

Healing the Healers

Richenel Ansano

Richenel Ansano is a healer from the island of Curacao in the Caribbean and much involved in the labor of “healing the healers.” He is a member of Global Medicine Education Foundation which *“came from the continuous painful assertion from doctors and medical students that they were “losing their souls” in medical school and in their professions. GMEF became a way to retrieve these souls.” Here the thread of empathy moves further through the four steps of the craft.*

My name is Muz—Richenel Ansano. I’ve been doing the kind of healing work which I like to do for about ten years now, although I’ve been doing a lot of related healing since the mid-seventies. Some ways I learned growing up in Curacao, being immersed in a lot of popular folk healing—herbs, prayers, massages and a lot of dream work. Really paying attention to dreams and what messages come -- especially from the recently deceased who might communicate to the family through dreams.

There are also beliefs that I thought were just from Curacao, like my mother’s belief that you don’t just leap into a chair when somebody gets up from it because you want to let that person’s energy dissipate first. She would say your energy and that person’s energy would be mixing in a way that could make you feel ill or maybe just

different from how you were feeling and you don't realize where this difference is coming from.

Growing up with a lot of that in a deeply multicultural community I moved to another deeply multicultural community when I went off to college in Puerto Rico. Just as I was going to college, I picked up the *Autobiography of a Yogi* and that became part of my daily practice. I was astounded at the matter-of-factness with which Yogananda was describing the most extraordinary things. It struck a cord because life was extraordinary for me too in many ways, but I never saw that kind of life written in books before. I started taking the Self-Realization Fellowship courses on meditation and yoga and that got me to pay attention to my body in a totally new way—especially with the energy exercises. They taught me to control my breath. In the incoming breath your attention goes to different parts of your body and I started to realize that the energy that my mother was talking about was not only “out there” but was also something that can be taken in through the breath and be controlled. I learned to work with the energies in the rays of the sun.

I started combining the teachings of Yogananda, what I grew up with in Curacao and what I was experiencing in Puerto Rico. Herbal healing, spiritual work based on Alan Kardec and African healing that was quite familiar to me in Curacao were somewhat enhanced in Puerto Rico -- a very similar culture. I think all of those things together became my new awareness of the specificity of the culture I grew up with and what I learned from my parents and the neighborhood. Later in college I learned that these things were actually universal. That dance of universality and specificity was key to what became my path. I went to college to study economics because I wanted to be

involved in community projects. The very last semester I took one class in anthropology and fell in love with it and started really getting deep into the relationship of what we call culture and identity. I decided to move from economics to anthropology in graduate school and it did become for a while what I very consciously called my spiritual path.

I called it my spiritual path because there was so much I was seeing about human beings and environment, as well as something that was quite ineffable and powerful behind all of that. One of the things I did learn through anthropology is the radical sense of being in this world.

If you live across cultures you realize that we have such a deep understanding of who we are within our culture and other people in other cultures have a radically different understanding. When we sit together and truly communicate instead of turning the other into something to confirm my own existence then there's this incredibly deep sharing that takes me beyond my limitation of my perceptions of who I am. It makes my own perceptions so much deeper that I can go back to that perception and see why it carried me and why I kept carrying it and how I was also able to evolve through it.

That became my path and still is in many ways. In communications we can shed that enormous and wonderful identity we cling to so much.

After doing the initial course of the Self Realization Fellowship I started doing therapeutic touch which I learned from Dolores Krieger's book, Therapeutic Touch. I combined that with a lot of what I learned growing up. Things I came to eventually call shamanic as I learned about the indigenous, traditional uses of similar techniques and processes all over the world. I'd communicate with dreams and retrieve people's lost selves. As a child all of these things were done in an unassuming way when I was

growing up, with much less ritual and ceremony than what I had seen in anthropology. Things that were just part of normal communication when I was growing up: no initiations, no rights of passage, just traditional wisdom masked as simple life learning. Part of the issue was the cultural destruction that took away some of the more structured ways of passing on this knowledge. But a great part of the disjuncture was also due to early anthropology's fascination with the exotic. Nowadays in anthropology more attention is paid to everyday life. There is a lot that we have learned to do as human beings that might originally have come from powerful ceremonial settings, but which have become common practice and deeply meaningful everyday interactions. I came to recognize them for what they were: simply traditional wisdom.

