



Complementary  
Healthcare  
Rosie Shelley

# Healing on every level

The ancient system of Shamanic Healing regards human beings and the natural world as one

These Shamans, known as 'the Earthkeepers', say that we're dreaming the world into being through the very act of witnessing it.

Let us be silent, that we may hear the whispers of the gods.  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

LIFE is busy, and fast, and loud, and sometimes hard. If you think about it, it probably always has been, but in these days of economic, social, and planetary struggle we can be in danger of losing sight of the value of stillness, of emotional as well as physical health, of spiritual wealth (whatever that means to you), and inner equilibrium. Of tapping into the truth of the natural world with its innate rhythms, rhyme and reason.

Shamanism, also known as Shamanic Healing, is simply the most ancient spiritual and healing system in the world, reaching back 40 to 50,000 years. It takes as its basic tenets the belief that human beings and the natural world they inhabit are one and the same, and that our physical and spiritual selves are also inextricably intertwined.

Shamans are medicine men or women who heal on every level, and are traditionally priest-like figures in their communities, although it's important to note that while revered they are not considered infallible, far from it: all humans are wounded, and the way of the Shaman is the way of the 'wounded healer'. Of course, aeons before the advent of university trained medical professionals, the religious leader of a community was also its healer, and he or she would address every aspect of the individual's well being, within the context of rebalancing natural energies, channelling and reconnecting with Mother Earth in all her potent majesty and quiet grace.

**Deep insight**  
What makes Shamans stand out from those around them, it's believed, is a unique gift of deep insight, an ability to communicate with the natural world, with plants and animals and birds and the elements, especially with 'power'

**Shamans journey to the hidden worlds that lie beyond any concept of concrete 'reality', outside of the physical body...**

or 'spirit' animals (Shamans hold that we all have a special spirit animal, an animal that we may be strongly drawn towards, whose role is to guide, teach and protect), spirit guides and teachers and the wisdom of all those who have gone before us.

The planet is a pulsing, living, all-knowing thing, and the Shaman communes with that knowledge using a number of techniques. They work to mediate healing with dreams and visions and myths, drawing on states of trance and sometimes near-death experiences, and using plant medicines, drumming techniques, dancing and divination. These tools are known as 'ecstatic techniques' aimed at invoking an SSC or Shamanic state of consciousness.

**Hidden worlds**  
Although different forms are practiced across the

globe, they all share the same basic characteristics. Shamans journey to the hidden worlds that lie beyond any concept of concrete 'reality', outside of the physical body, in order to come back with the information we might need to solve work or relationship problems, to heal our bodies and minds, to change our lives. Ultimately, this is seen as an act of reconnection, with ourselves, each other, the elemental forces of the Earth, and the deep mysteries of existence.

I'm fully aware of how off-the-wall this all seems. I went to great lengths to secure an interview with a practitioner of Shamanic Healing, who might have helped me to present the system in terms we could better relate to, but unfortunately they were all unforthcoming in the end. I can offer this description, from the website [www.shamanismireland.com](http://www.shamanismireland.com): 'This tradition has grown out of humanity's experience of evolving out of the earth and our intimate connection to our mother [Earth]. When we journey into the inner realms through the doors of perception using our mind's eye to explore the wondrous world of imagination, we can tap into the greater store of wisdom that our ancestors have accumulated throughout the millennia. This ancient wisdom can help us heal ourselves, each other, and the Earth ... Shamanic experiences are part of everyday life; the cycles of birth, death and rebirth are an intrinsic part of our reality.'

This may be thinking – or healing – way outside the box, but the goal is healing, holistically, all the same. You could think of a Shaman as a kind of spiritual guidance counselor – a spiritual teacher, life coach, doctor, midwife, genealogist, and travel agent all rolled into one.

**Reconnection**  
There has undeniably been a significant increase in the popularity of Shamanic Healing in recent years. It's as if we're recognising at some level that those years of economic boom – of long hours and competition and endless worries about how we might be perceived by others, performance, childcare issues, the whole work/life balance thing – brought about a disconnection with ourselves and others and the natural order of things. While the Shamanic system can seem quite ethereal and oblique, quite 'out there', it also carries a sense of grounding, of reconnection with the 'soul' within our bodies and earth beneath our feet.

And the philosophy of Shamanism chimes too with very contemporary concerns about our responsibility towards the health of the planet, about putting an end to what the Dalai Lama sees as the 'destruction of nature and natural resources resulting from ignorance, greed and lack of respect for the Earth's living things.'

