

THE KILLING OF DEMONS

Healing with a Tibetan Phurba Ritual Dagger

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About nine years ago, I became afflicted by a degenerative eye condition in my right eye which quite rapidly diminished the sight in that eye, causing my vision to be distorted as if I was looking through the thick glass of the bottom of a beer bottle. I was referred to a local Welsh hospital and then subsequently to Bristol Eye Hospital in England, where I came under the care of a professor renowned for his expertise in the field.

In an attempt to save my

eyesight I was prescribed the powerful drugs given to transplant patients, as the hospital diagnosed my problem as an inflammation at the back of my eye caused by my immune system, which in effect was rejecting my eyes; just as a new heart or other organ is rejected by the transplant patient.

The drugs turned off my immune system in an attempt to turn off the inflammation and so save my eyesight. They also gave me considerably unpleasant side effects including weight gain, joint stiffness and pain, nausea and occasional periods where I effectively lost my sight for days on end.

I of course worked with this problem shamanically, asking and receiving healing from my human shamanic teachers and friends, a Tibetan Buddhist lama friend and others across the planet, and was extremely grateful for this, their help and support. I also journeyed on the problem on a regular basis and received healings and instructions of things to do for it from my spirits.

Eventually the condition stabilised, and the professor asked me if I was doing anything else 'alternative' for it as he noticed I was getting better the less drugs they were prescribing. I

explained about all the shamanic things being done for it and he told me to keep it up as something seemed to be happening.

I suffered some residual damage in my one eye which has greatly impaired the vision in it, but the inflammation eventually went and I came off all the drugs.

However about two years later the condition returned, and the sight in my left eye, which had been unaffected until this time began to deteriorate.

Again I was referred to the local hospital and again to Bristol Eye Hospital to the care of the same professor, and the same round of drugs and side

effects started again as they battled to save the sight in my good eye.

I knew that if I suffered the same degree of sight loss in my good eye that I had in my bad eye, I would be unable to work on the computer, paint, read a book, or do beadwork; all of which were dear to me, so I was potentially facing a major readjustment of my life - one I did not wish to have to face.

JOURNEY ON THE PROBLEM

Every time I had done a shamanic journey to the spirit worlds to talk to my helpers about the cause of the problem - a journey I had done many times during flare-ups of the inflammation - the journey had been vague. This seemed almost a metaphor of my eyesight which has areas of the image missing and other parts blurred.

I never got clear answers, I swam in a sea of fog and would often fall asleep, returning during the journey, none the wiser.

I did other journeys with different intents, and these journeys were often very helpful. I was introduced to the spirits of my medications and given ways to honour and work with them to reduce the side effects, I met healer spirits who did physical healing on me, and the spirit of a rattlesnake bit me to prepare my body to withstand the small, but possibly life-threatening risk associated with the injection of a toxic chemical dye used to reveal

Top: gilt iron phurba, reputedly owned by Padmasambhava, brought out of Tibet by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Left: statue of Padmasambhava at Samye Ling Monastery, Eskdalemuir, Dumfrireshire, Scotland

problems in the blood vessels at the back of my eye, a dye which turned my vision, my skin and my urine a glowing orange-yellow.

But I still had no real idea as to why it was all happening, and without that I felt I could not really grasp the problem and fight it effectively.

MEETING THE INFLAMMATION

Eventually I did another journey to ask about it. I told my spirits I didn't really know why it was happening to me on a physical level and asked them to teach me about it.

They showed me my eyes swollen and inflamed and said that was the problem. Then I asked what on a physical level was causing it. They told me it was like an allergy, making the soft spongy material at the back of my eyes swell up.

I asked what could be done about it and they told me I should journey to the spirit of the inflammation, but it would be a very difficult and potentially dangerous journey.

My spirits explained to me that a journey to the spirit of the inflammation would disorientate me a great deal, and that before I did it I needed to ask my partner, Faith, to do a journey to ask how she could protect me on my journey.

