

Chapter 3  
The Reluctant Shaman  
Finding Integration of Mind, Body, and Spirit  
By Joseph E. Doherty, MSW, PhD

We all know the old saying "You can't wait for an opportunity to just come knocking on your door, you have to go out and seek it." Well, I have always prided myself on being an exception to the rules and my spiritual transformation was no different. In October of 2004 Linda Star Wolf did indeed come knocking on the door of my yoga studio! And reluctantly I let her in. I had no clue what mischief Spirit had afoot for me. The offer was "We want to rent your space for a Shamanic Breathwork weekend, we can pay you for the rental or you can come to the workshop in exchange." Being a dedicated yogi and teacher I thought, *breathwork, yoga, sounds like a good fit, I'll just go*. I had no idea what I was getting myself into that October 17 years ago!

Down the rabbit hole I went. Spirit had long been telling me, "Stop digging in your heels," and my response was always, "I'm not." Only to then dig them in firmer and deeper. Now Divine timing was set in place, and I was primed to make the shift. The teacher arrived because the student was ready, albeit still slightly reluctant. What amazed me was the ease of my first magical journey. On the cusp of turning 50, my very first Shamanic Breathwork began the unfolding of my Mind/Body/Spirit integration experience.

**MIND:** I started my career in mental health at age 22 after witnessing the murder of my 18 year old brother. After my testifying in two murder trials, I decided to put my double major of Psychology/Sociology to work. I found a job in a psychiatric hospital in the hopes of trying to understand the human mind and make 'sense' of my brother's murder. It was the top psychiatric facility in the country, Harvard's teaching hospital. This set my 40 year mental health career in motion.

**BODY:** I've studied yoga since my early 20s. I started studying both yoga and buddhism as a way of rebelling against my Irish Catholic upbringing. So after moving from Boston to the 'Left Coast' I did find a great yoga studio to attend and a wonderful teacher for instruction. Several years into my yoga classes with her, my teacher approached me and said, "I'd like to invite you to attend our teacher training. I think you are a natural yoga teacher." I had

lectured at all college levels, but never in my life did I even think of teaching in my body. Reluctantly I accepted, not knowing how integral teaching yoga would become in my mind/body/spirit healing path.

**SPIRIT:** My early spiritual path was a heavily indoctrinated Catholic one. Then in late adolescence it took the form of studying Buddhism. But eastern spirituality was always a 'left-brained' philosophical practice for me. I continued eschewing anything that even smacked lightly of religion. Post MSW degree, I regularly attended conferences on psychotherapy and spirituality but always left feeling dissatisfied. I successfully eluded Spirit for most of my adult life.

The spiritual path was lagging far behind me, barely visible and only in the rearview mirror. Then, five years after teaching yoga and opening my own studio my reluctance was split-open by Shamanic Breathwork. By the conclusion of that first weekend, my spiritual path became clear. I definitely wanted to study further with Linda Star Wolf. And okay, I'll reluctantly study with this guy, Brad (her late husband and co-teacher). I did not know I was even looking for a sacred masculine archetype, mine had long ago been defiled and shattered by an alcoholic and abusive father. Yet now, it manifested itself fully, completely, gently, and with unconditional love in the person of Brad Collins. I was accepted into the 13 moons Shamanic Healing and Initiatory Process (SHIP). My reluctance was melting.

Divine timing being everything, things were already shifting. I was to begin SHIP that December here on the west coast. But to my disheartenment, having cancelled my birthday India trip, the training was suddenly rescheduled to February of the following year. And also now it would be held in North Carolina. *Hell no*, was my first response, being my reluctant self. My mind was reeling, I knew I should not have signed up, this is not what I agreed to do! But Star Wolf worked her Blue Star magic. I was offered to teach yoga during my stay at Isis Cove to help defray the unexpected costs of flying cross country for the six initiations. This was clearly my sacred-but-reluctant initiation to the melding of mind/body/spirit.

I clearly remember that my heightened anxiety in waiting for the first circle on opening night was physically palpable. *Who are all these strange people and why am I here? I need to leave NOW.* That was my immediate reaction. And then the magic happened. As soon as I wandered into the sanctuary I received the affirmation loud and clear: "This is where you were meant to do

this work!" It felt like coming home. As we went around the circle first night with introductions and intentions I was honestly shocked with how much I shared in common with each member of this ragtag group. It did help that two members were also therapists which put my thinking mind at ease. We were affectionately, and not so affectionately at times, known as The Shadow Dancers, and *that* we most certainly were! For the next 13 months there was a whole lotta shadow going on. The bonds formed in the vulnerability of deep spiritual work as a cohesive cohort were not only healing but life-changing. I did indeed find a Spirit family, guided by two amazing spiritual teachers in Star Wolf and Brad.

