner dimension, called Hollow Bone, which can be achieved on the shamanic path by becoming open and receptive to what the Great Spirit, of which we are a part, breathes into us. The power of the Great Spirit flows through a sacred man (shaman) only to the extent that a person has transformed himself into a vessel for that power, becoming humble and selfless. The power of healing is not his, but rather the power of the Great Spirit. We must create, become a 'vessel' capable of listening to and receiving messages, otherwise they cannot be heard. There are many ways in which the Great Spirit or allied spirits can speak to us. Becoming a hollow bone is an experience that belongs to overcoming the dimension of the ordinary self. This has similarities with the holotropic path of surrendering with trust to the process of the Inner Healer and to what 'he' and not our ordinary self will manifest to us. In a non-ordinary state of consciousness, this is more easily achieved, but it helps to become clearer as a process and to be aware of it in ordinary life as well.

Jung also had inner guides, shamans have spirit allies or spiritual teachers who induce experiences outside the ordinary ego, manifest the unexpected, the unknown, broaden our experiential horizon and have healing powers. Psychedelic experiences can also often induce experiences outside the ordinary ego.

Spirits can speak to us in different ways. We can use different methods to contact them. The classic journey with the drum, dance, breath, sacred plants, or they may arrive unexpectedly. The shamanic crisis is a type of unexpected call. We must distinguish between the call of the Spirits on the one hand and the ability to listen on the other. Just as a spiritual emergency can be an opportunity for personal growth, it can also be an opportunity to sink into crisis without seizing the opportunity. There are many ways in which the Great Spirit or Allied Spirits speak to us, but if our heart is closed, we cannot hear them. To develop the dimension of Hollow Bone, in Amerindian shamanism it is necessary to open and listen to one's heart, through which the Great Spirit speaks to us.

To draw a parallel with Holotropic Breathwork, Hollow Bone is similar to when we are open and receptive, we tune in and surrender to the inner holotropic process, we give voice to the Inner Healer, an experience that transcends the ordinary self. In my practice as an holotropic facilitator, I remember a person who, despite working very hard on the breathing technique, was unable to enter the process. That block was his unrecognised process. Being Hollow Bone means opening oneself (as in holotropic therapy) to what we did not expect before, listening to one's own spirits or the Great Spirit or the Inner Healer.

I remember Stan Grof saying, 'Breathe and enter into the process until something happens that

you did not expect before'. The holotropic Inner Healer also brings extraordinary experiences and develops a power of inner listening, an inner centre, which can become a guide, an inner voice. Those who have sufficient experience in a holotropic path also have experience of inner listening in everyday life, outside the holotropic setting.

Michael Smith defines the shamanic path as an archaic process of individuation, which proceeds from the centre. The condition of Hollow Bone is necessary for this to happen.

Michael Smith teaches:

'The indigenous shamanic view is that everything is an emanation and manifestation of the Great Spirit and its creativity. Since the Great Spirit resides in the heart of each of us, we can reconnect with it through the heart, through the centre of our sacred circle of life, and learn again how to be in balance and in perfect relationship with things. The Red Path of the Native Americans is one of the paths that allows us to restore the sacred centre and helps us to walk the path centred on the heart and in honour of the earth. 'Finding the one who is within... finding one's vital core, one's centre of being... with the mind aligned with the heart, in service to the heart' [Smith M., Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue].

...a living Thou, a numinous presence that is in our hearts and in the heart of each creature. ...

...The Divine Physician is that source-power which can help us find, when ready, whatever is in the way of that and dissolve it!

In shamanism, we call soul retrieval the process of regaining those fragmented parts of the psyche (soul) that we have lost throughout history, not only biographical, due to trauma and repressed into other dimensions. This has important analogies with the holotropic process guided by our Inner Healer.

The path of the heart and the psychology of the centre. Great Spirit, Inner Healer and Jungian individuation

We need a psychological model that includes within it the spiritual centre of each person which, although it has different names, represents similar processes: the inner Axis Mundi, the Great Inner Spirit, the Inner Healer, the Jungian archetypal Self. It carries within itself the function of the Spiritus Rector and is also holotropic (from the Greek *olos trepein*, which makes us proceed towards wholeness), integrating together the sky, the earth and opposites, the fragmented or repressed parts of the soul. Among Native Americans, this psychology of the centre is called the path of the heart.

There are two aspects that characterise this psychology of the centre in bringing out one's inner centre. These two aspects will also be illustrated later when we talk about the Black Line, which, in the Medicine Wheel, connects the West to the East, and the Red Line, which connects the South to the North.

The first is contact with our true nature and the process of bringing it to the surface: the East archetype.

The second is the aspect of purification/healing (Inner Healer/Divine Physician), archetype of the West, working to remove obstacles (COEX) and traumas that prevent it from expressing itself. Dark energies must be extracted. The sweat lodge is a medicine wheel intended for purification. Holotropic breathing can be seen in the same way from a shamanic point of view. But the two aspects are not separable, one supports the other, the path of the heart, as in holotropic the Inner Healer, helps to bring out a creative vision of oneself.

