

# **Bushwhacking Through Narcissism: The Making of a Jungian Analyst**

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## Five

### **Shamanism and the Self Field**

In my quest to fill out Jung's empty intuition of the self-field connection between analyst and analysand, I have read widely in the literature of shamanism, taking as my guide Eliade's masterful review of the literature through the 1950's. The theme of his *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951/64) may be summarized in a single sentence: "[The shaman] alone 'sees' [soul], for he knows its 'form' and its destiny" (p. 8). The spirit of our pragmatic and materialistic age has left "soul" out of account as an embarrassing hypothesis, the idea that there is an invisible reality behind the experience and behavior of each individual that determines our lives more fundamentally than any of the factors we can demonstrate empirically. The shaman leaves the public world through an artificially induced trance in order to access the invisible realities of the self field. Both the diagnosis and the cure take place in this region of non-ordinary experience.

As regards diagnosis, there are usually two possibilities: the individual may have *lost* his soul, or a foreign entity may have *invaded* it. The more significant of these is soul-loss, characterized by feelings of discouragement, lack of energy, unconsciousness, and mental disorders (Underhill, 1965: 89; Hultkrantz, 19677: 89f). Generally the shaman retrieves a lost soul by going after it; that is, by entering a trance in which it is understood that her soul has left her body and roams the landscape of myth. Thus the shaman has been defined as a specialist "who can cross over into the supernatural world at will to deal with forces that influence and even determine the events of waking life" (Harner, 1973: 1). In the language I have been using, the shaman might be described as an expert in the unconscious oneness by which individuals are linked in the self field. Easily appropriating intuitions gathered from this deep region of psychological experience which most of us ignore or repress, the shaman is an indispensable asset to her community. Her visionary intuitions into individuals who have fallen ill form the basis of their restoration and cure. Both diagnosis and therapy employ the care-filled linkage that must have underlain my coasting with Karen.

Extended contact with technologically oriented societies has universally resulted in new diagnostic categories for shamans. Infections and other diseases that respond to Western medicine are sent to the hospitals and clinics. What remains for the shaman to treat are the more severe disturbances of soul -- the ones that result from the "loss of soul" or a disturbance in the region of the self field. The shaman knows about this because his election

by the spirits who have made him a shaman typically takes place through a severe illness of his own. Having lost his own soul and retrieved it through his shamanic initiation, he has learned to enter and leave the self field as necessity requires. Eliade says, "The shaman is not only a sick man; he is, above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself" (p. 27). And because of this, he has learned "the mechanism, or rather, the *theory* of illness" (p.31).

In a very loose manner, I can identify with this. For like Ellen and Karen, I began adult life without a persona and only learned to relate to the public world after a series of non-ordinary experiences. I could identify easily with their plight and knew where to look for the sources of self-confidence in a level of experience that is deeper than the persona field. But unlike the shaman, I could not enter non-ordinary reality at will and had only a vague and empty intuition of what was transpiring between us in the self field. I needed a detailed example for what transpires in a shamanic cure if I were going to have a model for an analytic process that is located primarily in the region of deep unconscious oneness.

I found one in a novelistic report by anthropologist Florinda Donner (1982), who not only witnessed but participated in the shamanic cure of a little girl.[1] Donner had spent a year living in every respect as a Yanomama Indian in the remote rain-forests of the upper Amazon in Venezuela. I have condensed her report as follows (pp. 243-248):

Little four-year old Texoma, eldest daughter of the polygynous family with which Donner lives, becomes listless and weepy while in the swamp on a frog-catching expedition. Donner carries her home, where she falls into a fitful sleep and develops a high temperature. The girl's mother has already been despondent for almost a week. Avoiding work and social contact, she has spent her time playing with the infant son of her co-wife, evidently preoccupied with her husband's absence on a raiding party to a tribe several days' journey distant. Presented with Texoma's illness, the mother is immediately convinced that the girl's soul has been lured away by a shaman of the enemy tribe. Donner denies this diagnosis, claiming that the child only has "the flu." She is so sure, she avers, that she can "feel it in my legs."