And so the transformation began, the Family of Origin Initiation was first to be experienced. Cleaning out the childhood family wounds was hard work. And again divine timing came into play. My mother, who had been on hospice at the start of this experience, passed away two months later. Beautifully dove-tailing on my newfound shamanic ritual experiences from this first initiation at Venus Rising, I was called to create a shamanic ritual for my mother's soul release. I called the funeral home and arranged a time to arrive before my family. I asked the funeral director if it was okay to burn sage around her in the open casket, he replied "I don't even know what that means, but sure." He watched intently as I drummed, rattled, called in the directions, and with an obsidian blade cut away the cords connected to her body that held her to this life form. This was not a left-brained experience for me. It was created in my heart through a connection to Spirit that I had never felt before. The mind/body/spirit connection was now manifesting through me. And it just kept building through the subsequent five initiations.

At the end of the SHIP in March of 1996, I was asked by Star Wolf if I desired to join her Wolf Clan lineage. This lineage was handed down through her Grandmother, Twyla Nitch, of the Lakota Tribe. I very enthusiastically replied, "Hell Yes!" And I was baptized as JaguarWolf, my shamanic essence. The guy formerly known as "The Reluctant Shamanic Healer " was reluctant no more. I felt SO secure on this newly awakened spiritual path, more than I ever had before.

**INTEGRATION:** Working in the mind and then the body had served me fine (I thought) up until then. Now, with the newly added ingredient of Spirit the lock sprang open! It revealed so many blessings, not only for me, but to those I worked with as clients, patients, students, family, and friends. The proverbial cup literally overflowed with unimagined blessings for all.

My yoga teaching shifted significantly to incorporate a much more spiritual component. I had been teaching Men's Tantric Naked yoga for years. Now Shamanic Breathwork had unlocked for me what others call the Full Kundalini Awakening! I was now fully connected to my seven chakra energy centers. The breath, the choreographed music, the container held by and through co-journeying, along with the healings offered by Star Wolf and Brad facilitated my unfolding. I incorporated this into my teaching and my yoga students felt the difference. The responses I got were, "This isn't like any other yoga class I've attended, it is *so* much more."

My psychotherapy practice deepened as well. I was now talking to patients about spiritual transformation, chakras, Shamanic Breathwork, and energy healing, something I had been trained to never do.

Living in Mexico during my shamanic initiations, I meditated and breathed daily on sacred Zapotec land. During one potent Shamanic Breathwork session, I took in the sacred breath of hot air; the condors circled in the updrafts of the blue sky; the ocean surrounded me on three sides; I listened to the power of its crashing waves; the earth supported me by the solid cool stone ancient altar; the fire raged wildly in my soul. Then and there it was revealed to me. The name "Elemental Healing" was birthed and gifted to me in that experience by Spirit. It then became the name and the focus of my new body/mind/spirit psychotherapy practice. [www.elementshealing.org](http://www.elementshealing.org)

Equally potent, as a newly ordained Shamanic Minister, I was invited to officiate at weddings, memorials, births and many life transitions. I would write each ceremony as directed by Spirit. Calling in the directions, honoring the ancestors, and engaging the elements—all which I experienced as an embodied soul in my breathworks. There honestly were times in these experiences I would stop and ask myself in amazement, "Who are you?" much like I had in the ceremony at my mother's casket. My response was always a clear affirmation that I was indeed more of 'me' than I ever had been.

I continued on my sacred path with Star Wolf and Brad. I began my apprenticeship as a Shamanic Breathwork facilitator which included amazing journeys to sacred sites in Mexico at Teotihuacan and in Peru at Machu Picchu. I was called to this work by an unseen force called 'Spirit' with whom I had been waiting for such a long, long time to meet. Never

knowing that Spirit had been right there beside me my whole life long.

The shamanic path of transformation was truly that. It allowed me to really 'see' on all levels and know the truths. I continued to transform. Now it was not only my receiving the experiences that was transforming, it was actively facilitating them for others that equally activated me on all levels. As Star Wolf so wisely shares "The healing is the learning and the learning is the healing." I was healing on so many levels from a very toxic and wounding childhood with two alcoholic parents and significant physical, emotional and sexual abuse. I was healing from the trauma of witnessing my younger brother being shot to death before my eyes. I was understanding I could transform all the pain by allowing the grief to be honored, felt, and released through my breathwork experiences. It happened in ways so much deeper and more wholly than all my years of verbal insight oriented psychotherapy. That had simply laid the foundation for change. I was indeed being transformed at a cellular level. My work was not only to find my inner shaman, but facilitate helping others discover their own "shaman within".

## MEDICINE

Start with your body. This is the foundation of the integration process. Sit in a chair, on a meditation cushion, or lying on the floor with towels or blankets thinly rolled under you. The Key in starting is alignment. Check the 3 natural curves of your spine. The lumbar curve in the lower back, the thoracic curve at your shoulder blades and the cervical curve behind your neck. Each should be relaxed but not hyper-curved. They should not be flat. You want them stacked upon each other in alignment. The chin should not be lifted or dropped, nor is it jutting forward. Think of a string attached to the crown of the head gently lifting your body into alignment. Make sure you will not be disturbed or interrupted. Phones off, pets in another room, people know you're 'off limits'.