Where most of this has come together is in pooling all the things I have learned and putting them back in to the context of where I came from. All the anthropology and work on the self and the ego are all informing the spirituality and culture of Curacao and when I go back I'm able to work in a much deeper way with people there.

For most of my one on one work in Curacao I only sit and talk with the person and let them tell me any kind of story about why they came to see me. What I listen for is how, invariably, within the first five minutes they say what they think is wrong with them, what their internal resources and abilities are and why they are not using them. Then I'll say—"well, let's concentrate on the resources. Let's concentrate on your gifts, your blessings, your powers, and see what it is in terms of the story you create and the story that people around you create that make those resources seem inaccessible and not important and that which is seen as limitation seem more important.

And then we start working with what are called the limitations and we approach

them as teachers. If it's cancer the cancer is a teacher. What that has done for me personally as a healer is that it has taken me away from what to do, what to fix and what to make happen. It has put me in a place of just being present with a person. In one case it's realizing that there's tension in the body that can be dealt with through massage or energy work, or the person taking care of their eating. At other times we just sit and laugh together.

What I try to look at is what happens after the session. After the session the person leaves with a knowledge that "there is a something I can do for myself".

One of these healings happened after a workshop I did about how social identity can be approached in a way that is healing or destructive. I was approached by a woman who I grew up with in the same neighborhood. Her issue was that she had this persistent cough. When she said it was persistent I figured it had gone on for a week and she said, "No, I've had it since I was four," and she was in her fifties. I thought there's definitely something to work on there. She'd gone to doctors over the years and nothing they did helped.

I asked her what she wanted to happen. "I want it to disappear." I asked what is with her that she wanted to leave. I listened to her and felt that it was not just the cough that she wanted to let go of. So I did an energy scan and found that the energy in her left leg was not moving and I asked her about that and she said she didn't think anything was wrong with her leg and didn't think anything had happened recently. We were going nowhere regarding her leg and we just relaxed and were quiet when she said, "I realize I always have problems with my leg."

Her leg has been tensing up and being painful and she realized this has also been

happening over fifty years. She had gotten so accustomed to it that she doesn't even notice it anymore. I immediately felt that those two things were connected. There was no connection in her mind.

We talked some more. After going over the leg and going over the cough she suddenly had this flash of remembering that when she was four years old there was a hurricane that came through the neighborhood. The roof of the house lifted and the rain came in. Dad was at work and couldn't get home so her mom who had a newborn had her stay in a bedroom in the rain and was periodically checking on her. After awhile the mother realized she had a cough and also that she was hunched up in a corner trying to get away from the worst of the rain. Being in that position her leg got totally stiff so since that day she remained in that state of fear of the hurricane. She kept coughing and kept having pain in the leg.

What we ended up doing was some energy work that relieved the leg and the coughing stopped on its own. I told her to come back in a week to see how everything went and do whatever follow up we might do for both the leg and the coughing.

The leg was getting better but the cough apparently came back. We went over what was happening with the cough and the main thing was that the cough always started at 2AM. She realized that is when the hurricane had gone by.

We came up with this idea that she could set an alarm clock for 1:30AM and she could be awake and her body would know there's no hurricane so she could let it go.

Before I left the island I briefly talked to her and she said the cough was still there and it doesn't come at 2AM anymore and it's very light. She only had it once every week or every two weeks.