As this does not convince the mother, Donner fetches Texoma's great-uncle, Iramamowe, the community's most powerful shaman. He takes a dose of his hallucinogenic snuff and officially confirms that the soul is missing. In his trance, the shaman searches his visions carefully; but not being able to find the girl's soul, he calls in her playmates and Donner to help him search. Without the aid of drugs, they sweep with branches every inch of the community living space: eating and sleeping quarters, storage areas, pathways to the river, to the gardens, and to the latrine. Donner is told she will "just know" if she finds the girl's soul. But these activities, too, prove fruitless. Convinced by the second day that an enemy shaman has stolen the girl's soul, Iramamowe is reduced to having to try to draw pathogens out of the girl's body with ritual sucking actions.

Donner finds herself "filled with an indescribable sense of helplessness" at this turn of events and asks the shaman to command his spirit-helpers to assist her while she works a "water cure." Iramamowe questions her closely concerning her intentions and how they relate to the realities he knows. She reminds him that he has often said that he can see the spirits in her eyes and that his own spirit familiars "are already acquainted with me." She will be the sober instrument of the spirits while he will take the snuff and commune directly with them. As Iramamowe indicates his satisfaction with this arrangement, Donner organizes the women to bring her boiling water and the older boys to cut and heat palm fronds, as she employs her own grandmother's cure of "breaking the fever" with hot compresses. The struggle goes on all night long. At one point, Donner writes: "My assurance faltered, I mumbled a prayer for her with a fervor I had not had since I was a child. Looking up, I noticed Iramamowe gazing at me. He seemed anxious, as if aware of the mixture of feelings -- magic, religion, and fear -- fighting inside me. Determinedly,

he went on chanting" (247). At dawn the girl sits up and asks for water. Her fever is broken and her soul has returned. "Iramamowe stopped beside me on the way back to his hut. We did not talk, but I was certain we shared a moment of absolute understanding" (248).

I am prepared to understand this story as describing a restoration of soul, as the Yanomama insist. That is to say, the healing cannot be appreciated without reference to events taking place in the self field. The shaman, Iramamowe, recognized this but was unable to establish a feeling link with the soul of the sick girl. Donner, on the other hand, succeeded because she had unconsciously gathered an intuition about the nature of little Texoma's affliction. Since it corresponded with her own childhood experience of illness, Donner was eventually able to appropriate the intuition sufficiently to open up the channel of care between herself and the girl and then to widen it in such a way that the community was able to reconnect with Texoma. When a substantial caring link had re-integrated the girl with her village and family, she regained consciousness.

Much is to be gained by considering the story in detail. First of all, there are two interpretations of the girl's illness. The Indians are convinced that her soul is lost, a matter of life and death. In our terms, she has lost her will to live, evidently because she feels like an abandoned child, her father likely dead and her mother despondent and no longer interested in her. Her inability to sustain a viable connection with her family and village implies that her illness is not merely "psychosomatic" but "socio-somatic" as well. For Levy-Strauss tells us: "Physical integrity cannot withstand the dissolution of the social personality" (1958/67: 161). Without family and community she feels annihilated, a "nobody."

Therefore what the Yanomama see as "loss of soul," we would call a loss of connection to the persona field. This is the container that holds and provides security and identity for the members of any community -- but is particularly important in a preliterate society that has little or no ideal of the rugged individual. The contrast between Texoma and Karen has everything to do with the difference between a preliterate society with its well-defined persona field and modern industrial society with its high tolerance for misfits. Being a misfit for us constitutes a kind of low functioning persona that might at any time be converted into rugged individualism. We know that many of these people will be lost to marginality (neurosis, psychosis, criminality), and we have places to put them (therapy, hospitals, jails). But in a well-functioning preliterate society, one either has a place in the persona field or one dies for lack of soulful connectedness. The diagnosis of soul-loss is therefore a matter of life and death for the Yanomama.

