

Shamanism, Ancestors and Transgenerational Integration

Traditional Wisdom and Contemporary Practices

By

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With

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The Ancients already knew the therapeutic potential of the family links between generations that we rediscover in modern transgenerational analysis. Far from being a new fashion, the recognition of transgenerational processes dates back to the first shamanic type of communities. Their methods to cure "The Ancestor Syndrome" offer to contemporary therapies essential historical references and valuable teachings.

Transgenerational integration brings a welcome middle ground for exchanges between traditional, shamanic and actual therapeutic approaches. This new field nourishes the rooting of contemporary practices as well as the renewal of ancestral wisdom. With the contribution of specialists from different backgrounds, this collective book presents a wide spectrum of perspectives to bridge traditional and modern knowledges.

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Thierry Gaillard, February 2016

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Introduction

By Thierry Gaillard

Elders and traditional cultures emphasized active relationships between generations and with their ancestors. These exchanges connected the community with its roots and sources – both symbolic and mythological. When in harmony, these links would assure a balance for the collective as a whole as well as for each of its individual members. When these links were lost, shamans would be called upon to restore them and to heal the symptoms occasioned by this loss.

The healing potential and the importance of these links between generations and their ancestors have been rediscovered in numerous approaches in contemporary therapy: depth psychology, transgenerational psychoanalysis, family therapy, psychogenealogy, epigenetics, etc. Today we distinguish the conscious transmissions between generations, named "intergenerational", from the unconscious transmissions, named "transgenerational", which call for healing or therapy, that is to say "transgenerational integration".

As explained by the authors of this collection, the Ancients managed these links between generations and their ancestors in a variety of ways.

Ancestor cult, for example, kept the memory and transparency of family histories alive to prevent the consequences of

unconscious legacies that could affect (or alienate) descendants. Martin Duffy explains: "In shamanic traditions it is important that the person is not just understood as an individual, they are connected to a network in their society as well as connected to their family lineage. Ancestral healing is very important in shamanism. And they are discovering this through science as well, in the field of epigenetics, where we can see that we inherit our physical characteristics, but we also can inherit much more. We can inherit memories of trauma, and generations later this can be manifesting in our current lives. One of the journeys we do in shamanism is to journey back and meet our ancestors to discover the power of our lineage. We often think of the defects we may have inherited, but it is really important to travel back to discover the power that we have from our ancestors too. In all shamanic cultures, working with the ancestors is vitally important because we are the ancestors of future generations to come¹."

Ancestor cult pre-dates religions. It was widespread in Asia, Africa, and Europe, and was part of a desire for global harmony. When this harmony is not respected, the imbalance can be harmful to humans and to the rest of creation. Thus African totemism in spiritual tradition was not only concerned with men, but also with other creatures, including animals and plants.

No wonder that the ancestral customs have deified their ancestors, or have promoted some to the rank of intercessors with the gods, giving them some special functions: enhancing

¹ Martin Duffy (2015), "Ancient Wisdom, Modern Medicine", *Network Irland Magazin*, issue 93, Robinstown.

biological regeneration by their intervention in births and in actions to enhance soil fertility; ensuring the moral and social order; protecting their descendants whose peace, health, and well-being they assure and whom they warn by omen or oracle.

These traditional societies were aware of their origins and the life stories of their ancestors much more than we are today. Their collective memory particularly allowed recognizing the liabilities inherited from ancestors to avoid repeating the same mistakes, and to experience healing from them. The great writers constantly remind us of the importance of transgenerational, as Gustave Flaubert, "Many things would be brought to light if we knew our genealogy." When you start to clarify your family tree, its unsolved conflicts and the missing transmission from previous generations, you are already taking an active part to the process of integration. Without being aware of our transgenerational inheritance, profitable and/or distressing, our entire connection to our origins, to being and to life may be diminished.

Anyone could find and get in touch with their roots through their ancestors, showing many ways they care about them (anniversary ceremonies for example). The ancient wisdom says it is important to cultivate our rootedness and treat it when necessary - in the same way as we would care for a tree. Deepening these ties to ancestors is a way to reconnect with the healthy parts of our roots, to our mythological and spiritual origins.

