

Shrink Rap Radio #31, April 2, 2006 Shamanic Psychology

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Alberto Villodo, Ph. D

(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Brandy Noble)

Excerpt: *People come to the Shamanic traditions wanting to become Indian and we refuse to work with these people, we're not interested in training Indians, or people who shake feathers and rattles, but rather individuals that can bring about healing and transformation to the world.*

Dr. Dave: Bringing healing and transformation to the world, that's the mission of today's guest, Dr. Villodo, who is both a noted author and workshop leader. For some years now Dr. Villodo has been training both lay people and professionals in Shamanic healing practices through his institute, the Four Wind Society, which is currently located in Park City, Utah. In addition, Dr. Villodo leads trips to Peru and other South American countries where his students get to interact with native healers. It was my good fortune to first get to know Alberto when he was a psychology master student and I a fairly green faculty member. Since that time he has gone on to great success and we've maintained contact as friends and colleges so lets get into the interview. Alberto Villodo, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio!

Dr. Villodo: Thank you David, its great to be with you and with our listeners today.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, great. Well look you're a world authority on Shamanism, and years ago, we won't say quite how many, you were a master student in my class on altered states of consciousness. And I remember you pulling me aside and saying, "David, you ought to go more into Shamanism, that's were it's at", and at that time, not many people were talking about Shamanism, or even knew much about it. Not long after, you co-authored a book with Stanley Krippner on Shaman healers in South American. And now you lecture all over the world, and you have a training program in which you train about two to three thousand people a year, you've written 7 or 8 books. I hope I haven't given to much of your story away here, but take us on this journey you've been on, tell us a little bit about this journey.

Dr. Villodo: Well you gave the best parts of my story away; I'm going to have to make some up as we go along.

Dr. Dave: (laughs) Right.

Dr. Villodo: Well actually this was 35 years ago that I mentioned that to you in that graduate course, which kind of dates both of us.

Dr. Dave: Okay you've blown my cover.

Dr. Villoldo: Laughs. The interest that I had in Shamanism at that time, which I still have today, was born out of a deep curiosity because students of religion have only studied the traditions that left a written body of knowledge, the literate cultures. So they have studied the Hinduism, they've studied Buddhism and Christianity and Islam and Judaism for thousands of years, hundreds of years, because they left us the Bible and the Koran and the Torah and the Vedas and the Sutras.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Villoldo: But the traditions that left, that did not leave us a written body of knowledge, the oral traditions, we assume that those were not important, that they were not very smart because they did not know how to read or write. Which means that all the traditions of the Americas were not studied until anthropologist like Margaret Mead came around and began doing participatory anthropology, experiencing, steeping themselves in the culture and finding what a rich fabric and tradition the oral cultures had. And my interest was in immersing myself in the medical side of these traditions. What were the healing systems? What were the models of health and disease? And at a time in which these traditions were dismissed as being ignorant and stupid because they could not read or write, which is what we assume of people who are illiterate, and what I found was just the contrary. What I discovered was that about 2000 years ago, a group of elders from the wisdom societies of the Americas got together to track down the future time line of their people and realized that if they were to advance writing that they would end up with attorneys and decided that it was better to do without it all together.

Dr. Dave: Laughs.

Dr. Villoldo: Actually that's not quite what occurred, but what I discovered was an extraordinarily rich tradition of healing. That focused not on treating the body, but in working on the luminous energy field, on the blue print that surrounds this central body and organizes the body in the same way that a magnet will organize, iron filings and a piece of glass.

Dr. Dave: Ok, now you mention Margaret Mead and how she immersed herself in cultures that she studied, and I know that you've studied with a variety of Shaman healers in South America, what can you tell us about the experiences you had doing that?

Dr. Villoldo: Well at the beginning, I took recorder and camera and note pad and followed the dictates of scientific research, which is to maintain objectivity, and found after 2 or 3 years after doing this that I had chronicled and documented a number of different societies and their mythology and their models of how one gets ill. But I knew nothing about these techniques, because these techniques are not objective they are subjective, they are participatory, they are the feminine, they're not of the masculine, which insists on separation and observation. So after 3 or 4 years I through my tape recorder and my camera and note book into a fire and decided to become a student of the Shaman instead of observing them.

Dr. Dave: Before we go too much further how would you define Shamanism?

