

THE HEALING POWER OF SONG

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It is not surprising that songs and shamanism are synergistic for healing. The shaman sees with the heart and music speaks to the heart. A song that is written “just for you,” can make you feel honored and valued in a way few other things can match. When this song is imbued with the compassion of the helping spirits, it offers powerful healing for body and soul.

When I first encountered songwriting, it was through what I know now was essentially a shamanic journey. In 1995, I had been working for several years as an educator and writer for a non-profit devoted to global community. Though it was challenging, meaningful work, it had begun to feel stale. At the same time, activities that had formerly brought me satisfaction no longer seemed to work. Much of the joy had drained out of my day-to-day existence.

I decided to take some time off to reevaluate my life and direction. I began with my usual logical approach to problems. I made a list of my abilities and how these abilities might fit the needs of the world. To my surprise and frustration, this method did not work as it had in the past. I remained stuck for some weeks, unable to discern my next course of action. Finally, I surrendered to what seemed to be my fate, that there was no figuring this out.

Then one morning as I awoke, in that moment between sleep and

consciousness, I heard a voice say very distinctly: “Stop striving.” I sat up, startled, but there was no visible presence in the room. Then the voice said, in my head this time: “Feed the soul, give it a voice.” It got my attention in a way that I could not ignore—I knew it was the answer I had been seeking.



*Feed the soul.
Give it a voice.*

The meaning of “stop striving” was obvious to me, since that was my normal mode. To my surprise it was also easy advice to follow, perhaps because I had reached an impasse with my mental struggles. A great peace settled over me and I let go of my lists and my need to do—even the thought that I would make a contribution to the world. I allowed myself to ask for the first time in years, what was it that I wanted? Not what did I need, or what did the world need from me, but what did I want. What did it mean to “feed the soul and give it a voice”?

Though I had not yet encountered shamanism, it came to me that only my soul knew the answer to this question. I decided to visit my soul and ask how I could feed it and give it a voice. I know now, after several years of journeying experience, that what I did next was essentially a shamanic

journey, though done in silence without drumming. I found a quiet place, closed my eyes, let go of my physical body, and went down deep into a cave, calling and searching for my soul.

After going down for some time, I entered the Lower World, though I had no name for it then. There, I found a few compassionate animal spirits who did some work on me, including returning some of my lost power in the form of a power animal that merged with me. When the animal merged with me, it felt like golden light, dense like water, was poured into my body. It was an ecstatic, visceral experience. Sometime during my time there, while asking “how do I feed my soul,” I saw the image of an old guitar I had tried to play when I was 16, long since forgotten and hidden away in a closet. It called to me, something I truly desired, which I had buried in the busyness of my ordinary reality life. When I returned to my body and to ordinary reality, I felt more solid, more here, more alive than ever before.

I was ready for the next step, which was nothing I would ever have considered in all my mental processing. My heart and my soul wanted music. So, I gave it to them. I dusted off my old guitar and basic music instruction book and started learning to play. A joyful and healing odyssey into songwriting began—music lessons, voice and guitar lessons, learning to

produce music on my computer. I also began to study shamanism. A close friend of mine, who was an experienced journeyer, recognized the description of my cave experience as shamanic in nature. I felt drawn to learn more and I enrolled in shamanic workshops with Michael Harner. After several weekend workshops, I went on to complete the *Two Week Shamanic Healing Intensive* and the *Three Year Program of Advanced Initiations in Shamanism and Shamanic Healing*.

Over the years, songwriting and shamanism have come together for me in a wonderful symbiosis. At first songs would come to me in dreams or in workshops, or when a chance phrase caught my attention. Later I began to journey to bring back healing songs. In the beginning I journeyed for songs that would help ease my own pain at the loss of a friend or my sorrow for the suffering I saw in the world. This evolved into journeys for others who needed healing or power. In the Three Year Program, Michael taught us about “song doctoring,” an ancient and respected shamanic healing method. I realized I was part of an honored tradition.

Please keep in mind that song healing is not about performing or having a beautiful voice. This was an important lesson for me. Growing up in Los Angeles, it was an unspoken rule that you did not “perform” unless you were really good. After childhood, singing was serious business, something only professionals should do. I had to overcome much of this early conditioning to accept the joyful gift of songs from the spirits. Shamanic songs are not about performance or about the practitioner—they are about the spirits’ healing power embedded in each song. Healing is what the client experiences when the song is given and received.