Donner, as a Westerner, is habituated to our more superficial and technological view of illness. Furthermore, she seems frightened by the Yanomama suspicions of a dire and mysterious condition in the girl. Does she really believe Texoma has succumbed merely to a trivial, everyday virus? Surely her "flu" diagnosis is meant primarily to reassure the community. The claim that she can "feel it in my legs," imitates a Yanomama figure of speech declaring unshakable certainty. Consciously, she means only to reassure. However, in view of the fact that she actually does restore the girl's soul, she may be speaking more truly than she knows. There may be a genuine kernel of confidence behind her claim, resulting from what she has unconsciously gathered about Texoma's condition.

Iramamowe's views clash diametrically with Donner's. He claims to "see" that Texoma's soul is missing. Evidently he relies on his feelings, intuitions, and imagination to come to this conclusion. Having "blinded" himself with his snuff to the distractions of the merely empirical, he has focused his attention on the self-field link he shares with Texoma. Penetrating her despondency sufficiently to know it is endangering her life, he enters the deep realm of *participation mystique* while retaining his professional observer standpoint -- very much like a psychoanalyst.

When Iramamowe enters his trance and sees that Texoma's soul is missing, he experiences a void. He does not feel, image, or intuit her soul. There is nothing "in" her with which his drug-enhanced soul can connect. Though we moderns may be put off by the hide-and-seek imagery of disembodied souls, the imagery is consistent with our feelings in analysis with a patient. We cannot work with a patient if we are not able to connect with something in her. That "something" in both the patient and myself is what pre-literate societies call "soul." For Texoma to be "without soul," means that the members of her community cannot connect with her. Iramamowe's diagnosis means that the community expert in maintaining a sensitivity to this kind of connection has failed; and the question is whether anyone can find and re-establish it before she dies.

At this point, the children and Donner [2] are asked to search for the lost link to Texoma's soul. The anthropologist feels out of her depth in this activity and is given only one pointer. Iramamowe does not know precisely what will happen to Donner beyond the fact that she will "just know" if and when she finds the soul. He can say no more than that it will be a moment of intuitive certainty. As Donner tells the story, it is evident she does not understand what Iramamowe is driving at. Indeed, she refuses to accept that the soul is lost until she is overcome by that feeling of "indescribable helplessness" when Iramamowe turns to the sucking ritual.

As an anthropologist, Donner must be consciously aware of the two theories of disease among American shamans: soul-loss and intrusion of a pathogenic object, usually introduced by a hostile shaman (Eliade, 1951/64: 300). Symptoms of intrusion disease are external injuries or internal pains, with *no* obvious changes in consciousness (Hultkrantz, 1967:88). But Texoma is comatose; her consciousness has been drastically changed. Everyone knows her soul is lost, so why is Iramamowe acting as though this were a lesser disease?

Donner's conscious awareness of all this is not a sufficient reason for her feelings of "indescribable helplessness." She is evidently in a panic at realizing the shaman has given up searching for the girl's soul. Her helplessness reflects both her involvement in the Yanomama community and her awareness that the shaman's powers are failing him. She is involved with these people at all three levels: ego, persona, and self. Far more than an anthropologist, she has become a kind of "auntie" to the sick girl as well as a full-time participant in community life. She cannot be uninvolved. But in calling her helplessness "indescribable," Donner hints at its belonging to a different order of experience from what she expected. Something deeply unsettling jars her assessment of the situation. She appreciates suddenly the earnestness of the Indians' concern. At this point she has not yet "found" the girl's soul in the full sense of making the contact, and of being aware of that contact. But in the uncanny moment of helplessness, Donner is jolted into feeling the dire condition of things on a deeper plane.

Knowing at last that there is no time to lose, she immediately begins to act on a belief she has had all along, something related to her persona-field platitudes about the triviality of the girl's sickness. She becomes aware that the conflicting views of Texoma's illness are simultaneously true. The girl *does* have the flu and must be treated for flu; yet that treatment must be pursued with the earnestness of a soul-restoring ritual.