In transgenerational integration work, what counts is to be pro-active vis-à-vis our roots, to integrate them instead of passively undergoing our transgenerational inheritance. In order not to be possessed by this unconscious inheritance, Goethe

said, "what you have inherited from your forefathers, acquire it to possess it." Giving life to one's ancestors within us becomes then a practice for oneself, a practice which, particularly in shamanism, extends to animals, plants, minerals, always with the aim to live in harmony with all creation. And finally, it is this love relationship in the world, including the ancestors, the heavens and the earth, animals, plants and all the life that animates the world, which is our relation to the "source". This is a kind of guarantor of a happy and prosperous life that all traditions have always taken to heart to protect.

As we will see in later chapters, these ideas are reflected in many ways in the ancient wisdom, in some rituals and especially in the first shamanic societies. They are also present in ancient sacred texts, including the Bible, Job (8.8) "Ask those of past generations, attend to the experience of their fathers. For we are of yesterday and we know nothing."

Gustav Glotz² explains that before the cult of individuality that we know today, the person (or the subject) was considered in relation to his family and not as individual. One blood was transmitted from generation to generation, forming a single being. In this perspective, a person who acted against the gods or against the laws of life, exposes his family and his descendants to pay the moral and spiritual debt that he or she had contracted, even if he or she does not personally suffer the consequences,

2 Gustav Glotz, (1931), *Histoires grecques*, PUF, Genève.

The "cult" of individualization and repression (instead of psychological integration) that characterizes modern societies here shows its weaknesses. Too many secrets, non-integrated traumas, events and unfinished stories, are replayed between generations and disrupt the bonds of filiation. Due to an accumulation of alienating transgenerational inheritance, our society has lost the thread of the stories that bind generations together. Compared to the life of the ancients, it seems we have lost the feel for a living, spiritual parentage, rooting the sensation of being the architect of the creative updating of our heritage.

The recognition of transgenerational unconscious legacies comes right on time to apply not only therapeutic needs, but also to important cultural issues we are confronted with nowadays (increased infertility, disruption of natural forces, endemic epidemia, questions about parenting, Alzheimer's disease, etc.)

The articles in this collection share this perspective of re-appropriating, or updating, the old knowledge about transgenerational phenomena for the mutual enrichment of cultures, traditional and modern.

Pierre Ramaut will develop the relationship between the transgenerational psychoanalysis and shamanism, particularly around the issue of healing ghosts. "As transgenerational psychoanalysis, shamanism considers 'Ancestors disease' and their ghosts. These are dead 'not completely gone', who departed with an encrypted secret, in tragic circumstances, and still have a score to settle, or those who have not accepted the loss, or those whose body we never found, making it impossible for a mourning process to take place."

In an illuminating reading that combines anthropology, psychoanalysis and shamanism, Olivier Douville will return in his article to the question of ancestors and initiations.

Inspired by the ancestral methods, Elisabeth Horowitz will present ten therapeutic rituals to heal one's family tree. And to stay in the field of therapeutic applications, Myron Eshowsky addresses the issue of collective healing rituals for transgenerational trauma. As he explains: "The unhealed ancestral past stories exist in the spiritual space and are considered as factors causing disease and conflicts within the community. We pay past debts. If we have not cleared the slate, an invisible loyalty prompts us to repeat a moment of joy or unbearable sadness, injustice or a tragic death."

For her part, Iona Miller invites us through the doors and thresholds that separate us from the world of our ancestors. She will develop this theme, as well on the psychic, spiritual and material level, recalling the function of some monuments from the shaman and druidic culture, sculptures of aperture (vulvas) in the world of Mother Earth, the Sheela-Na-Ghi, for both initiation and protection.

In my article I will return to the source of the conflict that opposes the traditional culture and the modern since more than two millennia. To cope with the profound changes generated by the birth of our modern civilization (in Athens in the 5th century BC), Sophocles had to rewrite the old myth of Oedipus. He leaves us a model of healing the conflict between tradition and modernity that restores harmony between worlds. A model that gives pride to the integration of transgenerational inheritance as he said through the initiation of Oedipus to self-knowledge, knowledge of the gods and of the universe.

Finally, this collective book ends with an interview of C. Michael Smith on themes such as transmission, adaptation of ancient traditions to today's reality's world and to the way of the heart, honoring the earth, heaven and all the living.