THE METHOD

This description is of my method for bringing back healing songs, developed through training and my journeys and interactions with the spirits. As with any other shamanic practice, your experience will differ, depending on your relationships with the spirits and your own soul’s needs. These steps should get you started, and the spirits will teach you what more you need to know.

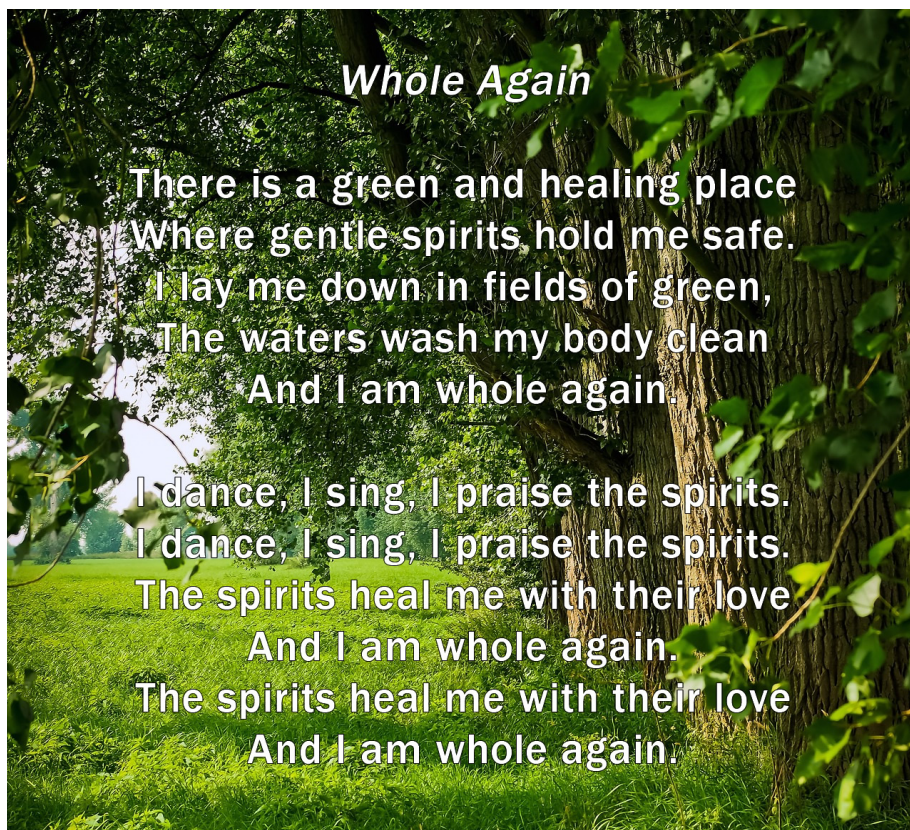
You can find songs as one does in soul retrieval, by having a clear intention and person firmly in mind and asking your spirit helpers to “take you to a song” for your client. I personally have found it very helpful to journey to a specific place and spirit to ask for a song. After my first few forays into journeying for songs, a power animal took me to a place in the Upper World where a spirit was waiting for

me. This spirit, who told me I could call her Mother of Song, said she would give me songs and work with me for this kind of healing. Repeatedly returning to this place and to Mother of Song has helped to deepen the experience. Most of the time the songs come more clearly and quickly now, and with more detail than in the past.

You may want to start by journeying to ask if there is a spirit who will help you with songs for healing. Or, you can begin with a more general journey to ask your helping spirits to give you a method to use to obtain healing songs.

The basic method involves:

1. A client who needs a healing song and who has granted permission for shamanic healing
2. Journey for the song



3. Bring the song back and teach it to the client and/or record it for the client.

Sometimes the client comes with a specific request for a song, as part of a rite of passage or ceremony. Sometimes the client simply asks for shamanic healing for an illness or issue and during the divination journey to ask what is needed, I am advised or feel in my heart that a song would be helpful.

THE JOURNEY

My particular method involves recording the song digitally, and later adding vocals and music. I do it this way because it is how the method has evolved for me—and because I really enjoy the production part of the process. It also gives the client something tangible to deepen the experience; it is good to be able to listen to “your song” whenever you like.

Please keep in mind that it is not necessary to the healing part of the process that the song be musically processed in any way. The important aspect is the song itself and that the client be taught the song and/or given a recording of the song. Sometimes I simply record it to my cell phone, for example, and send it to them digitally. I have done journeys for songs with and without the client being present or any processing; it is effective regardless. Whether the client is present or not, I record the song for them.