As an analyst I encountered this kind of thing when, for example, Mara's account of her depression was literally true and yet there was a "depth" to the account of which she was apparently ignorant and of whose nature I had only the vaguest glimmer. What I knew for certain was only that there was "more here than meets the eye." Mara had indeed to be "brought down to earth" but I felt "something more" that concerned the precarious state of her soul. It was enough to enable me to resist my supervisors but not enough to name or discuss.

In this context, Iramamowe's questioning of Donner appears to be an attempt to assess her intuitive certainty. Is this hot-water cure the white woman's stupid attempt to deny the *nagual*, the transpersonal self field; or is she, rather, grounded in the deep connectedness that makes community life possible? His anxiety on this score is reflected later in his acute awareness of her faltering assurance before she utters her childish prayer. He needs to be sure that the healing work be grounded in a solid soul-to-soul connection. The ritual dimension of the cure is only important to the extent that it articulates a feeling, image, or intuition of the patient's soul in such a way that others can find and participate in a preconscious unity of being with her and Texoma.

Iramamowe's evident reassurance indicates he has perceived that Donner has picked up a genuine link with Texoma. She allows herself to identify with the girl, to feel her depression, helplessness and longing to be cared for. This in turn activates memories from her own childhood when *she* was sick, somewhat the way Texoma is now. Her intuitive certainty that she is on the right track is grounded in a kind of "joint woundedness" with the sick girl. She knows what drove the sick girl into her coma because she had felt that way herself and may feel that way again. This, too, is a "countertransference feeling," even if she cannot name it. She has found in herself a deep unsettledness that raises the question of whether life is ultimately worth living. It is a self-level *participation mystique*, but it does not claim her wholly. She has enough presence of mind to retain her stance in the ordinary world of the Yanomama while learning from the pain and depression stirred in her depths.

The cure she designs amounts to a pathway from the "found" state of the girl's soul (abandonment and annihilation) to its potential restoration. She remembers what it was like when *she* felt the fragmentation and dissolution of her own childhood self, and how her grandmother convinced her it was "only the flu." To appreciate that I "only" have "the flu," means to accept that my depression and dis-ease is accidental, temporary, and an expected part of everyday life. An everyday category from the persona field ("flu") contains the existential panic resulting from the wound in my self. To have such a generally accepted context for the dissolution of my being reassures me at a deep level that my humanity, my connectedness with others, my very "soul," is "all right." As a little girl, Donner appreciated the relief that came from knowing the symptoms of her viral infection were irrelevant to the warmth, security, and love she felt connecting her with her grandmother. In her mystical participation with Texoma, she gathers an intuition about how to restore the affective linkage

the little girl has lost.

To a greater or lesser extent, every one of the analyses I have described in the previous chapters have had something of this character. Often our patients have become lost in a plethora of soul-denying events and obligations that drag them around by the nose. Sometimes, all too rarely, we are fortunate enough to see right through the confusion and grasp the very nature of the patient's will to live. This can occasion a magical course of therapy in which we seem to do little more than watch and listen as the patient pulls everything together almost singlehandedly. Such patients tell us that no one has ever "heard" them before, they owe their progress all to us. In a sense it is true; we *have* heard them in a uniquely efficacious way. On the basis of a joint woundedness in the self field, we have grasped what ails them and seen beyond it to a deeper source of connectedness. They have felt themselves understood in their place of confusion. This alone convinces them that connection with another human being is possible. In addition to this, our intuition of their healthy core enables them to imagine themselves as on the way toward clarity and reintegration into the human race. They have hope for the first time in ages.

Evidently Donner's intuition of Texoma's condition offers the girl an escape from the inevitability of dying. But then her assurance falters and she utters a prayer. In this moment she loses her sense of being connected with Texoma and can no longer understand how a grandmother's cure could work. Iramamowe's anxiety evidently asks the implicit question, "Has the soul slipped away from you, or are you only indulging in your white woman's penchant for denying what you know about invisible realities?" Her oscillating certainty corresponds to Jung's in the case of the woman who had the mystifying kundalini dreams. His suggestion that they quit the charade of analysis was met with firm refusal from a woman who was in some sense aware that significant events were occurring in the self field.

