

WALKING WITH BEARS

On Bridges to Earth's New Era



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CLEANSING THE WINDOWS

As we moved deeper into the practice of vision questing, conversations with Bear Heart amped up the importance of cleansing ourselves of toxic waste that accumulates over the course of living, in general, and working intensely with people, in particular.

Those involved in the service professions become deeply connected to others through a serving and compassionate relationship. In that connection, there is an exchange of multilayered energy, and the two of us agreed it is important to purify oneself or else become an ambulatory toxic waste station.

Such a necessity for purification is especially true in a polluted environment generated by Western Civilization. Just driving on a freeway often involves a transfer of highly charged, chaotic energy into our systems, not to mention carbon pollutants, smog, and ground-level ozone.

The stress of everyday living creates intense contractions within our musculoskeletal system so that the flow of energy in the form of electrical impulses hits the dams created by the stress-induced clenching.

Before we know it, we are uptight in a high loop. When the flow encounters the dams, there is a physiological pooling on one side and a

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trickle on the downstream side. Within the flow is a current of lactic acid which then remains in the pools because we don't have adequate release and cleansing practices. Eventually, the acid irritates the nerve receptor cells; these irritations become inflammations and the seat of much of our pain and disease.

Cutting-edge science is now telling us that many diseases, including heart difficulties and various forms of cancer are intricately connected to inflammation, a process that leads to cholesterol-clogged arteries. Such a documented proposal means that inflammation sets the stage for heart attacks, strokes, peripheral artery disease, and even vascular dementia, a common cause of memory loss.¹

So, yes, there are immense benefits to purification ceremonies such as sweat lodges and fasting, the process which I have found to be the most effective in the release of contractions. But the larger hill to climb is the release of humans from the bondage of a stress-dominated culture.



About the time Bear Heart and I were discussing stress, inflammation, and purification, our clinic at The Center for Creative Resources in Houston was on the graduate rotation of various universities for training psychotherapists, psychiatrists, family physicians, teachers, and pastoral counselors.

Our office setup included a closed-circuit television system that linked a team of senior therapists and their students with a treatment room where a trainee or a seasoned therapist would see a client.

The client signed a release to be part of the training, so it was a very effective form of therapeutic education. While the client gave up the privacy of meeting in seclusion with a therapist, she gained multiple perspectives from the larger treatment team watching in an adjacent room through closed circuit television. Such an arrangement was not for every client but worked well for many.

On some occasions, I would work with a client while Judith headed a team that included graduate students in an adjacent room. Through our televised system, the trainees observed as I engaged the client with the aspiration of learning from both useful therapeutic moments and mistakes. We also videotaped the session for future study and clinical research.

One day in the treatment room, I talked with a woman who had been through a severe trauma. As part of the treatment, I had her lay down on a ceremonial blanket on the carpeted floor and breathe through her feelings.

Utilizing a light trance induction of hypnosis, I took her briefly back to the trauma and then to a place cherished by her in Nature. In her mind's eye, she let go of the suffering, anger, and pain associated with the trauma and invited a healing presence to enter where the wound had been for so many years.

Through an indigenous breathing technique I had learned from Bear Heart, I invited her to expel the toxic waste of the trauma. We also engaged an integration of therapeutic tools that drew on Thought Field Therapy (TFT) and Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT).²

Both were aimed at allowing various energy fields to pass through the client and release tension and stress in favor of a more relaxed state. After an extensive active imagination or shamanic journey in which she had moved through a cave and a tunnel into another reality, she returned to her ordinary state of consciousness and sat up, holding her knees to her chest.

She reported that she felt much better. A knot in her stomach had disappeared.

While she rested, I told her that I would consult with the training team in the next room and that she could take this time to rest and collect herself, integrating the healing experience into her more usual ego state.

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I left the room and walked briskly to the office where Judith and the trainees were watching by our closed-circuit television arrangement. When I opened the door, Judith and the five other professionals were white as sheets, like they had seen a ghost.

It turns out, they had.

“What is going on here?” I asked, a bit alarmed at the vulnerability in the room.

All six of the people pointed at the closed circuit television monitor. I looked up at the screen, and I could see my client sitting where I had left her, holding her knees to her chest.

That aspect of the scene was perfectly usual. However, along the floor was a complete outline of her discharged energy. Was it an energetic representation of her trauma? Or was it some other phenomenon?

I squinted and rubbed my eyes. A perfect outline of a ghost-like body would not go away. My client continued to pull her knees up to her chest and sat in the middle of an out-stretched energetic form that had been expelled during the therapy.

At least, those were my first thoughts.

Judith said that during the treatment session they could see the energy pouring off her body like a dark mist. As it left her body, it shaped itself into a coagulated form that looked like her but flowed out on the floor.

It totally bumfuzzled the interns.

Was it an electromagnetic outpouring from her body? Was it a bridge between the wave/particle domain described by quantum physicists? Was it what ancients called “spirits or demons?” Was it a visitor from another dimension?

In any case, the form on the floor propelled us into a reality beyond our current paradigms.

