



Ankita Healing

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How to Take a Shower – A Shaman's Guide

Option one: You're running late. Thoughts of the day ahead crowd after each other. You make a list of the things you mustn't forget to do. Scrubbing your body quickly, you feel a bit groggy, but notice it lifting a bit with the smell of the shower gel. Do you have time to wash your hair? Damn! Stepping out, you pick up the towel, and rub yourself dry.

Time: 3 minutes.

Option two: You pause a moment before stepping under the water, taking a second to notice, sensing how your body feels, aware you are at a threshold. Standing under the shower, you feel the flows of water running down your body, and your body experiences pleasure at the sensation, spontaneously stretching. Savouring that, you experience gratitude for all the things which make this possible – all your hard work and skills that allow you to pay the bills; the energy from the sun that heats the water. You sense how this chain of causality extends out to all of the universe. You turn your body around, inviting the water to clear any areas where you feel dense energy has accumulated in your energy field. As you scrub your body, it feels a little like panes of subtle darkness breaking away and washing down the drain. You open your heart and thank the water, feeling its connection to all the planetary water – the rivers, lakes, the great oceans. You offer your dense energy as an offering, and give thanks for this strange, miraculous fluid that clears and sustains you. You feel a deep web of connection and love. Stepping out, you pick up the towel, and rub yourself dry.

Time: 3 minutes.

The first description may feel familiar, but the second description might sound like an awful lot of work. Particularly if you've had mindfulness training, with its emphasis on bare noticing of sensations, this way of being could even seem contrived and fanciful, even a bit smug. That may be the case. However, I encourage you to approach this experimentally. I'm going to pull out some core principles from the shower experience, which you can play with in your life, and watch the results. Some are probably already familiar to you, but hopefully this article will make them more conscious and accessible.

One aim for this piece of writing is to provide you with some tools you can use to clear and protect your own energy field and any space in which you might be working. I'll certainly cover some of that, but to do that, I think it's most helpful to explore some of the deeper principles. That way, when you

come back on your own, you stand a chance of working out how to cook a meal with the ingredients you have to hand, rather than just following the same recipe over and over again.

From my own experience and training, some of the key elements of what I'm describing in Shower Option 2, such as the sense of the water being connected to the planetary water cycle, are something which people living in the developed world have to work at imagining and sensing. However, for people still living indigenously, I understand this as an integral, innate part of the experience of "water". The same mindfulness practice for someone living in a more interconnected way naturally includes all the elements I describe. I suggest our "developed" world leads us to experience "reality" in a way that is denuded and desacralized. Many of our problems as people stem from this core sense of separation and alienation.

I think people on spiritual paths and healing paths, often have an instinctive sense of this deeper way of being, and yearn to more fully live a life that experiences itself as interwoven, breathing nose to nose, holding heart to heart, speaking directly in an old language, with creation.

So, who am I to talk to you? People in the developed world like qualifications and CVs. It helps with discernment and trust. I have a degree in PPE from Oxford University. I'm also an initiated Curandera in the Amazonian shamanic tradition, and an initiated 4th level Paqo in the Andean tradition. I've been blessed as well to have had direct initiations and transmissions. That all sounds great! And I feel a little shy – really I'm just me, ordinary me, still learning. But really, you can just see if my words have a good taste. The shamanic path is one of coming to know yourself, as you really, truly, deeply are, and in that process, coming to know for yourself what works, what is right for you. So I encourage you to walk that path wholeheartedly, and take what you like to eat from this meal. No need to be polite.

Back to the shower!

