

Smudged into a sacred space

By Ruth Ostrow

BOBBY Runningfox enters the room looking every bit the Cherokee Indian he is. Tassels dangling from a suede jacket, head-dress and a bunch of feathers in his hand, he begins doing a smudge on the room - an ancient Indian ritual of clearing away bad energy.

Then he beckons me over to him, where he begins what he calls a "scanning" of my body to see what's wrong. It's a shamanic practice used by his forefathers who were medicine men and healers.

He runs his hands up and down my body, holding my hands in his, and even wraps his arms round me in a bear hug.

"It's the lungs. They are filled with sadness. I can feel grief which is causing shortness of breath. This in turn is causing bad digestion and blood circulation which is leading to other ailments."

He stares into my eyes. Confident. Unflinching. He is, to my surprise, correct. "What's causing all this grief?" he asks.

I explain the reason I have come to do this strange, mystical work. I've been going through the process of being with people who have cancer. One by one, several people around me have been succumbing to the illness.

I've tried to be of support, doing what I know best, helping them let off emotional steam, sending them off to alternative medicine people in search of ways to assist with healing at a deeper level. But in the process, I've found myself utterly depleted, depressed and without any resources to help me answer that universal question: Why?

Why is a young woman, so sweet, so kind, and so needed by her children, riddled with the corrosive stuff while others are left unscathed? Why is there no justice in the picking off of life's victims? Who will be next?

When dealing with the brutal reality of illness, it's easy to find oneself tossed mercilessly between two extremes - the desire to be there, hold a hand, help; and the desire to run away, be self-indulgent, rejoice life and the precious little time we all have left.

Over the past few weeks of bad news I've vacillated between the two states: losing nights in an orgy of drunken summer madness, losing days in tears and fears and the soul-searching that plague us all when we are faced with mortality.

And I'm exhausted. Aching. Without answers. I need to rejuvenate so I can help others rejuvenate. I need balance. I have heard about shamanic healer Bobby Runningfox from friends who know of his Rainbow Warrior process on the Gold Coast in Queensland, where he lives with his Australian wife.

Because shamanic healing is one of the hottest trends in alternative healing, I've decided to try it. In the US, thousands of people run off on Vision Quests each year, spending days and nights in the desert bonding with nature. A plethora of

shamanic books have hit the international New Age best-seller lists, while tribal drumming, medicine wheel studies and sweat lodge retreats have become what Zen was to the 70s.

Runningfox, director of the Institute for Native American Wisdom, who followed his wife to her home in Australia, decided to teach his brand of spirituality here, but is quick to point out that he will soon be adding Aboriginal and local shamans to his practice to educate Australians in how to use our own indigenous heritage for healing.

"Lie down. I'm going to call on your higher self to help clear you," he says, placing me on a table and waving his smudge stick. He also calls on the four directions and the four elements: earth, wind, fire, water, to assist.

A wonderful sound washes over me. He is playing flute and chanting ancient Cherokee words in honour of his Indian ancestors. I feel myself slipping into a quiet, sacred space.

"We all have the power to cure ourselves. It is possible to heal from cancer, from disease, but before one heals the body one has to heal the mind and the soul," he says, stroking my hair and lulling me into a deep state of relaxation. "We have to change the internal dialogue."

The words aren't new. Two weeks ago, I went to hear a lecture by world-renowned healer Brandon Bays who cured herself of a football-sized tumour inside her stomach.

She talked about how we do possess the power to heal ourselves on a deep cellular level. She quoted Deepak Chopra's famous master work Quantum Healing to explain how our cells and atoms regenerate every few weeks or months, and can be prevented from recreating cancer if we reprogram the cellular memory buried in each cell by letting go of anger and pain.

In alternative healing circles it's widely believed that we hold grief in the lungs, anger in the liver, and other emotional traumas in various organs. And that by using deep meditation and processes that foster self-love, forgiveness and a bond with God or one's soul, it is possible to release past wounds and heal the body. Runningfox, who has studied psychology, claims to have helped people through illness by making them repeat over and over positive, loving mantras that change the way the subconscious thinks about the self.

"I am taking you to a place where you can release old memories," he says, Healing is not about gurus or following others, but rather empowering oneself. Shamans teach people how to access the soul and the wisdom within." Round and round he dances, and I'm told to send blue, healing light into my organs as his warm hands vibrate around me. I can hear him talking about an eagle. Suddenly I am above my body, flying, diving, gliding, as his soothing words take me on a journey. It's all so real.

He clicks his fingers and I land back in my body with a thud. It might be my imagination, but I feel energised. Lighter. I don't want to spoil the sensation by asking questions.

And I already know what I want to say here. It's this: I don't know the value of any individual healer, be they shaman, reiki master, psychologist or traditional doctor. But I'm convinced that we can help cure ourselves by controlling the mind.

And any healer who can help undo the damage of conditioning and put us in a more peaceful, relaxed, positive, self-loving space, is doing the sick a great service.

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