To quote again from the website: 'human survival now depends on our consciousness evolution, away from our predatory nature and towards the state of grace of loving kindness and compassion for all life on earth.'

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# Pushing beyond boundaries in Sweden

Ice skating through a marine wilderness is one of the joys of a Baltic Sea holiday



Green Tourist  
Catherine Mack

I AM in the middle of a Swedish lake watching winter melt away. The snow has gone and birch trees which cover surrounding islands are starting to bud. I should be worried, given that I am standing on ice, about three kilometres from land, and cracks are literally forming all around me, creating a thudding noise which reverberates across the bay, and through my body. However, I am in the safe hands of my guide, John Savelid, who reassures me that these are good sounds. He smiles calmly and says: 'These noises only happen when the ice is very thick,' and with Scandinavian serenity, skates on with an elegance I have been spending the last three days trying desperately to emulate.

**Feel the fear**

I drooled over photos on their website, with people gliding into the sunset, and presumed that only experts need apply, so was relieved to read that as long as you have skated a few times, and have basic fitness, this trip will suit you.

This was a case of 'feel the fear and do it anyway', and so I filled out the form and set aside a weekend in February. I had one skating lesson on the Christmas rink, which upped my skills in so far as I could now do a little bit of gliding on one leg, and most importantly, stop. However, on day one of my trip, sitting on the jetty leading out into the ice-covered Baltic, in Trosa, just 60 kms south of Stockholm, it was the 'starting' technique that suddenly escaped me.



Break time on Lake Malaren, Sweden.

(Photo: Catherine Mack)

ture, apparently – another reassuring fact, the thermometer having dropped to four degrees below, compared with four degrees above which greeted me on my first day. The cracks are only forming on the top layer, with no water seeping through, due to the fact that there is another 30cms below that again to hold me fast.

I first sought out an ice skating holiday after becoming somewhat addicted to the Christmas ice skating scene, grabbing the rink when it was quiet in an effort to try and get that gorgeous gliding feeling. I grew up in the Torville and Dean era after all, but ice skating was a foreign concept in my home town of Belfast at that time. So, was it possible to find an ice skating holiday, I wondered, and finally, I found it. It is offered by Nature Travels ([www.naturetravels.co.uk](http://www.naturetravels.co.uk)), a responsible tourism company operating out of the UK which ties in with a Swedish skating company to guide small groups out on lakes and open sea, depending on the conditions.

After learning how to use all the equipment, including a backpack which was to act as a buoyancy aid, crampons to stick into the ice in the event of falling in, and a rope to throw to an unfortunate who did so, then finally the blades which attach to special boots, I ease out onto the ice, using walking poles to support me, and my legs just lock.

Reality bites hard in these freezing temperatures, and the ice hits even harder when I fall just a few metres later, with all romantic notions dissipating as fast as my pride – not helped by the fact that my other group members are far from beginners, skating all year round in Swiss and Dutch skating clubs, rather than squeezing in a bit of a 'sesh' between Christmas shopping. I had persuaded one close friend to come with me, who had assured me that he too was a beginner, but whose cross-country skiing experience allows him to join the skating swans in the distance, while this duckling struggles in the bay, wondering what the hell she has let herself in for.

John is prepared for the Irish though, and has brought an other guide, Christine, so that we can divide into two groups, fast and slow. It's not easy being the only one 'slow', but I dig deep under my fleecy layers for a sense of humour, take a deep breath, and start again.

As I ease myself slowly over the ice, already softer than I had imagined, with February turning out to be one of the warmest in recent years, I am reassured by Christine that this does not make my efforts any easier, as the blades have to work so much harder to cut through the slush.

**Reassurance**

After an hour of pole pushing my arms start to ache so much that I just have to unlock those ankles and push out with



One of a few 'rock stops' on Lake Malaren, Sweden.

(Photo: Catherine Mack)



Prepared for skating on the ice-covered Baltic Sea.

(Photo: Catherine Mack)

one leg, then another, a bit like baby Bambi learning to walk, but not nearly so cute. Christine gently encourages me to push one leg for a little bit longer each time, just like in the rink, and slowly but surely my legs start to function, my fears are assuaged, and I start to skate.

By the time we join the others, who have already done a 20km circuit and are tucking into picnic lunches and hot chocolates on the dry surrounds of a rocky island, I have lost any sense of inferiority, not caring how many kilometres I have done, but just happy to be vertical and moving, my lovely instructor reassuring me that I am a skater after all.

The next two days are easier, not simply because we move further West to Eskilstuna, where John's online contacts tell him the skating conditions on Lake Malaren are ideal, without slush and mirror-like in its smoothness, but also because I start to actually get the 'transferring weight onto one leg as I push out with the other' thing, allowing me to get that swinging action I so coveted in my youth.

