

Sacred HOOP

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ABORIGINAL WISDOM

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BAREFOOT ON THE EARTH

The Message of Clint Ober

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CELTIC DIVINATION

HEALING ENCOUNTER

With Bear

WOULD YOU FRACK YOUR MOTHER?

Call to Action!

PDF Editor

Things the Body Knows

Laura Lee

Located in the desert, near Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Cuyamungue Institute is dedicated to the shamanic 'Ecstatic Trance Postures' work of the late Felicitas D. Goodman



Our mentor was fond of saying: "The shamanistic world view is not a belief system, but born of direct experience of the Alternate Reality." Over our last twenty years of direct experience, that has proven true in some surprising ways. That mentor was anthropologist Felicitas D. Goodman, founder of the Cuyamungue Institute.

I first met her in the early 90's, when she was guest on my radio talk show, 'The Laura Lee Show: Conversations for Exploration,' appearing to tell the story of her rediscovery of an ancient technique for spirit journeying.

She called it 'Ecstatic Trance Postures' or 'Ritual Body Postures;' but it is also known as 'Shamanic Trance Postures.' Felicitas used the term 'ecstatic' in the sense of 'ex-stasis,' which means 'the stepping outside your normal state of being,' which also nicely referenced the surge of well-being and feel-good endorphins

that is part of the physiological shift the body goes into naturally and easily to support this altered state.

"The body knows how to do this and wants to do this," she went on, "It's a legacy we share with our early ancestors; our nervous system is identical to theirs, and with this we can view the world as they did."

She called it 'psychological archeology,' and traced its origins back to the painted caves of Europe. There, in a drawing on a cave wall, as well as works of art from indigenous cultures the world over, were depictions of simple but precise body postures that were codes to the ritual induction of this altered state of consciousness.

Well, right there she had me. Were these clues to a long-standing quest: how to tap in again to the spontaneous mystical moments I'd had since childhood?

As a second generation American, with Swiss, Welsh and

English ancestors, might I find my earliest spiritual ancestral roots? We were soon to find out, as Felicitas - who quickly became mentor and friend - invited my husband Paul and I to Santa Fe to participate in her workshops.

We came, we dove in, and today, twenty years later, Paul is the President and Executive Director of the Cuyamungue Institute and I am the Director of Outreach and Development.

This work still puzzles, delights, and moves us. How is it that something so seemingly simple can invoke such deep, energetic, profound and visual experiences? I chalk it up to the benevolence of our Creator, and highly-engineered 'technology' embedded in the human body.

Today, brain-mind science suggests the steady fast beat of drum or rattle serves to 'loop' our analytical left brain, so the right brain is free to take us deep into

Above: The centre nestles in the low hills of the desert



unity, oneness and soul. The few medical lab tests we have on our posture work confirms that our brain can place a leg simultaneously in two worlds, beta and theta, waking and dreaming, resulting in a 'waking dream' with that inner visual screen switched on, while we are conscious and awake to watch it.

It also shows the blood pressure drops while our pulse rate rises (all within safe limits) and that happens only in the first stages of death - and yes, our shamanic journeys share something of Near Death Experiences.

Tremendous heat is felt in different regions of the body. Vibrating energy - we could perhaps call it kundalini energy - all manner of energy waves pulse through us. Those doubting they have an energy body, need only try this!

The D.C. electrical activity of the brain has been found to increase twenty to a hundred-fold with this practice, and as for the mystifying results with the Gamma/Cosmic Ray tests... well, we'll save that one for another story.

What Felicitas gave us was a short list of simple steps: set up a

sacred space, smudge, honour the directions, offer cornmeal or similar to the spirits and shake a rattle... all familiar to a shamanic practitioner.

The unique part of this equation however are the physical postures. We sit or stand, very precisely, in the chosen posture for fifteen minutes during a live or recorded rhythmic sounding of a rattle or drum at a steady, even 200-210 beats per minute.

While each posture produces the same physiological profile shift, each posture has its own unique experience. We liken the body held in a particular posture, or

Above: the simple elegant architecture of the adobe buildings in the centre

Below: a rainbow in the desert brings a sign of life-giving rain

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configuration, to an antennae bent to tune in to a particular frequency. To me, this makes sense in a universe of energy and vibration.

Anyone with a healthy nervous system can do this, and we have a track record of thirty-five years of safe and effective use by thousands of people all over the world.