Then they gave me some extra energy to help me cope with it and to get my intent together for the work I had to do. They also gave me healing and put ice and other cool things on the back of my eye to reduce the swelling, but explained they were only treating the symptoms and I needed to tackle the cause by visiting the spirit of the inflammation.

Up until then I had never thought to journey to meet this spirit, and so I was both keen and apprehensive about doing it, to see what would happen. I told my journey to Faith and she went off to do her own journey about how she had to help me. Her spirits told her she had to sit as a point of stability for me, holding a rattle which all the spirits on her journey had blessed. This rattle would be an anchor for me if I lost my focus on my journey, I could connect to it and it would restore my focus and intent.

MEETING THE INFLAMMATION

Later that day, while Faith sat watching over me, I began my shamanic journey to meet the spirit of the inflammation.

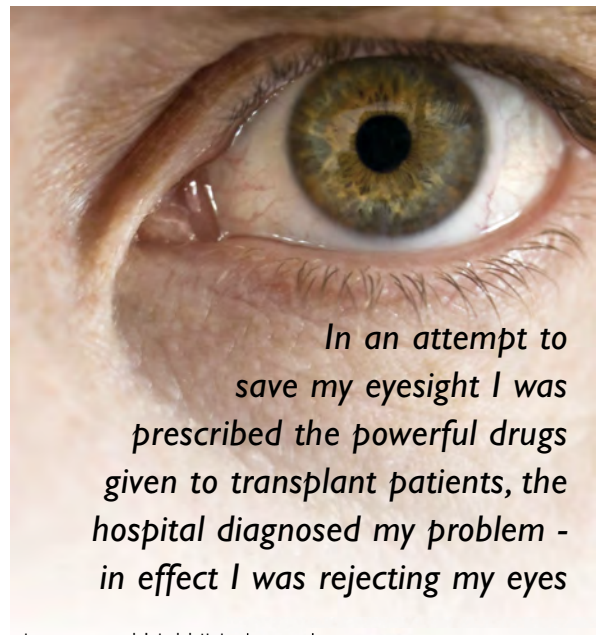
In the Lower World, my spirits took off all my clothes and rubbed me all over with grease and covered me in a fur robe. I understood this was to hide my real identity from the spirit of the inflammation.

Then we went to meet the spirit. When we arrived, I didn't have a sense of what was there – there was nothing solid, no floor, no up or down, and I found it very hard to stay focused, so I thought of Faith holding the space with her rattle and when I did it helped.

I asked my helper spirits what to do, as I felt vague and couldn't focus, it was like being in a yellow fog or cloud; the spirit had no shape, no solid identity, but I realised it was all around me, that I was in the spirit, that the fog was the spirit.

Then I gradually realised I needed to talk directly to the spirit of the inflammation, so I asked it what it wanted from me and it said 'a place to live'. Its voice was very loud and it echoed all the time as it spoke, it was actually physically painful to hear it speak, and I felt I had to defend myself from its sound.

I asked if it was trying to teach me anything but it seemed mystified by the question. Then I realised it was simply not in the right place and wanted me as a place to live, and that made me angry, as I felt it shouldn't be inside me. As I got angry I felt my willful intent get



In an attempt to save my eyesight I was prescribed the powerful drugs given to transplant patients, the hospital diagnosed my problem - in effect I was rejecting my eyes

stronger and I told it to leave. I really felt my will engage and push it out. When I did that my helper spirits joined in and we all chanted 'out-out-out' to it, banishing it. Then the spirits of my drugs came as well and we all joined together to really force it out. This continued for several minutes, all of us pushing out the invader.

My helper spirits then took the furs from me and told me I had to focus my will on driving the spirit of the inflammation out permanently, using whatever methods I could find to generate a strong intent to not be invaded. I returned from the journey, thanked Faith for her help and thanked all the spirits and gave an offering of vodka to them.