Intention

Intention is vital in any shamanic work. You can think of this partly in a management consultancy sort of way. Having a clear goal brings clarity to what you're undertaking. It stems also from a deeper understanding that mind or energy is the source of the material world, and the material world is responsive to strong and clear intentions. There is a quality of mind, perhaps akin to single-pointed concentration in meditation practice, that can be brought to bear on any undertaking. For example, some shamanic clearing techniques, such as smudging with sage, are now well known. However, just wafting some sage smoke around yourself, while probably helpful to some degree, is limited in its impact. Holding a clear, sustained intention that by doing this action you mean to clear your energy field, is much more powerful, and will have better results than perfectly but mindlessly executing a learnt process. You can apply this to any aspect of your life. Taking supplements, for example; most of us take a few supplements to keep us going. You can shake them from their container and swallow them down in your rush to get out of the door in the morning, or you can take the briefest of moments, and connect with your intention for taking them. Expanding this slightly, you can give thanks for the earth, the plants, maybe even the fish or krill that have given their lives, tell them what you want from them, tell your body it is about to be given very concentrated nutrition which you want it to be able to recognise and assimilate ... And then you can rush out the door! There's no randomised control trials to prove this works, but you have nothing to lose, except maybe a few seconds, in experimenting. In terms of clearing and protecting, holding this intention with conviction and clarity, is the first step.

Noticing and enquiring

I'm sure as psychotherapists, the practice of noticing is ingrained in your practice. Working with clients, and in your own process, attentiveness to arising images, sensations, memories, emotions is vital to following the unfolding and discerning what is needed freshly now in the moment. Shamanic work is perhaps an extension of this, particularly into the energetic realms. You can systematically cultivate your awareness by asking yourself different questions.

"How does my energy feel?" Following this, try scanning within and around the body. Notice any areas that seem heavy or dark, or where there might be gaps or even intrusions. An intrusion is an "object"; it's common for shamans to find knives, darts, daggers and the like, lodged in people's energy bodies. Some are self-inflicted; self-criticism is seen as the most powerful form of sorcery. Some are the crystallised forms of energy directed by another. Nasty knives from family are pretty common, lodged in people's backs. I somehow don't think this will be overly surprising to you as therapists, even if the way of perceiving this dynamic seems more exotic.

If you find something in or around your body, you can go on to ask, "Is this mine?" We manage to generate heavy energy mostly by ourselves, but some we acquire from others, or from our surroundings.

You can do the same with space. If you're working on a room, you can ask yourself on entering, "How does the energy feel in this room?"

You may initially feel like you draw a blank, but your larger self will know quite clearly. You can access this knowing with further questions. You can direct these questions to your unconscious, to your larger self, to your spirit guides, to your angels, whatever feels comfortable to you; the main thing is to tap into a larger awareness. You can ask, for example, "Can you give me an image for what the energy is like in this room?" You might need to work out which sensory channels are most accessible to you. You can ask for sounds, a word, a movement, even a smell. If it's a bad smell, you know something is off!

Building consciousness of your own energy field, and of the spaces you are in, is one of the most useful components in maintaining healthy energetic boundaries, and holding an inviting, safe space for others. Hold the intention to build this awareness and make a habit of checking in with yourself and your surroundings.

Protecting from what?

The traditions I've trained in mostly don't make moral judgements about "energy". There is light energy, associated with feelings like happiness, bliss, joy, and heavy energy, associated with anger, sadness, bitterness, fear and so on. As with emotions, all states have their place, and all emotions need to be experienced. Emotions which are suppressed, in particular, or which are held in a fixated state, can, however, cause energetic problems. This energy can be passed between people, particularly if someone has a weak energy field, and there are gaps waiting to be filled. Shamans see all the dynamics of human interaction as having an energetic component. Clarity on your own field helps with the process of feeling – is this mine or not – and on standing clear in your own power.

Sometimes, where there is hatred or envy, for example, people can unconsciously, or sometimes consciously, direct destructive intentions at others. This can have powerful effects on the recipient. In the process of working with such emotions, it's of course necessary to fully feel the intensity of these emotions, sometimes over the course of weeks or months. The parts of us carrying these emotions hold much of the blueprint for our innate, instinctual self, with its knowing of what was needed and what we deserved, and must be honoured and welcomed. I've found that it's possible to

do this, while holding the knowledge that these are my emotions, and with the intention not to direct them out at others.

As well as condensed, stuck energies, shamans also discern people as sometimes having attachments or entities of various kinds. Having been the host on more than one occasion for visiting entities, these beings now have an unquestionable reality for me. I'm also aware for Westerners the topic can seem implausible, even dangerous. Some traditions do indeed have what I see as unhelpful or dangerous practices around things like supposed demonic possession. However, again, I encourage an open-mindedness. Experiences like drug addiction or alcohol abuse, or even sustained depression, or physical assault, can leave people open to acquiring fellow-travellers. These are seen mostly as the spirits of people who have been unable to transition, and who are wandering, but can have darker aspects to them as well. Attachments of this kind can sap energy, and distort behaviour. If something "jumps" you can often feel an impact in your body, and might notice you feel unusually drained, or experiencing emotions, or even cravings, that are not typically yours.