Although I can't yet hear the echoes of Ravel's 'Bolero' in my head (generational thing, sorry), I am able to stop looking at my feet and actually take in this untouched marine wilderness, which feels like it has been, quite simply, frozen in time.

**Gliding on ice**

I stop to chat to an elderly

couple fishing on the ice, who explain how they drill the tiny hole, then just sit, grime-like it has to be said, with a tiny plastic rod, waiting for a catch. Standing still for too long I feel the wind start to bite, unlike the fish, so I thank them for their time, and skate on until Christine leads me round a peninsula where the wind changes direction. Cue the music, because with just a bit of wind in my back, I have my duckling-into-swan moment at last, gliding across the ice at speed for about 5kms. As if to celebrate my efforts, two swans fly across the lake in the distance, the first sign of wildlife I have seen in two days. By the last day I am covering up to 30 kms, passing remote islands protected by reeds, shimmying in and out of bays boasting wooden waterside cabins with wood burning saunas, canoes moored alongside just waiting for the waters to be revealed again. Or sometimes Christine and I just head out across the expanse of open water from one headland to another, watching an ice breaker in the distance clear the shipping lane for business as usual.

This is an expensive holiday, even though we stay in clean, basic hostels, with plenty of home prepared food (but do bring your own booze – the red and white jugs on the table at night are, disappointingly, simply rosehip and apple juice). But it is an experience you can't put a price on and you certainly can't do this on your own; even the Dutch experts agreed

on that one, making these guides worth every Krona. If I didn't hate the idea of 'things to do before you die' I might add this to the list. It is, however, a thing to do if you want to feel alive again, wake up to nature, and push yourself beyond your usual boundaries. The Christmas ice rink will never have quite the same appeal, however, but make my Christmas stocking a thermal one, and my chocolate coins Kronor, and you won't see me again before the ice melts.

Catherine Mack is the author of *Ireland Green Travel*, a travel app available for iPhone and Android. Follow her on [www.twitter.com/catherinemack](http://www.twitter.com/catherinemack) and at *Ethical Traveller* on Facebook or on her website, [www.ethicaltraveller.net](http://www.ethicaltraveller.net).

**Nature Travels**

Catherine Mack travelled with Nature Travels ([www.naturetravels.co.uk](http://www.naturetravels.co.uk), Tel: +44 (0) 1929 503080); £734 Sterling based on two persons sharing for three nights. Single supplement £39 per person for three nights. Book in now for next year, before the Dutch get in before you. Flights are not included. Fly from Dublin to Stockholm Skavsta with [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com). For more information on winter and summer holidays on Sweden's lakes, see [www.vis-itsweden.com](http://www.vis-itsweden.com).

# How to find a job in challenging times

Graduates seeking employment this year may consider these top tips

**Clean up your online presence**

The first thing employers will do is to see what they can find out about you on the Internet. Are you ready for that? They may look at your Facebook page during the interview. Are you ready for that?

**Look for work, not a job**

Don't scare off employers by communicating that you're looking for a job and all the traditional benefits that go

with it. Make it easy for them to hire you by making it clear that you are happy to accept part-time, temporary, or contract work.

If you are equipped to work from home, tell them that too. It may appeal to them.

**Ditch the CV**

Everybody is using a CV. In your initial contact with employers, make yourself stand out in a positive way with more creative tools that are

marketing oriented and focused on the employer's needs. It's OK to have a CV to take to the interview. But first you have to get there.

**Think**

Put yourself in the shoes of any employer you plan to contact. Why would they be interested in you? What exactly do you have to offer them?

Show them in your first contact with them that you know about them, the type of

work they do and the industry they're in.

Never send out lots of CVs in a shotgun fashion.

**Why should we hire you?**

Assume you'll be asked this question during the interview and be ready to answer it. Focus on the key points you made in the material you sent to them. Those are what got you the interview.

**Bite your tongue**

Talking too much in the interview is among the biggest mistakes graduates make, according to employers and recruiters. The more prepared you are for the interview, the less inclined you'll be to ramble on.

**Do your homework**

There's a wealth of information available on the employer's website.

Amazingly, many graduates never take the time to

thoroughly analyse this information and be ready to answer questions about it in the interview. It will also help if you can talk about some of the key issues going on in their industry.

**Create your own job**

Instead of waiting for someone to offer you a job, consider what millions of graduates around the world have been doing for years: i.e. operate as a freelancer.