It appears Jung and his patient were operating on two quite different bases. She knew by feeling and intuition that her process was important and that it required her to maintain the caring link she felt with him. Meanwhile Jung needed conceptual reassurance. Overlooking his emotional self-field connection with the patient, he searched for a *theoretical* certainty. Fortunately, her feelings were strong enough to enable her to speak up and he was flexible enough to respond. For it appears Jung had actually "found" his patient's soul but, like Donner, could not make the finding conscious. He could discover no way to appropriate what had been gathered. Like Iramamowe with Texoma, Jung had not the patience or courage to go on in his work with the kundalini woman without reassurance that he had found her soul. That these two prominent experts in soul-work, Jung and Iramamowe, are so resistant to "working blind" is an indication of how far out on a limb Donner has gone. *We* know that both Donner and Jung had found their patients' souls, but *they* did not.

It is reasonable to think that Donner's slip in certainty at the moment of the childish prayer results from her unfamiliarity with intuitions about the self field. She conducts herself adequately in that world as long as she does not think about what she is doing. Critical thoughts intrude like theoretical questions about how to ride a bicycle. We can only keep our balance as long as we let our body take care of all the details. So it is with a novice trying to negotiate the world where all beings are one, she can only succeed as long as she leaves all the details to her unconscious faculties. The moment she doubts this, the ground begins to slip away under her feet. It is only natural that she reach for familiar guidelines, but it is as

fatal as wondering which leg muscles to flex. For a moment her critical, rational ego has reasserted the Western cultural perspective against a natural world of latent interpersonal connections.

She subsequently brings herself back by mumbling a prayer with childlike fervor. She returns to the open channel of joint woundedness between herself and Texoma, while her protesting ego indulges in confusion over the mixture of "magic, religion, and fear." Her childish associations are indeed inadequate for conducting scientific research, but they are not in all ways inferior. Though they may lead her to a relatively undifferentiated, childish way of thinking, they also lead her into a deep sympathy with the world and with other individuals: the very ground of the soul-soul connection. It is likely that the hot-compress cure, the security of grandmother's competence, the power of God to make things right, and the earliest infant-parent bond, all belong to the same complex of memories; and that this is the essence of what Texoma has lost in losing her soul. Thus Donner's prayer appeals to the divine and familial source of joint woundedness with her patient.

In the shamanic context, prayer has another significance as well; for it appeals to the collective symbol of ultimacy and all-in-oneness (God), analogously as the shaman uses trance to enter the landscape of myth. The shaman's healing task generally involves the rearticulation of mythic realities to make them powerfully relevant to the crisis at hand. These mythic realities constitute the narration that explains a society to itself in an ultimate sense, grounding it in visionary truths to which only seers have free access. When a society is spiritually alive, its mythic narratives live, grow, and change, as well. "The myths . . . can be reexperienced, ordered, intensified, given artistic shape and communicated by means of the trance of an individual specially prepared for this activity" (Novak, 1977: 12). Thus the shaman reshapes a cultural myth to address the present illness of the patient and/or the community. Myth -- like all "god talk" -- speaks to self-field realities.

As an anthropologist Donner must have been familiar with these concepts, but her shamanic work with the sick girl lies far from the conceptual realm. It seems rather that, in the self field, she allows herself to be guided quite blindly by vaguely apprehended intuitions. Untrained and inexperienced in the Yanomama myths and untranced by their narcotic snuff,<sup>[3]</sup> Donner is left to construct her own naive ritual on the basis of the two realities she cannot doubt: the bond of joint woundedness she shares with Texoma and her grandmother's hot-compress cure. But now, suddenly, the whole village is involved. The cure takes on social dimensions rich with implications. It engages the people most closely related to the sick girl and gives them something to do to express their love and concern. It mobilizes *their* linkages to Texoma's soul. All the frustrated longings to assist on the parts of the girl's "mothers," "grandmothers," and "aunts" are harnessed in the preparation of hot compresses while her playmates are engaged in fire-tending and palm-frond heating. For the Yanomama, as for all preliterate peoples, the persona field is grounded in the mythic self field.

