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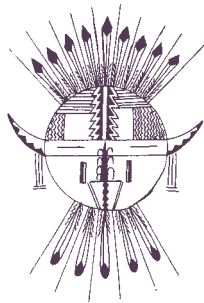


by Bonnie Horrigan

# CAN GOD

# heal?

*A beautifully illustrated series of books examines shamanic healing traditions around the world and finds that healing and God are irrevocably linked.*



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**F**IVE THOUSAND years ago, in an isolated valley in the Kalahari Desert of Africa, ten bushmen dance in a circle around a blazing night fire. As their black bodies vibrate and tremble, the bone beads wrapped around their ankles hiss like a hundred snakes rattling in the bush. Standing in the fire's shadows, eyes watching a boy who can barely breathe, eight women clap and sing.

Feeling the child's sickness floating toward him, the dancer named Bo prays to his ancestors for help. Finally, Bo's long-dead grandfather appears in the flames. The grandfather talks to *Modimo*, the Big God, and then whispers what must be done.

In pain, Bo collapses near the child and begins touching him. As he places his heart next to the boy's heart, he transfers *Inum* (spirit) into the boy's body. Suddenly, Bo leaps up. A white light has appeared, emanating from the dancers

and traveling straight up into the sky. Bo's pain disappears. And the bushmen rejoice—the child's lungs are clear.

Four thousand years pass. The world changes but some things don't change. Somewhere in the Central Plains of North America, a small, domed sweat lodge is being prepared. When the work is finished, the tribe's *Yuwipi* man transfers hot stones from the nearby fire into the lodge. As he sits down inside and begins to chant, twelve other men join him, including one with a serious heart condition.

Inside the dark, steaming lodge, as they sing and pray to *Wakan Tanka*, a brother ties the *Yuwipi* man's hands behind him with ropes and wraps him in the skin of a black-tailed deer. Within a few hours, small blue lights twinkle in the darkness. Three men hear voices in the north. One sees a vision of an eagle. The prayers continue and then, with a start, the *Yuwipi* man senses the arrival of the Bear Spirit.

Near dawn, the *Yuwipi* man feels the sharp claw of the Bear Spirit on his arm, the hot breath of the Bear Spirit on his neck. Then the ropes that bind his hands loosen. When the knots are undone and his hands completely free, he cries out in celebration, thanking the Bear. And the sick man sits up, the flow of blood to his heart restored.

## The First Medicine

As a means of helping communities heal disease, stay in balance with their environment, and remain in the right relationship with each other and spiritual domains, shamanic medicine has survived the winds of time for at least ten thousand years. It was the first medicine mankind had and, in the beginning, it was the only medicine.

Still practiced by peoples around the globe, this ancient art of communicating with the spirits has many different cultural colors, but at the core of each tradition is the certainty that knowledge and healing come not from humans, but from God.

Our culture struggles with this concept because in Western medicine, God is not part of the equation. Rather than seeking divine grace, we strive for knowledge, self-reliance, and control. As we busily unravel the "facts" of the physical universe, we are loath to rely on any force that is not subject to our dominion. Yet in cultures that embrace shamanism, even within small pockets of our own nation, these mysterious, grace-filled healings abound.

For many years now, anthropologists have been studying the Earth's slowly dying tribal cultures to learn what actually transpires during these healing rituals. Unfortunately, most scholars try to under-

stand tribal beliefs as filtered through their own beliefs. So, when a bushman doctor says he climbs a rope to talk with God, the anthropologist hears that the bushman *imagines* that he climbs a rope to have an *imaginary* conversation with God. But the bushman never said the word "imagine."

*Profiles of Healing*, a series edited by anthropologist Bradford Keeney, offers a remarkably filter-free view into the personal worlds of still-living tribal medicine men and shamans. Each of the ten books is actually an intimate conversation—words from a holy person to all humankind. Filled with art and photographs, this exquisitely produced series, which is a project of the Ringing Rocks Foundation, is dedicated to helping the world's most revered healers tell their stories and share their knowledge.

**"OH YOU, THUNDER-BEING, THERE WHERE WAZIAH HAS HIS LODGE, WHO COMES WITH PURIFYING WINDS, AND WHO GUARDS THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE ... HELP US!" —BLACK ELK**

In the first book of the series, *Lakota Yuwipi Man*, we meet Gary Holy Bull. When needed, the Lakota participate in the Sun Dance, a ceremony that uses pain as a means of separating from and transcending the physical world, and which has been credited with healing such diseases as diabetes and cancer. Gary Holy Bull's initiation reveals the Lakota spiritual landscape through which such healing power comes.