PHURBA INSTRUCTION

Some months before this healing journey for my eyes, my spirits had instructed me on how to perform a healing ceremony with a *phurba* for myself or others. A *phurba* is a ritual dagger made of metal or wood, which comes from the Himalayas, and is used in both Nepalese and Tibetan shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism. I felt strongly this was what I needed to do now to reinforce the healing we had just accomplished.

In this previous journey my spirits had not only taught me the ceremony, but given me a 'shopping list' of various items of ritual



Left: iron phurba from Nepal C19th



Left: a Nepalese shaman performing a dance with two wooden phurba



Above:
modern
cast
brass
phurba

Right:
bronze
phurba
from
Eastern
Tibet.
C15th

Below:
Tibetan
thangka
showing the
'spirit' of
the phurba

equipment I had to gather before I could perform it. In the months after the journey I had collected these items, and so was ready to perform this healing ceremony.

Preparing for the phurba ceremony that my spirits gave me was quite involved, but each part is important so I will relate it all.

Firstly I had to get two small iron or steel triangular frames, which needed to be joined together on one side by a simple hinge, to enable them to open like the wings of a butterfly. My spirits called this a 'demon trap'. I made two suitable triangles from iron wire, and wrapped a thin sheet of copper around one length of them to make the hinge. Once I had this I could perform the ceremony.

Next I had to lay out an altar cloth, and place upon it a bowl for vodka offerings to the spirits, a lit candle, a bronze incense pot I have, some juniper for smudge, the demon trap, a pair of tongs, seven pieces of paper, my phurba, a small double sided drum called a *damaru*, a ritual sword, a *tolu* (metal shaman's mirror) with a glass of water placed upon it, a Tibetan bell and dorje set, and my shamanic frame drum. Once all

this was arranged I was to perform the ceremony they had given me.

PERFORMING THE CEREMONY

My spirits told me to prepare for the ceremony by singing songs, with my drum to my spirit helpers, as this would help to put me into an altered state of consciousness

I lit the juniper in the bronze pot, offered vodka to the spirits, had a small mouthful myself to drink with them, and flicked a little to each corner of the room, the ceiling and the floor.

I then placed the first of the seven blank pieces of paper in between the two iron triangles like the filling of a sandwich, and began to build my intent to turn the paper into the spirit of the inflammation.

With each out-breath, I breathed out the spirit of the inflammation, forcing it with my visualisation between the two triangles which I knew would trap it, and on each in-breath I breathed in white light to fill the space the spirit of the inflammation had left.

This continued for some time until I perceived that the paper had turned from a sheet of white paper into the pink inflamed disgusting spirit of the inflammation.

During all this time of building the intent I held the phurba, and when my intent was ripe, I stabbed the spirit of the inflammation with the dagger to kill it, stabbing into the centre of the triangular demon trap, into the paper that had now become the 'demon'.

When I had killed the 'demon' I used the tongs to pick up the paper corpse (so I did not touch it with my fingers), and put it into the bronze incense pot where I placed burning juniper over it and cremated it, offering a few drops of vodka to the flames as it burnt.

Then I picked up the small *damaru* drum and used it to break the intent of all I had done (a bell would have worked just as well

here) and then repeated the whole process again with the second of the seven pieces of paper.

I did this for all seven pieces, each time finding that the intent I was building increased and the vision of the paper as the spirit of the illness became more intense and real.

At the point of stabbing the spirit of the inflammation for the seventh time, I picked up my sword, and as I struck the dagger into the demon I swung the sword down in front of my face to cut any fibres of energy which connected me, my eyes, and the trapped spirit in the demon trap, and then finally burned its body.

Next I drank the glass of water which had been sitting on the shaman's mirror on the altar during the ceremony and let its empowered, blessed quality go to my eyes to empower them and clean any toxins away from them.

The ceremony took about two hours to do, and as it was long past midnight when I had finished, I covered the ashes of the cremated demon in the bronze pot with a red brocade cloth, on top of which I placed my Tibetan dorje to seal them in, and went to bed.