We can hardly imagine Texoma's loss of soul apart from the dangerous raid in which her father may have lost his life and in reaction to which her mother seems to have drifted into depression -- perhaps equally in danger of losing soul. Furthermore, the whole community, bereft of its best warriors, must feel itself in a kind of twilight state between life and death. Donner's descent into the wound that gives her access to Texoma binds the community as well. This is a joint woundedness they *all* share. All are tuned to the same channel of

concern. Opening it is crucial in convincing the sick girl that she is loved and valuable and "only" suffering from "the flu." It accomplishes more than that, however, for it also energizes the community and gives it a reason to exist, fulfilling the function usually reserved for myth. Donner's rediscovery of her own deep woundedness restores "soul" to the village itself.

Donner shows us that to pursue our intuitions into an affective link with another can be a terrifying and disorienting experience. To submit to the guidance of what lies latently available in the self field risks our orientation in the appropriated or conscious world. Iramamowe enters the realm of the *nagual* deliberately and (for a time) irrevocably when he inhales his hallucinogenic mixture. Donner has no such sharp demarcation, only that rush of indescribable helplessness when the seriousness of the situation dawns upon her. From that point on, her guideposts are "non-existent" and "crazy" from the ordinary Western viewpoint. Intuitions -- compelling in their own way, but vague and outlandish -- conduct her into a childhood space of radical insecurity. But at the same time she finds herself more vividly connected with the comatose girl than waking consciousness had achieved with the healthy Texoma. This "crazy" world is so real and objective to one who has followed the pull of self-field intuitions, that we may well fear getting lost there.

In the last analysis this is what I believe characterized the silence Karen and I maintained for so long. Although we did not know it at the time, we were coasting just above the crazy, disorienting world of the self field. Unconsciously, we wished to remain ignorant of the abyss of non-differentiation and boundlessness that lay beneath our chairs. We were fortunate to have been able to coast such long time in ignorance of the dangers we were courting. The work got done on that deep plane without our having to trouble ourselves.

I had had visions that I failed to appreciate. I recognized the dissolving alchemical bath in which we were sitting as an image from Jung's *Psychology of the Transference* and knew that it referred to the moment when the boundaries are dissolved, the moment before the *conjunctio*, pictured as an incestuous sexual union that leads to death and transformation. I distrusted the vision, though; it was so patently a page from Jung's book (1946, p. 243) that I suspected myself of ego-inflating grandiosity. Even the dream of sexual union did not shake my defenses.

There was an even more shameful act of repression. On three separate occasions during our long series of silent sessions, Karen was dealt a panic attack. I was shaken each time, but acted with outward calm for which Karen thanked me profusely. I gave the usual advice, but little was to be done until the attack ended. Afterwards, very few words were exchanged before we returned to our silence. Today I would have taken the opportunity to observe there must have been something scary in our vicinity to give rise to such panic. Perhaps we could have talked about it. But even more alarming than my neglect of this obvious possibility was the fact that I had no warning of her panic. I was caught by surprise every time. I was feeling no agitation in the self field, although it patently had to have been there. All conscious connection with the self field was severed, even though that was where the action had to have been taking place.

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1. This chapter substantially revises my article, "Soul Loss and Restoration" (Haule, 1986).
  2. Donner's place in the Yanomama community is quite ambiguous. She is sometimes considered a woman on account of her anatomy, sometimes a child because she is not sexually active with the Indians, and sometimes a man on account of her skill with a bow and arrow.
  3. Western anthropologists who have experimented on themselves with the native pharmacopoeia report experiences virtually identical with those of the indigenous peoples; flying through space, traveling the Milky Way, meeting bird-headed people and talking dragons, and the like (Harner, 1973: 16ff; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971: 249, and 1975: 118ff).