It's normal, once you entertain the possibility of such exchanges, for a degree of paranoia to commence. Don't let the discomfort of that take you over, and don't freak out! This is why a sustained practice of noticing how your energy body feels is so helpful. Slight changes can then be perceived, and you can discern clearly for yourself what is happening.

Clearing and protecting

There are many techniques and practices you can learn about from books and online for clearing and protecting yourself. But say you've been out shopping, and checking yourself when you're back home, found something in your energy field that feels yucky, like a sticky web. What can you do?

The essence of clearing is to move heavy energy from its location in your energy field or space, allowing greater natural flow, and inviting in light energy to occupy the space.

A familiar and traditional ritual involves smudging. The smoke from smouldering white sage is drawn through a person's energy field, perhaps using a feather, with the intention to clear any debris, darkness or detritus. As you work, the feather occasionally flicks what it has collected towards an open window.

You could do this, or you could ask, "What do I need to do to clear this?", and see what answer you get.

Elements

All of the elements have different cleansing actions, and it can be useful to think about how you might draw on them. A flame from a candle can be passed around your body if you feel there is something you want to transmute rapidly. Sprinkling yourself with water can be a deeply cleansing and sacred ritual.

Finding tools in nature

Back in the day, before ebay and etsy, shamans had to find all their tools either in nature, or in the subtle realms themselves. Breathing in a smell from a flower, or slowly drawing a flower, or fresh leaves over your body, can be a beautiful way to cleanse yourself. Herbs like rosemary are seen as particularly cleansing.

Don't be so serious!

Cleansing doesn't always need to take a "ritual" form. Sound is exceedingly powerful, and identifying what music you need to listen to can shift energies rapidly. Laughter is also a great cleanser. Watching ten minutes of comedy, which really makes you laugh, is a potent antidote to anything you feel is energetically oppressive.

And get moving ...

Dance, movement, running, tai chi, yoga, anything which activates the body and the breath will assist clearing and support a strong energy field.

Any of the tools I've suggested above can be applied to spaces as well. Something as simple as ringing a small bell is often enough to harmonise a space, or lighting a candle

Protection

I've been trained in two traditions, one which sees protection as vital, particularly if you are working regularly with others' energy fields. The other tradition has the reverse approach, and has ways of taking in and consuming the dense energy. Tonglen might be the meditational equivalent of the latter. You might find rich psychotherapeutic resonances in these two approaches! The consuming approach is rather more advanced I think. It requires a certain fearlessness, and a robust energy body.

There's a danger as well, in talking about protection, that it can invite fearfulness. There are ways of seeing it like basic self-care, like putting on a coat when going out in winter, which render it routine. And again, cultivating a sense of your own energy field helps the awareness that, as with all boundaries, some clarity is helpful. Again, you can ask and sense what is right for you.

Something simple like having the intention of placing a gold sphere around your body gives a greater clarity to the edge of where you want to place a boundary between you and the world.

If you strongly feel that more is needed, you can ask your greater knowing, do research, perhaps consult a professional.

Support

In shamanic work, there is a strong belief that support is always available. You may not know who from, you can always call on guides or higher beings for help. If you strongly feel that you have picked up some kind of unwanted attachment, sitting quietly and asking for support in helping it move on to the best place for it, is almost always sufficient to bring about a transition.

Gratitude

Finally, gratitude is powerful. All shamanic work has gratitude at its heart; this flows naturally from the deeply embodied consciousness that experiences directly how our life is grown by the gods of this dimension, the sun, the earth, the cosmos itself. I invite you to extend your awareness in the daily mundane acts of your life, and in any rituals of clearing or protection, and feel the miracle of the life that has been given you, and express gratitude.

I give thanks to all my teachers, whose work and gifts are beyond reckoning or recounting.

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