

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

THE SHAMAN'S STORIES

Axel Magnus



A Collection of Primal Tales
on Connection

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Between Two Worlds: The
Shaman's Stories

*A Collection of Primal Tales about compassion, wisdom,
patience...*

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Chapter 1: The Wounded Healer

“It is precisely the wounded healer who can become a source of life for others.” — Henri Nouwen, The Wounded Healer (1972)

The Story of Ayana

In the vast taiga of eastern Siberia, where the winter nights stretch longer than memory and the Aurora Borealis paints stories across the sky, there lived a young woman named **Ayana**. Her name meant “journey” in the ancient Tungus language, though at twenty-two, she felt her journey had come to a devastating end.

The fever had taken them all—first her youngest brother, then her parents, finally her grandmother who had been teaching her the old ways of plant medicine. Within the span of one terrible winter, Ayana found herself alone in a world that suddenly seemed empty of meaning. The traditional songs her grandmother had taught her felt hollow in her throat. The healing plants she had learned to gather mocked her with their uselessness. She had failed to save anyone who mattered.

For months, Ayana wandered the forest like a ghost, surviving

on what little food she could forage, speaking to no one. The other families in the scattered settlements had suffered their own losses—the fever had swept through their communities like a hungry spirit, leaving behind a landscape of grief. When people saw Ayana approaching, they would turn away, not from cruelty, but from their own overwhelming sorrow. Everyone carried wounds too deep for words.

It was during the **darkest part of winter** that Ayana's true journey began. She had taken shelter in a cave during a particularly fierce blizzard when she heard a sound that stopped her breath—the weak crying of a child. Following the sound deeper into the cave, she discovered a little girl, perhaps five years old, shivering and alone. The child's lips were blue from cold, her eyes glazed with fever.

"I don't know how to help you," Ayana whispered, her voice cracking from disuse. *"Everyone I tried to help died."*

But as she held the child against her chest, sharing her warmth, something shifted inside her. The girl's breathing began to steady. Her fever seemed to lessen. For the first time since her family's death, Ayana felt a flicker of purpose.

She began to sing—not the healing songs her grandmother had taught her, but a new song that seemed to arise from the depths of her grief. It was a song that acknowledged the darkness, that honored the pain, that said *yes, this is terrible, and we will survive it together*.

The little girl lived. More importantly, when they emerged from the cave three days later, Ayana discovered something profound: her own wounds had become a source of wisdom. She understood suffering in a way she never had before. She could sit with people in their darkest moments without trying to fix them or make their pain go away. She had learned the medicine

of **genuine presence**.

Word spread slowly through the scattered settlements. People began to seek out Ayana—not for miracle cures, but for her ability to be with them in their suffering. She had become something her grandmother had spoken of but she had never fully understood: a **wounded healer**, someone whose own broken places had become doorways for helping others.

“The wound is the place where the Light enters you,” she would tell those who came to her, unknowingly echoing the words of a Persian poet from centuries past and thousands of miles away. Her medicine bundle grew to include not just healing plants, but stones worn smooth by tears, feathers found during moments of breakthrough, and small objects that reminded her of the journey from darkness to service.

Cultural Context: The Shamanic Wounded Healer Tradition

Ayana’s story reflects a **universal pattern** found across shamanic traditions worldwide. Among the Tungus people of Siberia—from whom we get the word “shaman”—the journey to becoming a healer traditionally begins with what anthropologists call “shamanic sickness” or “initiatory illness.”

The **Tungus understanding** is that true healers must first be broken down before they can be built up again. This breaking often comes through physical illness, mental crisis, near-death experiences, or profound loss. The community recognizes these experiences not as signs of weakness, but as potential signs of calling. The person who emerges from such trials often possesses a deep understanding of suffering and an enhanced ability to help others navigate their own dark passages.

This pattern appears across cultures with remarkable consistency:

- **Native American traditions** speak of the “wounded healer” who must walk through their own darkness before they can guide others
- **Celtic mythology** tells of healers who gained their powers through surviving great trials
- **African traditional healing** often involves practitioners who have overcome significant challenges
- **Greek mythology** gives us Chiron, the centaur who could heal others but not his own wound

The **Siberian shamanic perspective** teaches that these wounds never fully heal—and they’re not supposed to. The healer’s ongoing relationship with their own vulnerability keeps them humble and authentic. They don’t heal from a place of superiority, but from **shared humanity**.

Research by anthropologist **Joan Halifax** in her work with traditional healers worldwide confirms this pattern: “The shaman’s power to heal comes not from being whole, but from having learned to work with brokenness in a sacred way.”

Modern Understanding: The Science of Post-Traumatic Growth

Contemporary psychology has discovered what shamanic cultures have long known: **trauma can be transformative**. This phenomenon, researched extensively by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, is called “post-traumatic growth” (PTG).

Their research, spanning over two decades and involving thousands of subjects, reveals that people who experience significant trauma often report:

- **Enhanced relationships** and deeper capacity for intimacy
- **Increased appreciation** for life and everyday experiences
- **Greater sense of personal strength** and resilience
- **Spiritual development** and expanded worldview
- **New possibilities** and life directions they might never have discovered

Neuroscientist **Dr. Rick Hanson** explains the biological basis: “Adversity can literally rewire the brain for greater resilience, empathy, and wisdom. The neural pathways that develop through working with suffering create enhanced capacity for compassion—both self-compassion and compassion for others.”

Studies using fMRI brain imaging show that people who have experienced and integrated trauma demonstrate **increased activity** in regions associated with empathy, emotional regulation, and perspective-taking. Dr. Tania Singer’s research at the Max Planck Institute reveals that “personal experience of suffering, when consciously processed, enhances our neural capacity to

resonate with others' pain and respond helpfully.”