After years of assisting with the dance as an apprentice, Gary Holy Bull asked Fools Crow if he could lead the dance. The elder replied, "Go to the top of the hill and sit, cry, and pray. Talk to God. That's where you'll find the answers."

For two days, Gary Holy Bull sat on the hill and prayed. On the third morning, he heard a man singing in the north. When he looked



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up in the sky, the morning star was dancing in a circle. As the singing continued, a tree spoke: “Look who is singing. They are bringing you a song.”

When Gary looked at the hill at the far end of a ridge, he saw a lone coyote singing the song. But when he noticed that it was a coyote, the song turned into the animal’s natural howl. Then a remarkable transformation took place—the coyote changed into a human. “This is the song you will use to conduct the Sun Dance,” the spirit said.

Gary Holy Bull uses that song today and has since become a Sun Dance leader and great healer for his people.

In any of the Lakota healing ceremonies, be it the Sun Dance, *Hambelachia* (vision quest), or *Yuwipi* ceremony (calling the spirits), things happen. Gourds fly about; stars move; animals turn into humans; plants talk; and people are healed. Through these ceremonies, the world shows itself to be fluid, changeable, multidimensional. Through these rituals, spirit reveals its power.

**BE NOTHING. DO NOTHING. SIMPLY REST. WAIT TO BE MOVED. MOVE WITHOUT WEIGHT. AND AGAIN ... BECOME THIS MOVEMENT.—BRADFORD KEENEY**

In the second installment, *Japanese Master of Seiki Jutsu*, Keeney presents the life of Ikuko Osumi. As a young girl, Ikuko Osumi was very ill. When medicine didn’t work, her aunt turned to *seiki*.

Using her hands, her aunt instilled *seiki* (a word referring to the vital life force) into Ikuko. Then she taught Ikuko how to work with *seiki* on a daily basis by herself. “Put the tips of your fingers together and bring them up to your eyes,” her aunt instructed. “Touch your fingers against your closed eyes. Then wait and see what takes place.” Within days, Ikuko’s health was restored.

As Ikuko worked with the *seiki* movements, she contemplated the relationship between nature and the human body, and how it was possible to relieve various kinds of pain. “I lost contact with the everyday

world and felt as if I had entered another dimension of the universe,” she says. “I could look inside my own body and observe the inner workings.”

Having learned to be one with the *seiki* movements and overflowing with its power, Ikuko began to heal others. She describes her hands as being drawn to the person in need and then feeling something akin to a bolt of electricity pass through her hands as the *seiki* is transferred to the patient.

Ikuko is the instrument; *seiki* is the healer.

**THE SPIRIT IS IN THE AIR. WHEN IT GETS IN YOU, YOU SEE IT AS A STRING OF LIGHT ... IT CAN TAKE YOU TO ANOTHER PERSON WHO NEEDS HEALING OR IT CAN CARRY YOU TO ANOTHER VILLAGE, OR TO THE SKY. THIS LIGHT IS !NUM. —XIXAE DXAO**

For the bushmen of South Africa, healing is about the transmission of spirit. In *Kalahari Bushmen Healers*, we encounter *Tga*, the bushmen’s powerful healing dance. Given to them by *Modimo*, the Big God who created everything, the ritual (clapping and stomping in a circle around a fire) and sacred songs used today are the same as those used by their ancestors since the very beginning.

When the bushmen dance, the spirit inside them is stirred up as it gets ready to encounter the illness that comes from the sick. “When the illness comes toward me,” tribal healer Rasimane explains, spirit “not only causes the shaking, it also heats up my entire body. At this moment, the ancestral spirits start to show me things. They show me who is sick and what I must do to help them.”

The bushmen speak about a rope of light that appears during the dance. They climb up this rope and are taken away, even though their bodies stay on the ground. Motaope Saboabue explains that he is often lifted up and taken by “the biggest spirit” to a sacred place where he is filled up with spiritual strength. “The spirit that makes you shake gives you the power and the light,” says Motaope Saboabue. “It enables you to see and heal in special ways.”



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He reminds us that the Big God can give this vibration to any human being. But to be able to do this, he adds, “You must love everyone.”

