Book Reviews


Alberto Villoldo has been pursuing explorations of shamanism for decades, not just academically but also experientially. In *Heart of the Shaman* he shares windows of perceptions from his very rich experiences and understandings of shamanic worldviews and practices. His writing is clear and engaging, drawing us into dimensions in which we participate but of which most of us, within modern Western culture and worldviews, are but dimly aware.

Villoldo suggests that shamanic awarenesses are relevant to modern worldviews.

Each one of us is given a fragment of the sacred dream to hold and express in our own way. When we forget that we carry an essential and necessary part of the sacred dream, our lives begin to spiral into disarray, our personal dreams become nightmares, and our lives descend into chaos.

Many people have replaced the sacred dream with a dream of fame and fortune, power, and Facebook likes. Meanwhile we are facing global crises—from climate change to species extinction to war, famine, and disease—all of which are calling us to dream a new dream for ourselves and the world. (p. xii)

Villoldo invites us to seek and explore our sacred dreams, which can help us awaken from the nightmares we are living. There are various ways to do this. According to the Inkas, the sacred primordial light of ‘Ti’, can inspire and empower us to bring healing into our world. This is a key part of the shamanic journey to reconnect with our spiritual experience, rather than relying on beliefs about spiritual awarenesses.

In a state of non-ordinary awareness, the shaman enters the lower world, which is the time-past. Here, the ancestors can help you find where you came from, or help a patient recover a soul part that they lost as a result of trauma long ago in their past. (p. 16)

Similarly, shamans will enter the upper world, which is future-time. Here, the masters of tomorrow can help you discover who you are becoming, and help you perform a destiny-retrieval, to assist someone who is ill by finding a future healed state that can guide them toward health. (p. 17)
Through deepening our connection with our Ti we can connect with awarenesses of time past and time future. This can be helpful in various ways for promoting healings. For instance, our fears of death can be faced, experienced deeply, and released.

You can experience death as your ally after you wake up from the darkness of the nightmare of permanence. I invite you to examine whatever seems to be “killing you” in your life—your finances, your health, your relationships, your children, your parents, your job—and consider every one of these challenging circumstances an invitation to discover a demon that you can befriend. Let death help you claim the infinite generosity that is the nature of the Primordial Light. (p. 34)

Much of the wisdom of the Inka sages, who were called Laika, was dismissed by the Spanish conquistadores, who suppressed the native religion and promoted Catholicism as the exclusive local religion. Similarly, most of the Laika’s practices of visiting the future and the past in order to advise and bring healing to people were discouraged and dismissed as mere superstitions.

Villoldo does a good job of summarizing samples of this wisdom, which is being revived today. For instance, he observes that we may connect with the Primordial Light, a source of deep, inner wisdom, for healing our psychological and physical problems – for ourselves and for others.

In addressing life issues, shamans teach that spiritual and spirit aspects of our world are essential components of our lives. This broadens and deepens both our conscious experiences of life and broadens our spectrum of approaches in dealing with life. (More on this in the editorial in this issue of IJHC, dealing with end of life issues and grief.

This book is highly recommended. It offers an engaging read, and is well worth a leisurely, deliberately slow chew rather than just a light taste, as it shares many healing observations and methods that markedly expand current Western beliefs and practices.

Book review by Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM
IJHC Editor-in-Chief


Philippe Isler is a wise, caring person and astute psychotherapist. In this easy reading book he leads us through the gateway of mindfulness meditation into the world of wholistic awarenesses and healing. His focus is on helping us make the best possible decisions in all areas of our life, with the help of our inner wisdom, in five steps.

Starting with mindfulness meditation, focused on our breath, we connect with other sensations in our body, learning what our normal, quiet, resting baseline of awareness is. Then we expand our awarenesses to other inner sensations. Having established our normal inner awarenesses, we can then focus on questions or issues that we want to clarify in our lives, identifying inner awarenesses that gives us a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ to our questions.