Dr. Villoldo: A Shaman, let me define who a Shaman is because there is no "ism" in Shamanism. A Shaman is an individual who mediates between the visible and the invisible world, who fixes things before they are born. I like to compare to the most famous statement that we have from the 19th century which is Einstein's formula of $E = mc^2$ and where you have energy in one side and mass or matter in the other and then there is the equal sign, and the Shaman is the individual, the man or the woman, that dances on top of that equal sign, that helps things to be born from the invisible world and helps things and people return to the invisible world at the end of their time. So they are the mediators between the seen and the unseen, between the mythic and the mundane.

Dr. Dave: Let me play the devils advocate for a moment, what do you say to the person who might see this interest in, Sha- I want to say Shamanism even though you've corrected me - What do you say to the person who might see this interest in Shamanism as a step backwards, as moving towards primitive superstitions?

Dr. Villoldo: Well, first let me say why there is no "ism" in Shamanism is because its not organized, its not a religion, its pre-religious or post- religious, and its actually a spiritual discipline and spiritual practice. And spiritual disciplines are based on experience, on your personal experience versus a religion, which is based on belief. So that a spiritual tradition will always be based on your personal experience, which is what the Shaman is, so there is no organized body of Shamanism. There are medicine men and women or Shamans and to the person that believes that this is regressive, I think that it can be, and we have to be very very careful that we don't simply want to go back to an earlier time when the old growth wars were still present and the buffalo roamed the land because its impossible and in that way it can become regressive but anything can in that perspective.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Dr. Villoldo: But Shamanism really, the Shaman really invites us to revisit our relationship to the earth to question the myth of progress itself and to and it invites us to develop a new relationship with nature, particularly at a time when all the paradigms of the west are crumbling. When we have exhausted the earth, when we have polluted the rivers, we've contaminated the air, it's inviting us to engage in a new relationship with nature, with our psyches internally with our own inter nature and with each other.

Dr. Dave: Something relevant to what you're saying now is, you're in Florida now I'll let our listeners know, but a couple of days ago you were passing through California, we had a chance to have dinner, you said something that struck me about it not being a good idea to turn everybody into Indians. Can you kind of recap that comment and what you meant by that?

Dr. Villoldo: To turn everybody into?

Dr. Dave: Indians.

Dr. Villoldo: Well we don't want to turn anybody into Indians. Usually when people come to the Shamanic traditions wanting to become Indians we refuse to work with these people. We're not interested in training Indians or people who shake feathers and rattles, but rather individuals that can bring about healing and transformation to the world. By working at the essential level of energy, not at the level of moving things which is the level that medicine works on, but to dream the world into being, to learn to work at the blue print level of our existence, at the energetic and the luminous energy field that surrounds the body for example, to bring about physical change, this is what Shamans call dreaming the world into being. And I can give you an example of how this works, but to do that I have to take us a little bit into the mythology of the Shaman.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Dr. Villoldo: And because the mythology of the Shaman is the mythology of the feminine versus our mythology of the west, which is very much of the masculine. And remember that myth and reality are those myths that we haven't quite seen through yet. Like Joseph Campbell use to say, "Reality are the myths we haven't quite seen through yet", and lets look at a couple of our myths. Do you know that we have the only mythology in the planet in which we were kicked out of the Garden of Eden? No one else was cast out of the garden, the sub-Saharan Africans weren't, the Aborigines, or the Native Americas. They were given the garden to be the stewards and the caretakers of the garden. Secondly as we are being cast out of the garden there is a voice that says, "And cursed is the earth because of you woman" and then to the man the voice says, "And with the sweat of your back you will take the fruit of the earth and it shall grow thorns and thistles for you", and I'm not making this up this is page 2. So right at the beginning of our mythology we antagonize the feminine, cursed is the earth because of woman and then the mother, the earth that will grow thorns and thistles. The voice didn't say the earth shall grow mangos and papayas for you.

Dr. Dave: Yeah.

Dr. Villoldo: This is the heritage, the inheritance that we got. And then a little bit further down in the same paragraph we learn that, or a little bit further up we learn that woman was created from man, this story of the rib - of Adam and the rib. In no other mythology on the planet does the masculine give birth to the feminine, or to anything for that matter.

Dr. Dave: Interesting.