In the morning I took the ashes outside and scattered them on an earth altar in my garden together with more offerings to the spirits.

My vision seemed better the next day, but I felt that was subjective, and so took it that what I had done was just a part of the healing process and I would need to keep working on it.

Three days later I went to Bristol Eye Hospital where the specialist took photos of the back of my eyes and upon looking at them was quite visibly shocked.

She exclaimed that it was truly amazing as all signs of the inflammation had completely vanished. She repeated this several times, adding she had not expected to see any real difference from the last time she had examined me, but that the inflammation had completely and utterly gone. Her sense of awe and amazement was palpable.

The doctor reduced my medication there and then and asked me to return in six weeks time for a further check-up.



GURU RINPOCHE TEACHINGS

I knew that the phurba ceremony I had been given by my spirits had some similarities to traditional Tibetan ceremonies, but it was some months later, while reading a book with information about phurbas that I found the English translation of a *tantra* (teaching) about phurbas given by Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) when he came to Tibet in the C8th.

In the *tantra* Padmasambhava teaches about trapping demons in a triangle and using a phurba to 'liberate' them from this life (i.e. kill them) so that they do not collect further bad karma by their causing of suffering to other beings.

If this liberation is done from a place of compassion, it is seen as sometimes quite acceptable in some teachings of Tibetan Buddhism.

The killing of the spirits of illness or other harmful 'demons' not only liberates them from the negative existence in which they are currently living, but also can be seen as a speedy and efficient way of sending them through a doorway to their rightful place (and their next incarnation too).

But the teachings stress it is important to do this liberating from a position of compassion for the unhappy demon.

The book goes on to give further details about the use of the phurba ceremony as a way local shaman-lamas perform healing ceremonies for sick members of

their communities based on the teachings of Padmasambhava.

KEEPING FOCUS

Intent is the key to any ceremony, and also knowing the way into the kernel of the problem. I could not have done the phurba ceremony effectively and built the right intent for it, if I had not made contact with the spirit of the inflammation through the help of my spirit helpers. It was only their instruction to talk to the spirit of the inflammation and Faith's help to keep me grounded, that enabled me to actually see and so face the problem and gave me the target to engage my intent.

Some years on from this healing, my eyes remain stable with no inflammation, and I have checkups only every year or so at the local hospital.

I was on a minimal 'maintenance' amount of medication for some time, but about a year ago I gradually phased that out. On my last hospital check up, my surgeon was concerned I was no longer taking any medication, and surprised that he could see no sign of infection in my eyes. He told me that as I had already withdrawn medication for such a long time before I had seen him with no ill effects, I may as well continue to live drug free. I was advised to seek medical attention immediately if I notice any deterioration in my

vision - which of course I will. I am sure that the healing process with my eyes is not completely over, and I do not take it for granted at all - even writing this article has made me worry if I am 'tempting fate.'

I need to ask my spirits how I can repair the residual damage that my eyes have suffered, so as to improve my sight, and I have already journeyed to find out how the spirit of the inflammation was able to invade me in the first place, and done things to stop it returning again. This is all - like any healing - an on-going process.

The phurba ceremony which my helper spirits gave me, and which I have subsequently read and learnt more about, has become a part of my shamanic 'kit bag,' being used to 'liberate' the spirits of illness that live within other people.

I have already performed it several times for other people, either with them present, or as a form of distant healing. I hope that from my account of it here, it will be possible for others to adapt and make it their own to put into their healing kitbags also.

My sense of gratitude and awe at the sophistication and down-to-earth nature of the teachings and instructions I receive from my helper spirits continues to amaze and delight me, as I deepen my relationship with them as the years go by.



Above: the top of an antique Hayagriva, horse-headed phurba

Below: an altar laid out ready for a phurba ceremony, with butterlamp, bronze incense pot, bell and dorje, iron triangle, bronze arrow-shaped fire tools, silver tongs, phurba and wooden triangle shaped stand, damaru drum made from two human skulls and a C17th ritual sword

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