The larger question is what is this Alternate Reality we access? From whence does the spirit journey come? This, if not fully answered, is at least hinted at by our direct experience. The contents of our spirit journeys are received, much as in a profound dream, yet it's one that we can interact with, as we can in a lucid dream. Visualisation, projecting, conjuring up what we want to see: this is not that. This is receiving a vision from a source beyond us.

The evidence that this is not generated within our own minds, but through our minds, from a larger field, that source beyond us, is inherent in the practice.

The Kiva at Cuyamungue is both sacred space and lab, in that we record our spirit journeys.

When introducing novices to this work, we give some simple instructions as to what to do inside the trance: park the intellect and mental chatter off to the side while letting your soul-self receive the vision and engage in it. Not all that much instruction is needed, as indeed, our body-mind-soul already knows how to do this, and takes every opportunity to do so if we can just get out of the way.

As facilitators we demonstrate the selected posture without showing the original art work (many of the artworks carry clues). We do identify the category of the posture however - that is, the type of spirit journey, be it healing, divination, metamorphosis, though any and all of these aspects can and do happen in any of the postures.

We teach as Felicitas taught us. We don't suggest what content may arise, we leave that to the source.

There are a myriad ways of tapping into this source... but the key that ties it together for me is that our early ancestors knew the universe as intelligent, living and accessible.



After the trance, as the rattling ends, we silently sit to attend to the immediate task of journaling the experience. Then we go around the kiva, one by one, to share those experiences.

What almost everyone reports is the tremendous energy and heat they feel, the vividness of the experience, an emotional release and profound sense of peace.

Most comment that their journey came to a natural conclusion just before the rattling ended. Many report that the time went very fast, or very slow, and they can hardly believe it was fifteen minutes of rattling. Many report hearing sounds or singing over the rattle, multiple rattles, or no rattle at all. All are indicators of being deep in trance.

At a recent Kiva session with all novices, we listened as one person after another reported they were flying, or seeing wings, clouds, horizons, birds, riding on the back of birds, seeing through a bird's eyes, talking with birds, or feeling wings want to sprout from their shoulders. That's when we finally passed around a photo of the original art work - there, atop the head of a figure in the same pose they had just done, sits a raven.

All this bears powerful testament that their experience did not arise from random neurons firing.

While each posture has its typical themes and symbols, each trance experience with that posture is unique, with variations on those themes. In a group trance, we often find a smaller set of elements repeated, again with much variation, with a theme emerging that has surprising depth and coherence. Other times, everyone gets a piece that when stitched together, tells a mythic story.

At another recent gathering of fourteen, one person heard the message, "we link earth and heaven" and every report contained visuals and palpable sensations of being grounded, rooted, anchored, or pulled into the Earth, before



growing tall and blossoming into the Tree of Life, or shooting up to the sky or cosmos as tubes of energy, or flashes of light, arrows, tunnels, elevators, all pointing up and rapidly moving up. These visuals were symbolic of the verbal message.

There are a myriad ways of tapping into this source, and we have only circumstantial evidence that those who created the art that gives us our canon of postures intended their use as we employ them in our work today. But the key that ties it together for me is that our early ancestors knew the universe as intelligent, living and accessible.

If we are indeed tapping into an Alternate Reality, whose very fabric is this living, cosmic intelligence, then I can understand why our bodies shake, vibrate, and pulse with energy; why electrical activity, endorphins and ecstasy receptors go into high gear; why our inner visionary screen switches on as we step across the veil - grounded yet ascending - one foot anchored in this realm, and the other catapulted



across the gap between earth and heaven.

If we listen, if we learn its language, we hear the Universe speaking to us, and what it says to us today it has long been saying, it's the wisdom of the ages.

We are immersed in a cosmic ocean of energy, and we can tap into that, experientially, imbibing on levels which we don't yet know, and can only sense.

This, then, is the best evidence of all that our trance journeys are a very old and very valuable tool in the age-old tool-kit of shamanism.

Laura Lee works closely with her husband Paul Robear as teachers, writers, and directors of The Cuyamungue Institute in Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, a non-profit educational resource organization. She hosted the nationally syndicated 'The Laura Lee Show: Conversation for Exploration' on radio from 1990-2000, a call-in talk show featuring in-depth interviews with leading-edge thinkers. Laura and Paul reside in Santa Fe, Seattle, and Maui, and travel by invitation to teach.

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Above left: demonstrating the 'Tsimshian posture'; one of the trance postures performed at the centre

Above: inside the sacred kiva

Opposite page Main photo: The 'lion circle' (named after a large rock that resembles a sleeping lion) at the center of the community plaza, with the kiva behind it
inset: the inside and outside of the centre's dining room