All that information was in the body and the body both helped a child express a fear that she wasn't able to express in any other way because it was this terror she endured. And at the same time, the body was not able to let go of it. The body itself was showing what was limiting it and what needed to be dealt with. And once we paid attention to the body there was nothing else to do, in a way, except just follow the lead and keep being attentive, responsive, present

At a more communal level and maybe in a setting that might have more impact on the health practices of more people, I was able to work with a group of amazing health care practitioners who put into practice these same kinds of principles. I was fortunate to work with The Global Medicine Education Foundation for a few years. The foundation put together training programs for medical students and interns and later for health care professionals. I was more involved in the professional training program. We had a team of about 30 teachers in all fields imaginable, from homeopathy, Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine to yoga, energy medicine, massage therapy and art therapy. The participants would learn these modalities and get continuing education credits. However, the truly transformative part of the program was getting these beautiful practitioners to feel their souls were coming back. The whole energy behind Global Medicine Education Foundation came from the continuous painful assertion from doctors and medical students that they were "losing their souls" in medical school and in their professions. GMEF became a way to retrieve these souls. A very shamanic concept that was approached from the perspective of valuing of the world's healing traditions, healing with the Earth as our guide and knowing that when a healer's soul has fled there is more harm

that gets done than there is healing. The healer is hurt, the healee is hurt, place is hurt, the relationships between humans, animals, plants, stones, life, everything are hurt. In Global Medicine retreats we would combine the hard-nosed CME conferring teaching of healing ways not taught in regular medical schools with intentional time to let the wisdom rise from the place where the retreat was held, from the hearts of the participants, from the intelligence of the group, from the life force of the plants and animals in our surroundings, from dreams, traditional wisdom, the elders and sages of Western Medicine and the small moments of epiphany and harmony in everyone's own practice. Although all of the participants were grateful for their medical training and for the parts of it that were life-sustaining they were also aware of how statistics, trials, illnesses seen as confined to individual bodies, the lack of space for the healer to express grief, doubts, fears or rage, and a persistent war mentality in important parts of the profession took a toll on the powerful passion with which they started medical school. What Global Medicine did was to create a space to reconnect. To reconnect with the passion for being of service to others as well as with their unwavering knowledge that they were more than statistical diagnosticians or engineers of medicine delivery systems. Some of this happened through sharing the hidden stories of how souls had been hurt, through listening to what night time dreams keep reminding us of, to engaging the creative aspects of the self, but also by comparing and enhancing spaces of beauty all of them found in their practices and in their personal lives. This is very important, because the soul does not get lost because there is no beauty in what we do, but rather because that persistent beauty gets actively pushed back by a complicated environment that repeatedly succumbs to metaphoric as well as manifest war rather than compassion. These spaces of

wisdom, beauty and passion are gardens of compassion that, if intentionally tended and cultivated, can withstand the loss of soul we can experience in any medicine that is not predicated on being a healing force for all that it touches.

I find myself moving between these two settings of the one-on-one work of transformation through listening to illness and the more communal teaching work of responding to soul loss. This combination has especially come into focus for me through working with Deena Metzger and Credo Mutwa, both of whom insistently combine these two ways of walking in the world: listening and responding, being in service of that which is calling us, from the headache to the ravages of war. But an important part of their teachings for me has also been that we can give energy to the suffering and forget to enjoy the beauty in this world. Even beyond that: I learned from them that we are always called to service and it does not matter what else we do, we respond. We respond with what we have and what we think we don't have. We just respond.

In this process I have learned to respond not primarily from the head, but from the intuitive heart. Trusting that whatever calls me in a situation comes from an important place. It may be ego, maybe delusion, maybe need, maybe the world calling. Wherever it comes from it is embedded in this world, right here, right now. And when I get confused I go back to one of the things I learned growing up: ceremony and prayer bring us back to our present selves. Trusting ceremony (something I learned to do even more so with you, Michael, the few times we did ceremony together) takes me away from doing the practical thing from the small mind. It creates a space of mystery and of true openness to what the here and now offers.