The **“helper’s high” phenomenon**, documented by Allan Luks and later confirmed by neuroscientist Dr. Stephanie Brown, shows that helping others activates reward centers in the brain and releases endorphins, creating a positive feedback loop. Remarkably, this effect is most pronounced in people who help others facing challenges they themselves have overcome.

This aligns perfectly with shamanic wisdom: the wounded healer doesn’t just survive their trials—they transform them into **medicine for the community**.

Practice Section: Transforming Personal Wounds

The journey from wounded person to wounded healer requires conscious work. This practice, adapted from both traditional shamanic methods and modern therapeutic approaches, guides you through this transformation safely and effectively.

Exercise 1: Mapping Your Wound Landscape

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Materials: Journal, colored pencils or markers (optional)

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Preparation:

1. Create a safe, private space where you won't be interrupted
2. Have tissues and water nearby
3. Set an intention to approach this work with self-compassion
4. Take three deep breaths to center yourself

The Practice:

Step 1: Identify Your Significant Wounds (10 minutes)

- List major difficulties, traumas, or losses you've experienced
- Include physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual wounds
- Don't overthink--write whatever comes to mind
- It's okay if some wounds feel too big to address yet

Step 2: Choose One Wound to Explore (5 minutes)

- Select a wound that feels significant but manageable today
- It should be something you've had some time to process
- Avoid recent traumas that still feel overwhelming

Step 3: Explore the Wound's Gifts (15 minutes)

For your chosen wound, journal on these questions:

- What did this experience teach me about life?
- How did it change my perspective on what matters?
- What strengths did I develop by surviving this?
- How did it increase my empathy for others?
- What wisdom would I share with someone facing something similar?

Step 4: Identify Your Helper's Calling (10 minutes)

- Who do you feel naturally drawn to help?
- What type of suffering do you understand deeply?
- What would you want someone to have said/done for you during your difficult time?
- How might your experience become medicine for others?

Step 5: Integration (5 minutes)

- Write a brief "medicine story" about your wound (2-3 sentences)

- Example: "My divorce taught me that endings can be beginnings. The loneliness I felt helps me recognize when others are isolated. My wound became a doorway to understanding resilience."

Exercise 2: Developing Your Helper's Practice

Duration: Ongoing daily practice

Commitment: Start with 10 minutes daily for one week

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Week 1: Compassionate Presence Practice

Day 1-2: Practice with yourself

- Spend 10 minutes in self-compassion meditation
- When difficult emotions arise, say: "This is suffering. Suffering is part of human experience. May I be kind to myself in this moment."

Day 3-4: Practice with loved ones

- Listen to a friend or family member without trying to fix or advise
- Practice simply being present with their experience
- Notice your urge to "make it better"--breathe and stay present instead

Day 5-7: Practice with strangers or acquaintances

- Offer genuine presence to someone having a difficult day
- This might be a cashier, coworker, or neighbor
- Practice seeing their humanity behind any surface behavior

Daily Reflection Questions:

- How did my own experience of suffering help me understand others today?
- When was it hardest to stay present rather than trying to fix?
- What did I notice about the healing power of simply being witnessed?

Exercise 3: Creating Your Medicine Bundle

Duration: 2-3 hours over several days

Materials: Small cloth or bag, meaningful objects

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A medicine bundle is a traditional shamanic tool containing objects that represent your healing journey and power. Creating one helps you embody your identity as a wounded healer.

Gathering Phase:

- Find objects that represent your wound and healing journey
- These might include: stones, feathers, photos, jewelry, small artwork
- Choose items that feel significant, even if you can't explain why
- Include something that represents your wound/challenge
- Include something that represents your growth/wisdom
- Include something that represents your service to others

Assembly Ritual:

1. Create sacred space (light candle, play soft music, etc.)

2. Lay out all potential objects
3. Hold each one, feeling its significance
4. Choose 3-7 items that feel most important
5. Arrange them in your bundle/bag
6. Speak aloud what each represents
7. Close with gratitude for your journey

Using Your Bundle:

- Keep it in a special place in your home
- Hold it before difficult conversations or helping situations
- Add new items as your healing journey evolves
- Share its meaning with trusted friends or family

Integration: From Victim to Healer Consciousness

The transformation from wounded person to wounded healer represents one of humanity's most profound alchemical processes. It's the difference between being **defined** by your wounds and being **refined** by them. This shift doesn't happen automatically—it requires conscious choice, ongoing practice, and often community support.

Victim consciousness says: "This terrible thing happened to me, and I am broken because of it." There's nothing wrong with this stage—it's a natural and necessary response to trauma. But healing invites us eventually into a different relationship with our experience.

Healer consciousness says: "This terrible thing happened to me, and because of how I've worked with it, I can now help others." The wound doesn't disappear, but it becomes **medicine** rather than poison.

This transformation serves not just the individual, but the entire community. Dr. **Judith Herman**, trauma researcher and author of *Trauma and Recovery*, notes: “The survivor who has learned to bear witness to her own story can now bear witness to others. This is how trauma stops being merely destructive and becomes generative.”

As you continue this journey through the remaining chapters, you’ll discover that **all spiritual medicine begins with this foundation**: the willingness to transform our wounds into wisdom, our pain into compassion, our darkness into light that can guide others home.

Your wounds are not mistakes or signs of weakness. They are the raw material of your unique medicine. In the next chapter, we’ll explore how the rhythm of healing—like the heartbeat that carries us through our darkest nights—becomes a drum that can call others back to life.

Chapter Reflection Questions:

- How has a significant challenge in your life become a source of strength or wisdom?
- Who in your life exemplifies the wounded healer archetype? What can you learn from them?
- What type of suffering do you feel most qualified to help others navigate?
- How might your community benefit from your transformed wounds?