

## A Journey of No Regrets: Winter, Depression & Lucy

I was recently reminded what a wonderful gift it is to journey in the way of the shaman. As a practitioner, I have used journeying in my own healing and the healing of others. I have expressed thanks for those successful journeys many times but recently, for the first time, I journeyed for a family life or death decision. Her name was Lucy.

A few weeks ago our dog family member of 13 years was diagnosed with fatal cancer which left us only days together. Though she had pain meds and would rally as friends came to visit her one last time, I could see her spasms of pain when she was still. Three times I journeyed seeking to know what her needs were and three times I had no answers. The fourth time, as I came to the great oak where I begin my travels, Lucy appeared, displaying the familiar excitement of a dog ready to jump into a truck and go on an adventure. In her prime, the thrill of travel and promises of good behavior on her face, she was ready.

The following day, at sunset, the vet would arrive. It was a sunny warm day and she spent the afternoon hours on a snow bank eating snow, looking across the fields as she had done all her life, occasionally rolling on her back in the warm sun. I began to doubt our decision. I journeyed once again and was told not to falter. The Spring-like day was a parting gift for her. Our last gift for her was to end her pain and bask in the love we had all shared. When the vet came, Lucy lie down and put her head in my hands. Never looked away, never winced, no fear, calm, accepting, no regrets and I was able to do the same because of

her strength, our love. We buried her as the sun set. Joy and tears for my tiny dancer.

I've had gratitude for journeys before but this time I understood to my core what a wonderful blessing it is to let the drum take us to the portal where truth resides. I held no doubt, no fear, no regrets, and the blessings received throughout our years together overwhelmed any feelings of loss.

“No regrets” – there is the skeleton key to open so many of the doors that block our way to love, light and our proclamation of worthiness to receive these blessings. Winter can be a formidable doorway to pass through for those of us who have been on the rollercoaster ride of depression for most of our lives. If knowledge is achieved by taking many steps forward then wisdom might be found in taking a step back, in stillness, in honest introspect. In that place we might seek the spirit bear to help us dream our dreams that we might awaken in our season of Spring to make our dreams into our reality; to act upon them with bear strength and courage.

For those who suffer from depression, that introspection is too often replaying scenarios of regret from our pasts. Regret for what we have done, for what others have done, for all that has

never been done. We tell ourselves that the most important parts of our lives are in the past where there is no potential for change and we are most certainly alone. “Feeling alone” is the dominant emotion of depression. No matter how many loving beings and spirits surround us, we are blind to them. It is not by choice. We want nothing more than to pass through that doorway, to move on, to be free of that excruciating pain, but we doubt our right to do



so. We find ourselves chained to a past of sorrow, unable to authenticate our role as turnkeys. “The way is closed and the dead keep it.” as the ghost of a dishonored king states in the movie, “The Return of the King”.

Learning shamanic practices does not make one a shaman. Learning self-help practices does not make one a psychotherapist. There are mental afflictions and chemical imbalances that are served well through qualified psychotherapists but the pivotal point is distinguishing these conditions from what might be generically termed “spiritual crisis”. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines crisis as “an unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending; *especially* : one with the distinct possibility of a highly undesirable outcome”. Taking one’s own life is a “highly undesirable outcome” though most of us who have suffered severe clinical depression have entertained the contrary because we’ve experienced the true depth of how alone, alone can be.

For some, who accept the idea that they are in spiritual crisis, finding religion or joining a church is the knee-jerk reaction and it might work for them. However, statistically, church attendance in the United States is at its lowest point in decades during a time when cases of depression, anxiety, prescribed and self-medication, are rapidly rising. Others might be able to wait the “crisis” out, disguise it, mask it, attribute it to some moment of stress, but the spiritual dis-ease remains. We each have a spirit. That spirit will be heard and the volume of its message will grow greater each time it is denied, even to the point where the flame of life itself is a breath away from being extinguished.

Shamanism is not a religion or a church. It is not a new age practice or cult. It has been a cultural practice of spirituality since before recorded history and, unlike religions, it continues on long after cultures and civilizations turn to dust. Many religions are built upon the creations and ego of humankind supporting perpetuated misconceptions such as peace can only be achieved through war or that only that which is hard can survive against force.

So much of our suffering, our depression, anxiety, addictions, are the result of the personal wars we have declared, the hardening we strive to sustain, and the fact that what we truly want to achieve in our lives is a sense of belonging that is born of love and peace. As a society, we are exhausted from the constraints of the armor we wear and the threats we perceive from every direction. Times of “spiritual crisis” may yield the greatest opportunities to mine the freedom of truth, create a lasting peace and, through spiritual practice, have it endure. All that is life must first pass through darkness before it can know light.

There are shamanic practitioners who will tell you they are Christian, Jewish, Buddhist. Shamanic practices do not involve changing or abandoning one’s religion. They will not shield you from harm or heavy burdens. They will connect you to the same life force that makes us love our animal and human families; mourn the loss of a favorite tree; deeply inhale the scent of freshly turned soil; and be mesmerized by the deer encountered who stares deep into our eyes. “Being alone” is the illusion we embrace to protect ourselves from the pain of being touched, yet being touched, opening our senses, our hearts, is the only way we can be healed and to heal others. Through spiritual practices, the illusion of being alone is made transparent and all the life forces of heaven, earth, and realities beyond embrace our tender hearts.

So Lucy, my sweet girl, what did I learn from your passing? I learned what indigenous people mean when they say: “It was a good death.”. I’ve never said those words before. It means that the harmony and balance of nature was kept in truth, strength and honor. It means you had a very good life. Through shamanic spirituality and practices, through my journeys, I was spared regret or doubt when I reviewed our years. I was able to celebrate our life together as you went on your way; your new adventure. I will see you soon, but not too soon. Your myriad gifts have made me a more authentic human being. Dogs can do that ya know? Have fun my darlin’ girl.

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