

Soul Retrieval: Bringing Lost Soul Essence “Home”

By Gretchen Crilly McKay

When “David”(name changed) contacted me he was depressed, suicidal, & dependent upon whatever chemicals he could get his hands on to escape. He had read about soul retrieval and shamanic healing and was anxious to see if this practice could help him. In short, he was desperate to feel whole again.

“David” is a single father in his forties with full custody of his two children. Ultimately the only thing that had kept him here was that he didn’t want to put his two teenagers through the trauma of having a suicidal parent, and he believed he couldn’t trust his ex-wife to raise them.

During childhood, “David” had experienced significant trauma. Through the years he had tried traditional psychotherapy, studied various religions and philosophies, and worked on forgiveness but no matter what he tried to do to move past his shame, he continued to feel as though there was a dark cloud hovering over him. After talking with David for a while and doing some shamanic divination work, I could see that he had experienced significant “soul loss.” My job was to bring this lost soul essence back to David to restore well-being and wholeness.

After the soul retrieval, “David” shared his experience. He had felt “raw” for the first 3 weeks. It was a profound time of reflection and incorporation of the restored soul essence. It wasn’t a magic fix to all his problems but it helped him to see them as mere speed bumps, challenges that could be overcome. “David” began to feel whole, able to detach from daily problems that presented themselves and see resolutions that he had been unable to see before the soul retrieval.

From the shamanic perspective it is believed that part of the human soul is free to leave the body to protect itself from potentially damaging situations. When a person experiences an extremely traumatic event or time period, he or she may be left feeling disconnected or depressed. Soul loss can also be generational -- soul loss begets soul loss.

Shamanism is the primal ground from which all spiritual traditions have emerged. It is the ancient religion of our ancestors, who took nature as their spiritual teacher. It is a system of healing based on spiritual practices that originated in tribal cultures, at least 40,000 years ago.

A shaman is a man or woman who enters an altered state of consciousness, at will, to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality. The shaman is a healer who acquires knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual power from personal helping spirits whom the shaman encounters on journeys into other realities -- a "walker between worlds."

Traditional cultures attribute soul loss to the soul being frightened away, straying, or being stolen, and see soul retrieval as essential, like an operation for the soul. In Western society we see it as a result of trauma: incest, abuse, surgery, life-threatening illness, loss of a loved one, divorce, accident, miscarriage, abortion, stress of combat, or addiction (shock).

Another way to lose soul essence is voluntary, to give it to a loved one. It is often done unintentionally to gain personal power. Sometimes a person takes a piece of a loved one's essence so they can feel connected. A mother may give some of her life force to her child because she wishes to protect him or her. This type of soul exchange may seem acceptable because of a person's desire to share themselves with another but it is not a good idea. We cannot use another person's soul essence so this "unusable energy" becomes a problem. It disempowers both parties.

Sometimes another person has "stolen" soul essence from a person they are angry with or admire. Other times a person voluntarily gives up part of their life force, like when a loved one dies, the survivor lets a bit of his or her soul essence die with them. The average person is unconscious of this soul dynamic but when you take someone's soul essence you take some of that person's power.

According to Sandra Ingerman, author of *Soul Retrieval: Mending the Fragmented Self*, there are three major causes of illness: loss of soul essence, loss of power, and spiritual intrusions. During soul retrieval, the shamanic practitioner journeys to non-ordinary

reality (NOR) to retrieve lost soul essence and bring it back to restore wholeness. No trauma is reintroduced; only healed essence is brought “home.” Soul retrieval is beneficial for anyone who wants to deepen their connection to self, loved ones, and to the Earth.

Signs of soul loss may include:

- Difficulty staying “present” in your body
- Feeling numb, apathetic, or deadened
- Problems with your immune system and resisting illness
- Chronicle illness as a child
- Memory gaps after age five; sense of blocking out trauma
- Addictions
- Looking to external fulfillment to fill up an internal void
- Difficulty moving on with your life after a divorce or the death of a loved one,

In indigenous cultures, life is communal and interdependence is essential to the health of every member of the tribe. Disintegration of community into individualization and separation has contributed to soul loss. Traditional cultures assist the shaman by participating in rituals and ceremonies surrounding the soul loss and retrieval process. The whole community welcomes the soul home. In Western culture, a client to whom soul essence has been returned needs a support system for the integration and the welcoming home of the soul.

The tools for soul retrieval are drum, rattle, crystals (“stone of light” to hold soul essence), blanket, medicine bag, soul catchers. The guardians and helping spirits that assist in soul retrieval are power animals, teachers and helping spirits. The job of the power animal is to keep its charge healthy and out of danger.

Tracking lost soul essence in NOR requires a trained shamanic practitioner. It is serious work and should not be entered into lightly. The shaman may have to coax lost soul essence into returning, depending on the state of the soul. The client should be ready and willing for change because once the soul part is restored there will be a time of “remembering.” Trust and intention are the keys to healing.

Not all physical problems are solved instantly or easily. Shamanic practitioners stress that the roots of a physical problem may be healed spiritually during soul retrieval. The cause of a physical problem may have been removed but the outward symptoms of the problem may still need to be addressed medically. However, soul retrieval is a powerful method for the recovery of spiritual wholeness. With renewed wholeness come empowerment, joy, insight, and the ability to truly be present in our lives!