To obtain and record the song, use headphones and the FSS shamanic journey drumming track. Before the journey, have a separate recording device ready. I record simply to my cell phone.

Begin with your normal preparations for a healing session for a client, who has granted permission for shamanic healing—calling in the spirits, making the client comfortable if pres-

ent, and so forth. If present, the client can sit or recline, whatever is more comfortable. During the journey, you are not in physical contact with the client. Have your intention firmly in mind: “To bring back a healing song that will help with their illness/issue.” Begin the journey. When the song starts coming to you, start the recorder and begin singing the song aloud, humming the melody, singing any words (sometimes there are no words), staying open to whatever comes to you for as long as it takes for the song to feel complete. When you feel it is finished, sing the song one final time all the way through for the recording. Thank the spirits and come back from the journey.

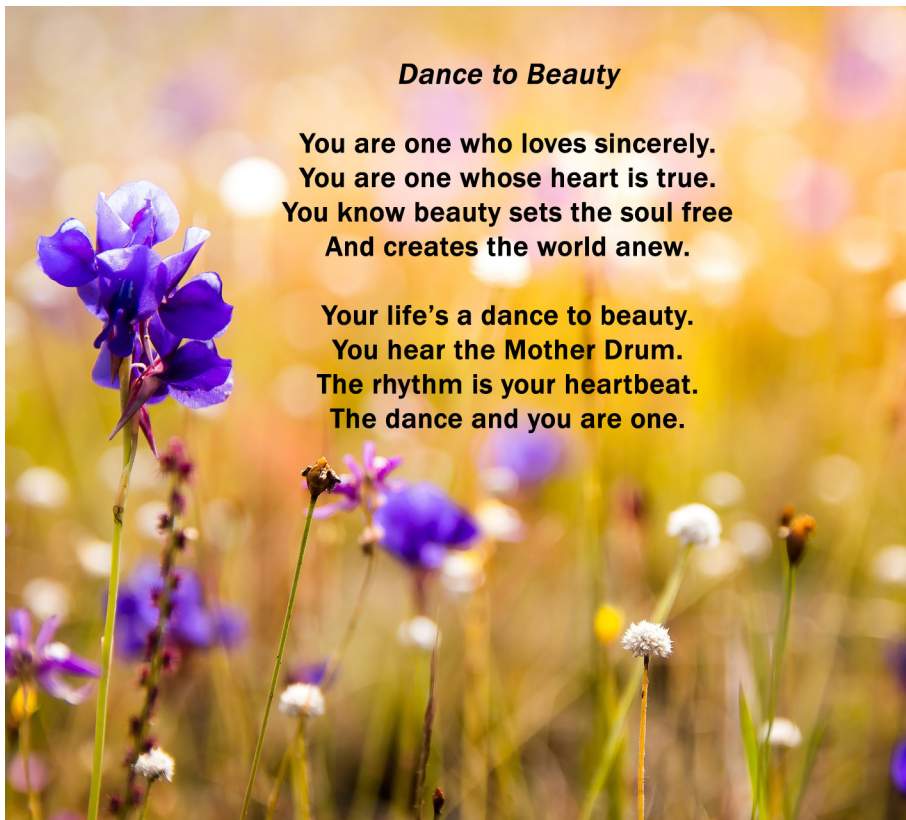
GIVING THE CLIENT THE SONG

If the client is present, teach the client the song. Repeat it as often as necessary for the client to memorize the song. Have the client sing the song with you, then alone. You can give the client the original recording and/or process the song if needed and send the final version to them.

Because I process the song afterward, I usually work without the client present. I record as much of the song lyrics and melody as I am given during the journey. While I receive the “core” of the song in the journey, sometimes I am instructed to finish it in ordinary reality. The song may also come to me in a more complete form, with lyrics, music, and even certain instrumental sounds. I try as best as I can to duplicate the song in ordinary reality, keeping the healing power of the spirits alive in it.

ONE JOURNEY FOR A SONG

A client requested a song to help her through a difficult and painful emotional time in her life. She was in need of spiritual support, something she could “carry close to her heart.”

