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Sound Healing 110

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A Brief Exploration of Icaros and Shamanic Music

To be connected to both the elements and the unseen realms is a birthright that we have simply in being here on planet Earth. Just about every place in the world experienced this kind of connection if you go back in time far enough; many cultures accessing this wisdom through their own form of what you would call shamanism. The term shamanism comes directly from the Manchu-Tungus word *šaman*. The noun is composed of the verb ša- 'to know'; thus, a shaman is literally "one who knows." In terms of sound healing, many shamanic practices throughout time have made use of the power of sound and music as a way of communing with life, the Spirit World, and the Creator of all that is.

One instance where sound has been used as a means to connect with life on Earth is through traditional shamanic airs or melodies referred to as *Ikaros*. *Ikaros*, a word which pulls directly from the Peruvian *vegetalistas* or "plant shamans" reveals to us the ancient practice of communing with the plant world. In fact, to access this sort of communion with the plant realm, vegetalistas would ingest ayahuasca, a medicinal plant known for its capacity to promote profound healing on a soul level. Consciousness-altering substances aren't a prerequisite to do this, though. The Shipibo people, for instance, claim that each individual plant is sacred and carries its own unique song; most of which are taught to shamans during their isolation period consuming a strict diet (i.e. *dietas*). In other words, ikaros can be used to summon the spirit of plants and animals and serve their healing intent and act as a potent tool to promote both healing

and keeping the bad spirits away. Moreover, there are a variety of ways in which these songs are received or downloaded – either through dreams, in visions, or in the rhythm of your own heart. One may perceive an ikaros as through it's being sung by another individual or it may simply be an overwhelmingly clear melody that wishes to be expressed. Overall, it's a practice with specific intention that requires a clear level of intuition and deep listening.

While we've only focused on one kind of song so far, the practice of using music for healing purposes has been present for millennia in most of the cultures around the world. A great premise for this is the fact that most cultures consider that sound and music are either directly linked to the unseen or spiritual realms or that sound was the force that started it all. For instance, the Nada Brahma branch of the Vedic tradition conceives sound as the first manifestation of Spirit, the Cosmic Vibration, or the "Soundless Sound" at the origin and basis of all the matter and energy in the Universe. We also see in other cultures and backgrounds that share a similar story like in the statement pulled directly from the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God".

In what other ways is the power of sound and music employed in shamanic practices, though? Most shamanic practices across the globe have used sound for group-centered ritualistic purposes. A very common shamanic staple that is used in rituals and practices is drumming, a means for altering one's brainwave state, allowing one to enter a trance state. When used, the drum is oftentimes played in a more monotonous, repetitive rhythm to induce a shift in mental activity. Not only that, but the sound waves from the drum have the ability to impart its energy to other substances such as the human body, making it vibrate in harmony. Drumming alone enlives our living flesh, slows our brainwaves and activates our energy centers which can open up so much. In different traditions, dance is even paired with drumming, instrumentation, or chanting

to facilitate ecstatic bliss. But more than that, many of the dances that are used serve as an invocation, whether that be for healing on a physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual level. At the heart of any shamanic practice is a particular intent. And when people come together within a collective or tribe and enact such a ritual through the use of these tools, clarity, transformation, connection, and Divine communion have room to occur. It goes without saying that through the use of music, a shaman is able to gain a clearer and more lucid connection to the spirit world to benefit either the community or individual s/he is working with.

I believe more than anything that while science has come to show the effectiveness of shamanic practices on one's brainwave state, the true power of many of these ancient practices can only be known through the experiential. Not to mention, as someone who studied linguistics, it's important that we honor those who preceded us and also realize that just as language constantly changes, so too do the aims and constructs of our spiritual practices. That's to say we can give gratitude for the blueprints that have been left behind while holding the deeper knowing that it's up to us to forge our connection to the unseen realms in our own creative ways.

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