Dr. Villoldo: So our mythology is very steeped into the masculine and then in the year 1564, there was the council of elders of the church in Rome, the Council of Trent in which they were determining weather animals, Indians and women have souls. The first day was determined that animals and Indians, or people of color, did not have souls, which is why they were later worked in the Americas like animals basically. It took 23 days of deliberation to determine that women indeed had souls. So our mythology is very very steeped in the masculine and becomes dismissive of any tradition that is steeped in the feminine, we dismiss it as regressive, as simplistic, as...and because it doesn't fit within the lenses that we like to see reality through.

Dr. Dave: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

Dr. Villoldo: So these are traditions of the feminine, that are participatory, they are engaging. Shamans for example do not diagnose they heal. They don't diagnose they heal, we diagnose, but we don't know how to heal. If you open up a medical text you find that's there's thousands of different ways of being sick, but very few of those are really treatable, and if you really think about it there is only 1 or 2 ways to be healthy, but nobody knows what these are. So Shamans don't diagnose, they heal, they differentiate between information and knowledge. We live in an information society, but there is very little wisdom in our society. We are flooded with information, the Shaman differentiates between the two, and the information that water is H₂O, knowledge and wisdom is being able to make it rain. Information is having a diagnosis, wisdom is knowing how to heal that, how to bring the body back into balance.

Dr. Dave: Right. Right. You mention Joseph Campbell and that kind of anticipates one question I wanted to ask you, which is how you see the relationship or points of contact between the Shamanic and psychology?

Dr. Villoldo: Well the psychology is say, is an exquisite science of the psyche. But what happens in psychology is it was born out of our search for the soul. And first we looked for the soul in the liver, we couldn't find it there, then we looked for the soul in the heart we couldn't find it there either, we've looked for the soul in the brain and couldn't find it there either, so we kind of dismissed the notion of the soul. And what's happened in psychology is that it become a bit of barren landscape. It is suffered from loss of soul, it's become, it lost much of its enchantment and much of its mystery and mystique. Its become dissected or more interested in traditional psychology, in dissecting, analyzing and interventions that are behavioral and then adjusting behavior. The mythic element of psychology has been lost. You perhaps, Jung and the Joseph Campbell's are for the great proponents of it. But it's become more of a source of curiosity for psychologist rather than something they build into their practices. So the, I think what we are challenged to do today as psychologist is to reinvent the field, to reanimate it, is to bring the anima the soul back into the field of psychology, make it a bit more animistic. Look at the journey of the soul and not just the journey of the victim whose recovering from abusive parents. Please that is so desecrating of the essential nature of the human to be, when we begin to autodi - self diagnose our self as being crippled by abandonment issues and suffering through mommy and daddy problems.

Dr. Dave: Mm, hmm.

Dr. Villoldo: As being the children of dysfunctional parents, where we hold past generations responsible for who we are, its not a journey of power and of beauty, which I think is really what the soul clamors for.

Dr. Dave: Mm hmm, I think that when psychotherapy works, that good psychotherapy has elements that I would consider be Shamanic, and on a previous show on neural linguistic programming, I managed to offend my guest by remarking after the interview that I thought the approach was less science and more Shamanism and later I tried to explain that to me saying it was Shamanic was not a bad thing. And in fact I think there is a strong Shamanic element in good psychotherapy. What are your thoughts on that?

Dr. Villoldo: Well I think that there is in great psychotherapist, very strong Shamanic element, they're individuals that know how to work with transference for example, in a very creative and powerful manner. In the great psychotherapist of our time, the Virginia Sapears, the renowned psychotherapists the Milton Ericson's, they were individuals that of course NLP tried to model the structure, the magic that they brought to their patients. But it's very difficult to model only the use of language, when these individuals are working with body movement, with gestures, with nuance, with silence, with crescents with an energy that they radiated, and they brought about extraordinary transformation in their clients, so the great therapists I think have a strong element of the Shaman because she is able to help the client birth from their own invisible world, the resources that will bring them to help and to healing.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Now you've got a teaching organization, I mentioned at the top of the show that you train somewhere between 2000 and 3000 people, in Shamanic thinking in Shamanic practices, and you have an organization called the Four Winds, maybe you could tell us a bit about that.