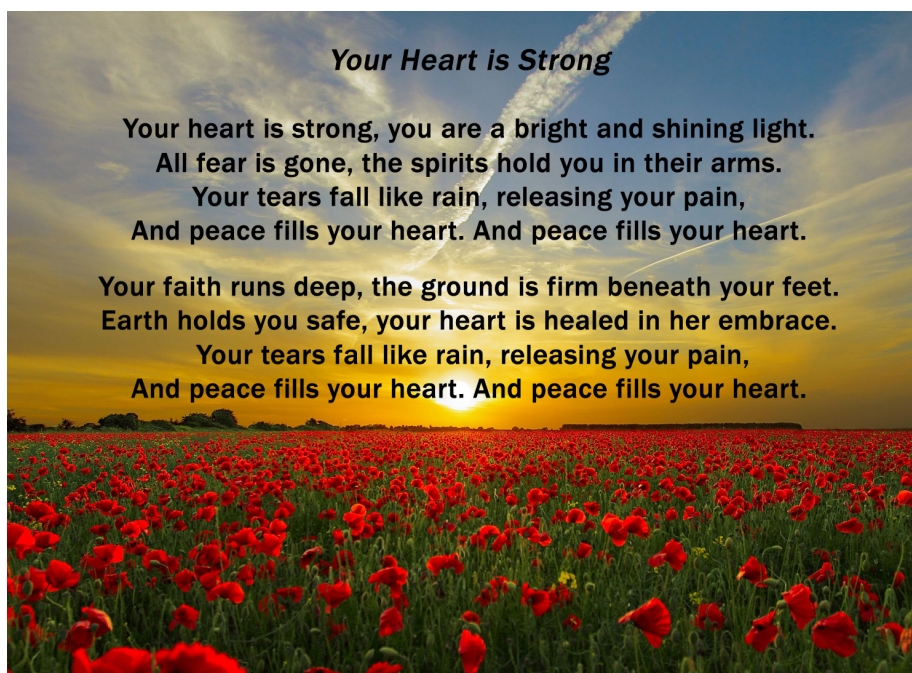


Without the client being present, I journeyed to the place of Mother of Song in the Upper World. The power animal associated with this spirit and with songs accompanied me. We greeted each other and I entered the cave where Mother of Song lives and lay down on the earthen floor next to a small campfire. I closed my eyes and asked for a song for my client (by name) to help her right now through a difficult emotional time in her life.

I waited, listening with my heart. I could feel something stirring in my chest and lungs. I turned on the recorder and started to hum and sing a melody. As I sang, words began to come. “Your heart is strong. You are a bright and shining light.” I kept my heart open, letting the song come to me, repeating the intention for my client as needed. I sang the words for a few moments. Then, the melody changed and new words came: “Your tears fall like rain, releasing your pain.” Then more words: “And peace fills your heart.” I continued to sing, recording whatever phrases emerged, knowing they were part of the message. As with other shamanic practices, I have found that the first words and melody that come after the intention is stated are usually the core of the song. Note that sometimes I see images at first. If you wait, these will usually resolve themselves into words and music.

Finally, it felt complete and I sang the song through once as completely as I could, then I thanked Mother of Song and returned from the journey.

Immediately afterward, I went to my computer and wrote down the lyrics. Still feeling the song with my heart, I worked on the lyrics, completing phrases I had received. (Most of the songs I receive have words that make sense, though I know many practitioners who receive songs made



of sounds or simply vowels, etc.) Over the next few days, I set the melody to music and recorded the vocals. The completed song, *Your Heart Is Strong*, was sent to my client.*

When my client heard her healing song, she wrote me: “Tears are running like rain, not because of my sorrows, but because of Love. As I listen to the song, waves of Love and power begun running through me—tears falling as if releasing all fears and presenting me with immense strength and new light. Amazing!”

A GIFT OF SONG

Over the years, some of the songs originally given for a specific client have also proven useful for others. When doing a shamanic healing session, sometimes the spirits will advise me to offer one of the songs to the current client, as an affirmation and as part of their own healing.

Journeying for songs is not easy at first. The waiting is difficult. I wonder if a song will come. On rare occasions, as with other shamanic practices, I do not receive a song. This is to be expected when working

in the realm of the spirits. In the beginning, when songs would come, I found myself questioning them, doubting myself. These days, I have learned through experience to accept what I receive and to do my best to be a faithful translator. After having seen the joy, healing, and peace clients experience, I am filled with gratitude for the spirits’ gifts and generosity. I keep my heart open and trust that the spirits will continue to sing there. ✨

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* Listen to *Your Heart Is Strong* at: <https://tinyurl.com/YourHeartIsStrong>

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