Immediately, I went back into the treatment room and invited my client to return to her chair, which she did. She was completely unaware of the form-like mist that had issued out of her welcome release and purification.

When I asked her if she noticed anything different where she had been sitting, she said, “No.” I told her that we had observed an expulsion of toxicity and that we were examining the tape. After I affirmed the excellent and courageous work she had done, we scheduled another appointment, and she left. She paused at the door with a quizzical smile on her face and thanked me.

Then, I returned to the observation room to examine the monitor more fully in order to make some sense of what was unfolding in our midst. On the monitor was the continued outline of an energetic body on the floor.

We discussed what it might be. Did it have something to do with the camera? Was there some technical miscue we were overlooking? We made adjustments in an attempt to eliminate hidden variables in our technology. We turned the camera on and off. We wiped the lens. We doubted what we were seeing and sought some explanation within a more rational paradigm.

About that time, Jack Jensen, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon who practiced in the office next to us, entered the discussion. With his assistance, we eliminated more variables.

We even changed cameras. Still the energetic body lay on the floor. While we could not see the toxic form of her release with the naked eye, we continued to observe it with various cameras and camera angles. It remained outlined on the floor of the treatment room for over 24 hours until it finally dissipated or departed after I burned sage and juniper for purification.

In the discussions we had with our team, we explored the reality of leftover energy within our treatment facilities. At that time, I had been involved in the practice of psychotherapy for more than twenty years and was still a relatively young man.

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Just think, I intoned to my graduate students, how these energy forms have gathered in my office over time. And think of all that energy moving into and through all of us, all outside our awareness.

We should, I kidded, get hazardous duty pay. For several weeks we discussed with our students the importance of purifying ourselves when there is a discharge of energy in a therapeutic transaction.

I still have the videotape, and I look at it when I doubt the necessity of purification. I propose that any deep listening by any person to another who is in crisis leaves a residue of emotional and energetic energy both with the interior and the exterior eco-fields.

The questions our students raised with us boiled down to one: how do we cleanse ourselves of leftovers in our transactions? I suggest that addressing that question is a central one in a culture beset with fear, angst, shame, addiction, environmental degradation, an avalanche of negative news, and a variety of traumas.



Another dimension of our undigested energy globs comes into awareness through tensions and conflicts we experience in relationships. Both partners in an intense conflict lose energy in the exchange during which there is a “deposit” of unwanted energy in the other. Astonishingly, there are few models of conflict resolution taught in a typical academic setting that pay close attention to purification of toxic waste.

In Judith’s and my work, we use a variety of approaches to move through tensions in our marriage and in clinical work. Hal and Sidra Stone have provided us with a most useful map that attends to purification.

They call these moments of conflict—negative bonding patterns—because of the presence of negativity during the relational exchanges. Hal and Sidra are spot on: much of our bonding in mainstream culture is in negativity. Take an ordinary weather forecast. More often than not the forecaster seeks to evoke fear with continued reference to “getting hit” with a storm.

A trailer might suggest that we will need our umbrellas for the morning commute even though the forecast for rain is spotty. We subsequently are bound to a negative narrative about the upcoming day.³

At the core of tension in intimate relationships in negative bonding, according to this model, is a power imbalance. One partner hits (emotionally and/or physically) the other from a power side of the personality (often an internal critical parent).

The damaged partner experiences hurt and vulnerability and then shifts into a power gear and returns the hit. Soon, there is a cycle of hitting and hurting. Resolution, however, is not complete until the negative energy deposit has been scrubbed from the system.

What is crucial in purification?

Not just emotional and spiritual release but most important, physical sweat!

Sweating increases an almost magical chemical we call endorphins. Toxic elements such as alcohol, cholesterol, and salt are excreted through the medium of sweat. According to recent studies, sweating reduces the incidence of kidney stones by flushing out the kidneys.

Sweat contains antimicrobial peptides effective against viruses, bacteria, and fungi. These peptides are positively charged and attract negatively charged bacteria; they also enter the membranes of bacteria and break them down. Sweating unclogs pores that can cause various skin problems. No wonder hot yoga has become popular, along with Zumba, bicycle spinning, and myriad exercise regimes.

All good. But there was more I needed—exercise-type sweating was only a first step. Much more was needed in the hyper-complex world in which we live to rid the system of an everywhere negativity.

The *inipi ceremony*, sweat lodge, offered the deep cleansing I needed. The benefits astounded me, and I wanted to share the experience with

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Judith. Such an occasion presented itself during the sweltering days of a Houston August, circa 1980.

The only place we could find to conduct the ceremony on short notice was a vacant five-acre lot north of Houston, near a subdivision; not the most auspicious place for a sublime experience.

In the hot afternoon, we built the lodge with traditional willows cut from a near-by drainage ditch. We covered the thatched roof with blankets and draped black plastic over the top, a grudging nod to the petroleum industry. Bear Heart didn't like to use the plastic, but it was all we had. Tarps and hides of the type he usually used were not available.

We entered the lodge about sunset with sweat already dripping off our bodies from Gulf Coast humidity. About an hour and a half later, we emerged from sitting on the rich dirt, from looking into rocks heated to a red glow, from smelling the pungent fragrance of a variety of herbs, from hearing deeply moving utterances of a dozen pilgrims, and from the smoking of a sacred pipe.