Isler explains each step in clear detail, enabling us to learn and apply this process in order to access our inner wisdom for guidance in our lives.
In my experience as a wholistic psychotherapist, and as a teacher and supervisor for other therapists, I find that these approaches work wonderfully well and relatively quickly for sensitive people who are naturally in touch with their inner selves, and who find the identification of their inner awarenesses easy to access. Others, who come to these methods from a more left-brain, thinking orientation to the world may need to practice each step for a while in order to master these methods.

Regardless of the above, there are many studies on the benefits of mindfulness meditation on many aspects of wholistic health and healing. I find that the addition of practical uses for mindfulness, as in connecting with inner messages, can enhance motivation to meditate and the effectiveness of the meditation.

Also very helpful are Eisler’s observations and discussions on the processes, outcomes and consequences of decision making. This is extremely helpful information for anyone finding themselves challenged in making decisions.

This book is warmly recommended.

Supplementing the materials in this book, here are references on meditation research, confirming statistically significant modest results for stress, anxiety, wellbeing, pain and cancer.


Book review by Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM, IJHC Editor-in-Chief

Deborah D. Miller, PhD. (2014). The Dragon with Flames of Love: Helping Children with Serious Illness Improve the Quality of their Lives. Self published. 90 pp. $22.95

Deborah miller was invited to work with children with cancer in a hospital in 2007. Since then she has made this her full-time job. She teaches children, their families and hospital staff how to tap away symptoms and troublesome emotions, and how to tap in positive expectations, attitudes and expectations, using Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), an Energy Psychology (EP) method.

With EFT, you tap on a series of acupressure points on the head,
chest and hand, while focusing your mind on whatever issues you wish to address. This rapidly enables you to reduce negative symptoms.

Miller describes how tapping improves physical and psychological healing, enables children to manage their anxieties and other feelings, and install hope.

Tapping can help more than providing just symptomatic release. Ordinarily, children and their families feel helpless to deal with their own problems in the hospital, which engenders hopelessness and sometimes even despair. Children and family members come to know they have tools to manage their emotions. It gives them hope that their experiences of illness and hospitalization will be manageable.

Numerous hospital procedures and experiences create tensions and fears – including needles, spinal taps, surgery and post-surgical issues, negative feelings about doctors, meds and difficult treatments, side effects of medications and more. The experiences of children and their families with all of these can be markedly gentled.

Hospital staff are also trained in tapping, so they understand the benefits it offer their child patients along with family members. Staff report markedly enhanced interactions and compliance when tapping is used. The whole atmosphere can be transformed on units where tapping is done. Beyond symptom relief, Miller finds that tapping creates a cheerful attitude, which improves the immune system and enhances effects of treatments.

Parents feel empowered when they can tap with their children, and if their children are despondent or in a bad mood, parents can help them tap away their worries and fears.

Miller does an excellent job of providing detailed instructions, such as age specific languaging, along with suggestions for a spectrum of issues that can be addressed with common hospital procedures and specific approaches for varieties of problems commonly seen in children treated for cancers.

An aid in tapping is a teddy bear with buttons Excellent examples of children using EFT and their Tappy Bear for pain. Not only is this a comfortable soft companion, it also has small buttons sewn onto it to remind the children of the specific EFT point to tap on.

Kids also take pleasure and are proud to be able to teach other kids and their families how to tap.

Miller provides an excellent spectrum of case examples, with details about various phrases that were used to help children with a broad spectrum of problems. Wonderful, cheerful illustrations of children counterbalance pictures of children facing their hospital challenges.

This book is highly recommended for children of all ages who are facing daunting, anxiety-provoking, and often painful hospital experiences.

Book review by Daniel Benor, MD, ABIHM
IJHC Editor-in-Chief
Daniel J. Benor, MD, Editor-in-Chief, IJHC

Dr. Benor has edited the IJHC for 18 years. He is author of Seven Minutes to Pain Relief; of Healing Research, Volumes I-III and of many articles on wholistic healing. He offers Wholistic Healing with the method called TWR/ WHEE locally in Guelph, ON, Canada and worldwide via phone and Skype.

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