Close your eyes and focus on your breath. It is a resting breath. A gentle rise and fall, no emphasis on the inhale or exhale. Just breathe as you begin to drop into your body. Quiet the mind.

Next scan your physical internal and energetic bodies. Am I holding tightly

anywhere bodily? If so, breathe into that space and ask it to soften. Once the body is relaxed, gently dive deeper, into the energy body. The 7 chakras running from your tailbone up your spine to your crown. First notice, can I feel my energetic body? Where do I feel it? Think of a string of xmas lights. Are all 7 bulbs glowing brightly? Are some dim, some too bright, some dark? Now think of a roll of colored lifesavers, they are whirling circles of energy. Imagine the color of each chakra wrapping around your body..

A. Start your scan:

1) Root Chakra. Located between your legs at the base of your tailbone, pubic bone, sitz bones. How does it feel? What do you notice somatically?

Issues: Stability/Balance/Survival manifesting Health/Home/Money

Color: Red

2) Sacral Chakra. Located below your navel. This includes your low back, your hips, your genitals. Notice the physical cues. Is my second chakra vibrating?

Issues: Connection to self and others/sexuality/creativity. Color:

Orange

3) Solar Plexus. Above your navel and below your ribcage, front back and sides. What do you feel?

Issues: Personal Power/Fear/Dread. Color: Yellow

4) Heart Chakra: Center of the ribcage and wrapping around the back. What feelings do you feel?

Issues: All Emotions      Color: Green

5) Throat Chakra: The whole throat. Is your throat open/closed/tight/loose ?

Issues: Speaking your truth, things said and unsaid stuck in your throat. Connects Heart and Mind.

Color: Turquoise

6) Third Eye: Forehead and the brain inside the whole skull.

Issues: Seeing and perceiving the truth, Intuition, Perceptions. Can you quiet your mind?

Color: Indigo Blue

7) Crown Chakra: Top of your head. Can you feel it open or closed?

Issues: Connection to all spiritual support that is available to us.

Color: Amethyst

### B. Engage the Mind.

What chakras speak to me? Which are flat? Which have sensations? Images? Emotions? Are they connected? Where is the disruption/blockage? What messages am I receiving?

### C. Spirit

When we open up each chakra and connect them in alignment the vibration is high.

Bring your awareness to your root chakra on the exhale. Pause the breath. Then inhale through the root and draw it slowly up the spinal column one chakra at a time. When you eventually reach the crown, pause and hold the breath for a few seconds. Then exhale back down the spine one chakra at a time all the way back to the root. Pause again. Repeat 2 more times. At the end of the 3rd 'Full Body Breath' return to resting breath and focus on the top of your head. Ask of Spirit "What messages do you have for me? What lessons am I meant to learn? What is in my highest good and well-being?" What do I need to leave behind? Have a notebook nearby, or a large piece of paper and some crayons/colored pencils/markers. Write down what you felt in your physical body, your energy body and your spirit body, or draw an image that represents your experience to you.

When we continue to practice the body/mind/spirit exercise we strengthen the 'muscle' of our integration experiences. When I work with clients in person I use chakra attuned crystals and bowls, drumming, rattling, gongs and tuning forks to assist in releasing blockages and attuning the whole

person experience. My inner shaman meets yours, and we walk the path together!

AHO! Mitakuye Oyasin!  
(May it Be so! We are All Related!)

BIO: Joe Doherty, MSW, PhD, LCSW is a licensed clinical psychotherapist with a private psychotherapy practice in Portland, Oregon. He holds a Master's degree in Clinical Social work from Smith College and a Doctorate from Venus Rising University. He is a Certified Shamanic Breathwork Facilitator and an Ordained Shamanic Minister through Venus Rising  
[www.shamanicbreathwork.org](http://www.shamanicbreathwork.org)

He has over 40 years experience in the Mental Health Field and specializes in working with C-PTSD as well as GLBTQI+ individuals.

He trained and has presented in the arena of Relational Mutuality at The JMBTI Institute of The Stone Center at Wellesley College focusing on gender socialization and the treatment of Gay and Lesbian couples.

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He is also an Iyengar Yoga Instructor specializing in Tantric Yoga for Men. His Body/Mind/Spirit approach is detailed on his website

[www.elementalhealing.org](http://www.elementalhealing.org) and on Facebook

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His Doctoral Dissertation: The Non-Dualism of Shamanic Psychotherapy is published in the book Shamanic Transformations: True Stories of the Moment of Awakening by Itzhak Beery (Editor) 2015.

He has also contributed to 3 books by Linda Star Wolf PhD Shamanic Breathwork; Visionary Shamanism; Soul Whispering.

He is also a Psychedelic Integration Therapist

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