As Michael Smith says, as people practise the path of the heart, they evolve, activate their potential and become more creative, they come to have purpose and be of service to Spirit, community and Life, but often there are limiting patterns, such as COEX, based on trauma, that hinder the path, so breathing work helps to dissolve everything that hinders you from creating the

life you truly desire. There are two branches of a single path of the heart. The right branch helps you to create the life you truly desire, to become artists of the spirit, and to succeed in this is bliss. In the left branch, you must face with respect and an open heart, love and heal the suffering parts of yourself that have been rejected. But there is only one path of the heart. The open heart and faith in it (right side) must be applied to the work of the left hand. If you do not do the work of the wounded healer on the left, the left side will sabotage you and completely divert you from the path of the heart. Spiritual bypassing corrupts the intent to walk the path of the heart.

Opposite poles in the medicine wheel: red line and black line

So far, we have seen the fundamental archetypes of the directions of the sacred circle in order and circular relation, but they can also be dynamically connected in opposite poles. In the Medicine Wheel, there are two lines that pass through the centre. The good red road runs from south to north, the black road runs from west to east, in other words, you have a circle with a cross. The masculine is opposite the feminine, in the north the earth (feminine), in the south the fire (masculine), in the west the water (feminine), in the east the air (masculine) and in the centre the Unity.

In Michael Smith's Cherokee teaching, each direction represents a part of ourselves that we must take care of, and each of the four parts is interconnected. If one of these is neglected, the others will also become diseased and destabilised. We, as people at the centre of the circle, must take care of ourselves by maintaining the balance between our four parts, establishing the centre: the seventh direction, and inducing inner peace in ourselves and balance in the community.

The ancient Cherokee allegorical story of the two wolves has similarities with these two lines: it tells that two wolves dwell in the human soul, the white wolf, good and generous, and the black wolf, aggressive, selfish and discontented. Both struggle to dominate our soul, and this struggle can cause great inner imbalance. But the legend teaches that if we nurture both, without neglecting the black wolf, we can find a balance between the two and even have it as an ally, but if we do not take care of it, it will find the right moment to destabilise us. This symbolic story teaches us that the difficult or dark side of each of us should not be ignored or rejected, but can be managed and, with respect, become an ally. In the same way, we can learn to balance the red line and the black line. This is an alternative to the New Age spiritual bypass, where only the positive is nurtured.

Speaking directly with Michael Smith:

'In life, we make many mistakes, and the lesson is that we must walk in both worlds. If we do not follow the red road, if we make mistakes, if we allow ourselves to be dominated by our blocks, we do not understand the importance of the red road. So everyone has to spend some time on the black road to understand why the red road is important. This is the teaching, because it says that we will fail, that we will make mistakes, but we will learn from these mistakes and return to the red road.'

The red line

The *assertive* mastery of the South is balanced by the generosity of the North.

The good red road runs from south to north. It is the path of the heart, guided by the Great Spirit, the Guardian Spirit, or whatever you want to call it. I would also say by the Inner Healer. It is a line in which the heart is decisive, uniting, at opposite poles, the search for balance between assertive individuality (south) and generosity, wisdom, and compassion (north). It is living with the heart, that is, from our centre or sacred inner space. It is the line of emotional wisdom, connecting vertically 'the Warrior' in the south, masculine, youthful, exuberant, connected to fire, assertive and individualistic, with 'the Master' in the north, wise and elderly, generous, compassionate and empathetic, receptive, feminine, connected to the earth.

Being assertive, expressing oneself by listening to one's heart: South, must be expressed in balanced realisation in and for the world, not in self-assertion as a search for status, in narcissism or in a selfish, egocentric search for external recognition that demeans others. This assertiveness must

be expressed in balance with the generosity and compassion of the North. Conversely, an excess of generosity and giving leads to impoverishment, underestimation and undervaluation. Imbalance will lead to the breaking of the sacred inner and social circle.

The black line

The independence of the West is balanced by the belonging of the East.

The black line *directly connects the West to the East horizontally, passing through the centre*. As we have already seen, black represents blocks, our 'baggage', everything that is in darkness and needs to be healed, including CO-EX. In it, we live with and for the ego, for selfish or egocentric reasons, that is, with our lower self. It represents the mistake we make that leads us off the red road.

Cherokee medicine, with its values and principles, attaches great importance to the polarity between belonging and independence. A community with a healthy sacred circle is made up of strong individuals who live in reciprocity and co-creative participation. Too much independence, West, (disinterest in the needs of the community, the value of others, isolation) and too much belonging, East, (co-dependence, external frame of reference) run the risk of imbalance. To keep the sacred circle of our lives intact, it is necessary to maintain a balance between solid, heart-centred individualisation and community participation (belonging) that honours the earth.

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