We crawled out of the lodge on our hands and knees feet first to symbolize a breech birth. Bear Heart told us that children and pilgrims born through breech birth had powerful medicine.

Upon emerging from the hot lodge, I couldn't believe how fresh and cool the air felt. Even sweltering Houston felt cool after this ceremony! Toweling off, my skin breathed in a way that opened the micro-tubules of my cells to reach out and mingle with the energetic pulsations of life all around.

I lay down on the cool ground, with my belly button connected with the rich soil of Mother Earth. With each deep breath, toxic waste poured into the ground. It would be returned to me recycled, said Bear Heart, after it was purified.

I loved this cycle because it underlined a sustainable use of energy whereby the negative had its place and then was returned in positive form.

After a brief ceremonial meal of fruit, Judith and I opened the doors of our 1979 VW pop-up van. Before I turned on the engine, we sat in a most profound moment of intimacy.

“What just happened?” Judith asked with a voice indicating we had been through an experience unlike anything she had ever known.

Over three and a half decades would pass as we purified ourselves in this fashion once or twice per month. Such a cleansing practice was challenging and a lot of trouble. I kept searching for a purification process that would take its place. I found many helpful ones, but none that penetrated to the depth of my cellular structure and the domain of sub-atomic particles like the sweat lodge did.

But what of people who do not have a sweat lodge ceremony available to them?

Recently, I received an email from an enrolled member of an indigenous tribe in a nearby state. She was in desperate need of a cleansing ceremony, but, to her surprise, her tribe did not have a regular sweat lodge ceremony in the entire state.

Her tribe taught that she needed this purification each month; yet, there didn't seem to be a regular practice available. If need be, she wrote, she would drive ten hours to enter the sweat ceremony with us. Her email set me to thinking about those persons who don't have a tribe that engages in this practice.

Allow me to break down some of the components of the ceremony which can be engaged for purification when the whole enchilada is not available. As I proceed, you will see how this ceremony touches aspects of ourselves not inherent in jacuzzis, commercial saunas, or other sweat inducing experiences.

We crawl on the ground and sit with our bare feet on the soil. There is considerable scientific evidence that such sitting allows the electro-magnetic field to pass through the soles of our feet in a process called “Earthing.” Earthing in and of itself can enhance our cleansing and pro-

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vide vigorous steps towards wholeness.⁴ I make it a point to walk bare-footed on the exposed ground nearly everyday.

In sweat lodge ceremonies, we stand in a circle with the fire heating up the rocks. A simple ceremonial linking with friends around an outdoor fire will release much that needs to pass through us.

We chant, drum, and sound the conch outside in richly nourishing eco-fields. As such we join with all aspects of the environment as relatives. The trees reach down and draw pollutants from our bodily systems and even assist our breathing.

We breathe in to the count of 13 and out through the mouth to the count of 8, starting with a concentration on the head, then to the heart, then to the solar plexus, and then to the genitals.

We dance together in five rhythms to the sound of drums and other music. We engage in body drumming, acupuncture, acupressure, myofascial release, and other body therapies.⁵



Our civilization has produced cleansing practices that are distortions of the purification process. Bulimia (compulsive vomiting) and anorexia (compulsive fasting) are examples, especially with young people, of an intuitive urge to cleanse ourselves.

By the same token, chronic constipation is common in the mainstream and speaks not only to diet but to a blocked civilization. All of these adjustments in life deserve our awareness and compassion. They are largely memetic symptoms of a culture gone awry.

The wisdom of the sweat lodge ceremony offers a profound corrective. No wonder such ceremonies are present in many cultures under different names: Mexican *temezcals*, Scandinavian dry heat saunas, Afghanistan rock heat, Irish/Celtic sweats, and so on. There are many different forms of sweat lodges available in different locations.

A word of caution. It is very important for sweat lodge facilitators to be properly trained. As we proceed, we will see how a long-lasting spiritual community called The Earthtribe grew out of Bear Heart's and my work.

Through the decades, a particular form of healing has evolved, and those forms will be addressed as we proceed. Sweat lodge guides in the Earthtribe receive eight years of training as part of a rigorous commitment to respecting the power of this process. Before engaging in a sweat lodge practice, it is a good idea to inquire as to the lineage and training of the leaders.



What is the purpose of this cleansing?

For our personal benefits solely?

Or for a much larger endeavor?

The windows of our perception are cleansed so we can see clearer. See what? See beyond ourselves to all creation. This intimacy is at the heart of who we are as natural humans, and we cannot rest until we have those connections.

It is the aim of our Earth walk. Releasing the contractions of muscles, emotions, and mind tangles lies at the heart of purification with an eye toward more intimate and aware connections with our surroundings.

The purpose of such cleansing that leads to relinquishing is the co-creation of a regenerative and sustainable civilization. As we delve into the creation of compassion and nature-based communities, we turn to a partner of purification and fasting: vision questing.

I was about to discover domains of perspective, power, and vulnerability just beyond my experience, or even my imagination.