**A SHAMAN IS SOMEONE WHO PRAYS TO GOD. PRAYER IS THE INSTRUMENT, THE LINK. THIS IS WHAT GIVES YOU FLIGHT, BRINGS YOU THE PUREST SIGHT, AND RECONNECTS YOU TO THE WEB OF LIGHT. —AVA TAPE MIRI**

In *Guarani Shamans of the Forest*, we meet Ava Tape Miri, chief shaman for the town of Cumindad Fortuna in Paraguay. Ava Tape Miri was called to be a shaman when four ancestral shamans, sent by God, appeared to him in a dream and gave him four songs. Then the shamans took him to a sacred place where he was taught how to baptize, the Guarani ceremony in which a person is given a soul-name so that he or she will be recognized by the spirits.

Ava Tape Miri learned from his dreams that there are many types of sickness, each with its own unique cure. “I have been shown these cures,” he says. “A different spirit came for each sickness.”

The ancestral shamans also taught Ava Tape Miri that right action on Earth is necessary to maintain a relationship with the spiritual world. It makes for, as Ava Tape Miri says, a hard life. Sometimes he dances and prays for four nights before learning, through a dream, how to heal a person. “Those who carry the pain of others hold the power to heal,” he says. “It is an impossible role but must be done so that others may survive.”



**I AM CALLING YOU, GRANDFATHER, TO COME BY MY SIDE ... REMEMBER ME IN THE LAND OF THE GODS. REMEMBER ME IN THE DARK UNDERWORLD. WHATEVER YOU WERE REBORN AS, OLD GREAT ONE, REMEMBER ME AND WATCH OVER ME.**

**—VUSAMAZULU CREDO MUTWA**

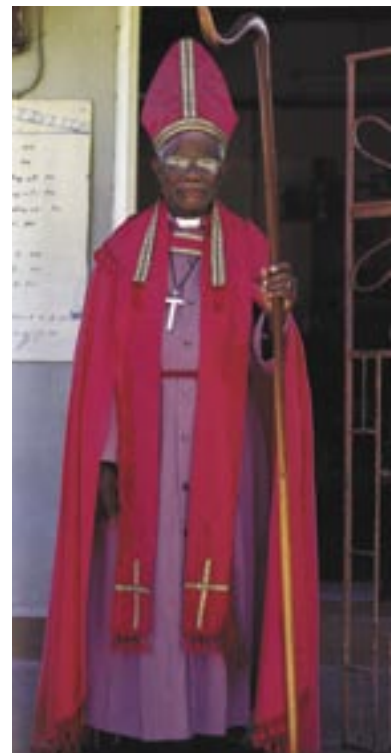
Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, who speaks in *Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa: High Sanusi Zulu Healer*, was, like many healers, initiated into the sacred arts by an elder family member. His aunt put “the pot of initiation” on his head and taught him to dance and shake until he was overtaken by a strange spell, after which he would feel as if he were floating. “A pot full of hot water suddenly jets up from the small of your back between your but-



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tocks, right up your spine to the top of your head,” says Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa. “It explodes into space and seems to float toward the stars. Then, your vision changes.” He describes *Ncumu* (the power) as the feeling of being one with everything.

Once a Zulu initiate is on the path, he must dream of his future teacher, just as the teacher must dream of him. During this dream, the initiate will be told where to find the teacher. In Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa’s travels throughout Africa, which were directed by such dreams, he was taught how to take pain away with touch, how to summon things through visualization, and how to create “ghosts” with his mind that could be perceived by other people.

“It is also possible for a group of human beings sitting in a circle to become one mind,” he says. “This happens if everyone is filled with deep love and respect for one another. Such a gathering can create a beautiful energy that can bring good and healing to anyone entering the field.”

**YOUR HANDS ARE POLLEN; YOUR BODY IS  
POLLEN; YOUR MIND IS POLLEN; YOUR VOICE  
IS POLLEN; THE TRAIL IS BEAUTIFUL. BE STILL.**

**—WALKING THUNDER**

With *Walking Thunder: Diné Medicine Woman*, Keeney presents Walking Thunder, a Navajo medicine woman from the Four Corners area of the American southwest. To understand Diné healing, one must understand the group’s creation stories. All Diné ceremonial life is used to call forth and connect with the Holy Ones so that life on Earth will be blessed with *hozho*, a word meaning something akin to sacred, holy, blessed, and balanced.

Navajo myth tells how the Holy Ones, who traveled from the first world to the fifth world, encountered illness. “The first sickness they faced came from the evil ways,” Walking Thunder says. White Shell Woman became very sick in this world. “So they performed a dance for her. A Holy One visioned how

she should be healed. He dreamed of a four-day ceremony in which she throws up each morning, takes herbs, receives prayers, and so forth. That was the beginning of the Chant Way.”

