

## Shamanic vision of mental illness: what a shaman sees in a psychiatric hospital

*This text is an excerpt of [an article published in 'Uplift'](#), since we have chosen to share on the LEO Network, only the instructive part without dwelling on the disinformation concerning the necessity of doing certain rituals. However old and effective they may be, rituals belong and serve the world of the service to self...*

In shamanic view, mental illness signals “the birth of a healer,” explains Malidoma Patrice Somé. Thus, mental disorders are spiritual critical situations, spiritual crises, and need to be regarded as such to help the healer to be born.

What the West sees as a mental illness, the Dagara people regard as “good news from the other world.” The person going through the crisis was chosen as the medium to bring a message to the community, which needs to be communicated from the spiritual world. Dr. Somé comments: “Mental disorders, behavioral disorder of all kinds, point to the fact that two incompatible energies have merged in the same field.” These disturbances occur when the person does not get assistance in dealing with the presence of an energy from the spirit realm.

One of the first things Dr. Somé encountered when he first came to the United States in 1980 for his graduate study, was how the country was dealing with mental illness. When a student he knew was sent to a psychiatric hospital for ‘nervous depression,’ Dr. Somé went to visit him.

“I was so shocked. It was the first time I was brought face to face with what is being done here to people who have the same symptoms I'd seen in my village.” What struck Dr. Somé was that such symptoms were perceived from the angle of pathology, with the idea that the disorder must be stopped. This was in complete opposition to the way his culture views such a situation. As he looked at the patients in the stark room, some in straitjackets, some “zoned out” on drugs, others screaming, he thought: “So this is how we treat the emerging healers in this culture. What a loss! What a pity that a person finally aligned with a power from the other world is just wasted.”

To put it another way, perhaps in a more understandable way for the Western mentality, it is that we in the West, are not trained to deal with psychic phenomena, the spiritual world, nor does anyone teach us to recognize its existence. In fact, psychic abilities are denigrated. When the energies of the spiritual world emerge in the Western psyche, the individual is completely unequipped to integrate them or even understand what is happening. The result can be terrifying. Without an adequate environment, and assistance to cope with the breakthrough of another level of reality, ultimately the person becomes insane. High doses of anti-psychotic drugs compound the problem and prevent the integration that could lead to soul development and growth of the individual who has received these energies.

In the psychiatric ward, Dr. Somé saw a lot of ‘beings’ hanging around patients, ‘entities’ that most people do not see but that shamans and psychics can see. “They were causing the crisis in these people,” he says. It appeared to him that these beings were trying to extract the medications and their effects from the bodies of the people the beings were trying to merge with, and in doing so, were increasing the patients’ pain. “The beings were acting almost like some kind of excavator in the energy field of people. They were doing it very hard. The people were screaming and yelling,” he said. He couldn’t stay in this place and had to leave.

In the Dagara tradition, the community helps the person to reconcile the energies of both worlds—“the world of the spirit that he or she is merged with, and the village and community.” This person is able to serve as a bridge between worlds and helps the living by providing them with the

information and care they need. Thus, the spiritual crisis ends with the birth of a new healer. “The relationship between the other world and ours is one of sponsorship,” Dr. Somé explains. “Most often, the knowledge and gifts that arise from this kind of fusion are a knowledge and gifts that are provided directly from the other world.”

The beings who were increasing the pain of the inmates in the psychiatric hospital were actually attempting to merge with the inmates in order to get messages out into this world. The people they wanted to merge with were getting no assistance in learning how to create a bridge between the worlds and the beings’ attempts to merge were thwarted. This resulted in the sustaining of the initial energy disorder and abortion of the birth of a healer.

“Western culture consistently ignores the birth of healer,” states Dr. Somé. “Consequently, the other world will tend to contact more and more people to try to grab attention. It is harder for them.” The spiritual beings are attracted to people whose senses have not been anesthetized. “Sensitivity is very often an invitation” he notes.

Those who develop so-called mental disorders are those who are sensitive, which Western culture defines as oversensitivity. Indigenous cultures don’t see it that way and, as a result, sensitive people don’t think they are overly sensitive. In the West, “it is the overload of the culture they’re in that destroys them,” observes Dr. Somé. The frenetic pace, bombardment of the senses, and violent energy that characterize Western culture can overwhelm sensitive people.  
[...]

#### Alex: Crazy in the United-States, Healer in Africa:

To test his belief that the shamanic view of mental illness holds true in the Western world as well as in Indigenous cultures, Dr. Somé brought a patient with him to Africa, to his village. He says: “I wanted to know, out of curiosity, whether it is truly universal that mental illness is connected with an alignment with a spirit from another world.”

Alex was an 18-year-old American who went through a psychotic crisis when he was 14. He had hallucinations, was suicidal, and was going through dangerous cycles of severe depression. He was in a mental hospital and had been given a lot of drugs, but none of it helped him. “The parents had tried everything—unsuccessfully,” says Dr. Somé. “They didn’t know what else to do.”

With their permission, Dr. Somé brought their son to Africa. “After eight months here, Alex was practically normal,” Dr. Somé reports. “He was even able to participate in the care given by healers; by staying with them all day long and helping them, assisting them in what they were doing with their patients... He spent about four years in my village.” Alex stayed by choice, not to be treated any longer. He felt, “much safer in the village than in America.”[...]

All of this experience eventually led Alex to a university, where he studies psychology. He returned to the United States four years later because “he realized that he had done everything he needed to do, and that he could move forward in his life.”

The last that Dr. Somé heard, Alex is at Harvard in psychology. No one would have thought that he could have completed his undergraduate studies, much less get a graduate degree.

Dr. Somé summarized what Alex’s mental illness said: “He was asking for help. It was an emergency call. His job and destiny was to be a healer. He said no one paid attention to that.” [...]

(Source: This is an excerpt from Stephanie Marohn's book *The Natural Medicine Guide to Schizophrenia*, (also featuring Malidoma Patrice Somé), page 178-179, or in "The Natural Medicine Guide to Bi-polar Disorder")