Sandpainting was also given to the Diné by the Holy Ones. “When the Holy People decided to travel from the first world, they painted messages on buckskin. Eventually these were brought into the fifth world. There they began to draw on rocks. After that, the Holy Ones began talking about healing and placed sacred power into sandpainting.” Walking Thunder says that during the sandpainting ceremony, the patient strives to absorb and become one with the Holy People and the sacred origin stories of the universe depicted in the sand in order to gain the ability to recreate him or herself in wholeness.

In addition to sandpainting, Walking Thunder works with prayers, herbs, and songs. “When you are performing a ceremony, you can give herbs to your patient to help them feel the truth about themselves. While the patient is taking the herbs, you also have to take it because you will sing and chant the sickness out of the patient ... In the end, everything walks in beauty again. That’s how it works.”

**WHEN YOU ARE A SPIRITUAL  
ELDER ... YOU WILL SEE LINES.  
THEY LOOK LIKE WHITE  
TELEPHONE LINES. THEY  
CONNECT YOU TO ALL THE  
PLACES WHERE YOU CAN  
TRAVEL. SOMETIMES I SEE  
THAT A LINE IS BROKEN;  
IT’S NOT LIT UP. I THEN HAVE  
TO GO REPAIR IT TO KEEP  
THE CONNECTION ALIVE.”**

**—MOTHER SAMUEL**

St. Vincent, one of the Windward Islands in the West Indies, is home to the Shakers, a tradition that sprang from a blend of African spirituality and Methodist Christianity. “When a Shaker seeks spiritual healing,” Keeney says in the *Shakers of Saint Vincent*, “they set on a journey (travels of the soul, not the feet) that traverses through spiritual death and rebirth.”

This journey, which is an intricate process called “mourning,” is done under the guidance of



a pointer, a person skilled at helping others traverse the spiritual realms. The ritual begins with a worship service, after which several layers of cloth covered with wax markings are tied around the pilgrim's head. These markings determine where the spiritual seeker will go on his or her journey. The pilgrim prays and reviews all the wrongdoings of his or her life. The pointer also prays and reads from the Bible. At some point, the visionary experience takes over.

Mourning takes three or more days to complete. Pilgrims travel to different places, including the past and the future. During the process, spirit enters them as a vibration or a shivering. "When you contact the Holy Spirit," the pilgrims say, "you get filled with something that makes you move."

The vibration is used for healing. Before touching a person, the Shakers ask for the Lord's help and guidance. People often tell Mother Samuel, a Shaker healer, that they feel an electrical shock when she touches them. "This happens when I feel the presence of Jesus," she says. "If you call Him for somebody, He may enter you. When this takes place, you must touch the sick person."

Like the bushmen, Shakers talk about seeing "the light." Sometimes they see lines and ropes, sometimes a lighthouse, or a bright sun. When Pointer Warren travels, he uses the lines of light to travel. "I go near them and they take me on a journey," he says. "There are many schools in the spirit world and they have taught me many things."

**THE ROPES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE KNOW ABOUT BECAUSE YOU CAN WALK WITH THE ROPE TO VISIT GOD.—CGUNTA/KACE**

In *Ropes to God: Experiencing the Bushman Spiritual Universe*, Kenney takes us back to South Africa for a closer look at the bushman healing dance and the ropes of light.

The ropes appear during the dance. The bushmen say that these ropes, or lines, open their eyes and make their stomachs tight. The bushmen travel on the lines by turning "into wind." "When I am in the dance and see the ropes, I can either go up or down," says Cgunta/kace, a Namibia healer. "I can [also] send my thoughts to another. This is done by using the lines that connect people."

But it is the biggest rope that takes the bushmen to God. "When I jump onto that rope," says

Namibia doctor Cgunta !elae, "God calls me to go so that he can give me some more medicine."

When traveling on the ropes to God, the bushmen often encounter their ancestral spirits. "After we go up the rope and find the bushmen ancestors from the past, we then bring the whole world of our ancestors back down to the earth," explains Cgunta !elae. "The village in the sky comes down with us when we come back down that rope. Everything comes down. When this happens the dance becomes very special. Now the dance is taking place with all the bushmen that ever lived. We find ourselves in the beginning of all things.

"We hold the truth of God while the rest of the world is in trouble," he adds. "We wish that everyone would start dancing and wake up God."

**IT IS GOOD TO GO INSIDE YOUR HEART AND SILENTLY HOLD SOMEONE'S HAND. LOVE IS THE SIMPLEST ACT.**

**—OTAVIA ALVES PIMENTEL BARBOSA**

Brazilian elders Otavia Alves Pimentel Barbosa and João Fernandes de Carvalho, who are presented in the book, *Hands of Faith: Healers of Brazil*, say that the main ingredients to their healing practices are prayer, faith, and love. But the spirits also play an important role.

Healing with blessed water and prescriptions given to him by God, João performed his first healing when he was seventeen. "The pearl that is within me doesn't belong to me," says João. "It comes from a larger dimension and I am unable to give it to anyone else. It belongs to God. It feels like a force or electric current that moves through me when I pray. My rosary works like a telephone line to God."

Otavia first learned the healing arts from the spirit of a dead priest. The priest "lived" with the Barbosa family for several years when Otavia was a teenager and taught her about the spirit world and of helping others. "He brought us everything we needed to do healing work," she says. Then she began to learn from other spirits and from God.

Otavia, who is now a great-great grandmother, still heals by praying for the patient, asking for spiritual help, and then waiting for a dream. In these dreams, she is given the information she needs to heal the person in question. "My dreams tell me what is wrong with them and what should be done to make their life improve," she says. But she adds, "Love is the power of healing. If you love, you are able to heal."



## I AM CONNECTED TO THE MAGIC OF BUDDHISM, ISLAM, HINDUISM, AND CHRISTIANITY. —JERO MANGKU SRILANDI



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In the tenth and final book of the *Profiles in Healing* series, *Balians: Traditional Healers of Bali*, Keeney introduces us to Jero Gede Macaling, the Big God of Bali, and Balinese healing magic. The Balinese recognize two kinds of diseases—those caused by natural means and those caused by supernatural means. Either way, sickness is a result of an imbalance. And because good and evil depend on each other to exist, these healers work with both forces to find the harmony that will result in wellness.

Balinese healers, known as balians, derive their knowledge from the gods. A priest came to Jero Sekar Manik in a dream and told her to become a healer. She agreed, but only on the condition that he would ensure that people would accept her. The next morning, half the village was lined up in front of her house, asking to be healed.

“Before I heal someone, I pray and make some offerings,” says Jero Sekar Manik. “I pray to the sun god, the taxsu god, the earth spirit, and other gods. Some gods control unhappiness on Earth, while others can cure people. I receive songs, knowledge, ointments, herbs, and medicines from the gods.”

### The Big God

In the very beginning, the original shamans learned to care for their communities by receiving information about medicinal plants and healing ceremonies from spirits and ancestors who talked with God, or directly from the “Big God.” Their school was the trance. Their teacher was spirit. Thousands of years later, tribal elders, medicine people, and shamans around the globe still use these same ceremonies to talk with God and ask for knowledge and healing.

While the majority of Western people worship God in one form or another, and millions pray every day, we seem to be disconnected from the art of talking with divine beings to learn about the universe or to increase our abilities to help others. Instead of spiritual knowl-

edge, we rely on human knowledge. Rather than dreaming and talking with spirits to learn about plant medicines, we test for active ingredients in labs. Instead of cultivating X-ray eyes, we use X-ray machines. And instead of engaging telepathy, which requires a deep focus, we call our friends on cell phones, something we can do even as we drive.

But despite our technical advances, which are many and magnificent, there are still far too many diseases—cancer, diabetes, and AIDS, to name but a few—for which we have no cure. We continue to struggle with societal ills such as violence, substance abuse, crime, and pollution; and earthquakes, hurricanes, and fire still destroy our communities. The question becomes, then, can these ancient shamanic techniques offer any help to modern society? Can the gods, goddesses, spirits, ancestors, and the Big God teach and heal *us*?

The South African bushmen doctors think so. So do the St. Vincent Shakers, the Guarani shamans of Paraguay, the *seiki* masters of Japan, the Zulu healers of Africa, the Navajo and Lakota medicine people of North America, the faith healers of Brazil, and the balians of Bali. Perhaps their faith has something to offer us. ☺



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## THERE IS NO DEATH

The problem of death is founded upon love of life and love of the physical form. As the consciousness of thinking humanity rises from personal to transpersonal levels where we begin to know ourselves as the Soul, our attachment to physical form loosens and a new understanding and experience of death becomes possible.

The Soul does not know death or the fear of death. Through the Soul we gain a sense of participation and cooperation in the cyclic process of life; we can meet death in a different way and can prepare for it as simply the Bringer of Changes.

What then do people experience during transition from life in form to life without form? Is it possible to gain control of the process? Answers can be found in a 34-page compilation of the writings of Alice A. Bailey, *Death: Entrance into Fuller Life*, available free:

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