Dr. Villoldo: Well the Four Winds Society, we train western Shamans. And our teaching staff includes a union psychologist, union analysts, and neuro scientists, MD, a wide variety of people that are all trained as western Shamans as well. And we train them in the four core healing disciplines of Shamanism; of the medicine way and I would like to review these briefly. The first one is the illumination process, where we learn that there is a luminous energy field that surrounds the physical body, an information field, a blue print of the body, and that you must clear the blueprint in order for physical or emotional healing to happen, other wise you can remove the tissue or the organ and if you don't clear the blueprint the physical illness returns. If you don't clear the blueprint the emotional pattern is replayed again. So the first of the illumination process is clearing overriding the blueprint so that we don't keep repeating the same behavior patterns, and pass them on to our children. This is what they call in the jungle "generational curses", where we were not able to heal it ourselves and we pass it on to our children, or we inherit it from our mothers, the wounds of our parents, the wounds of our grandparents. The second intervention is the extraction process. Now in psychology we believe that all of the energies and emotion we feel belong to us, the Shaman understands that not everything that you experience or that you feel belong to you, that some of these energies can be intrusive energies that are being directed at you from somebody that you

angered, or somebody who believes that you are responsible for there unhappiness, or somebody you are divorcing or happen to break up with, that you suddenly go from being an angel to being a demon. And these energies have to be extracted they have to be drawn out of the system. There is no amount of talk therapy that's going to address the toxic effect of these energies on the body. But not only are there intrusive energies there are intrusive entities as well. Which as you know we did away with in psychology quite a while back. But let me tell you a story, when my previous to my last book was coming out "Shaman Healers Sage", in Shaman Healers Sage I described the healing more modalities that we're talking about, and Random House, the publisher, invited me to go back to New York and make a presentation to the sales force and my talk, my 15 minutes were right after lunch and nobody knew what a Shaman is and they weren't interested.

Dr. Dave: Oh what a challenge.

Dr. Villoldo: The national sales force was sold to the Wal-Mart's and to the Borders, and in the middle of my 15 minute talk this man walks in and everybody perks up and he raises his hand and he speaks to the group not to me and he says, " You all know I've had a problem with alcohol for the last 10 years and I went to see one of Dr. Villoldo graduates, and I've had two sessions with her and that was four months ago and I've not had a drop of alcohol since and my craving is gone. Thank you very much" and he gets up and he leaves.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Dr. Villoldo: It turns out that he is one of the heads of the publishing company.

Dr. Dave: Oh my goodness.

Dr. Villoldo: He came in unannounced and suddenly every body is interested because every body in publishing in New York has a problem with alcohol, or many of them do. And I'm wondering to myself, because we know how complex addictions are, addictions are very complex issues and as soon as my talk is over I call my graduate and I ask what did you do? And she said well this man walked into my office and walking in right behind him I sensed that right behind was his father's spirit. And I asked her what did you do? And she said I helped him to die. Now his father had died 10 years earlier and had been an alcoholic his entire life and had become attached to his son and the minute that his father was able to go back home to go back to the world of spirit, the son was able to change his behaviors.

Dr. Dave: My goodness.

Dr. Villoldo: Now this doesn't mean that all alcoholism has an intrusive entity involved; in this case it just happens to be so. But there is no amount of talk therapy that would deal with grandma or dad whose trapped between the worlds in a nightmare that they can not wake up from and who gravitates to the person that they have the most unfinished business with and attach themselves to them.

Dr. Dave: Okay, so that was related to stage 2, extraction?

Dr. Villoldo: That's number 2. That's the second intervention we work with. The third is the soul retrieval process, where the Shaman or our students learn that its possible to journey along your time line to the past to find an original event that derailed your destiny, an original wounding that derailed your destiny. Because when somebody comes into our office today they are coming in to talk about something that happened 2 weeks ago or a month ago and as you know through analysis we have to get back to the source, to that original wounding that often happened in childhood. Now we often times find that this wounding occurred in a former life time, perhaps 2000 years ago, where our client will experience themselves suffering, experiencing trauma that repeats itself over and over again over many lives. Now of course this doesn't prove that reincarnation exists, it simply proves that this is the story that lives inside our client, but it's a living story within them.

Dr. Dave: Mm hmm.

Dr. Villoldo: Which is more for metaphor for the trauma that occurred, so doing soul retrieval we journey back to the original wounding and we coax back that part of the self that's splintered, that became fragmented. We bring back those energetic resources and reinstall them in the psyche, so that we don't have to keep recreating the condition of the original wounding, through out next job or our next relationship in hopes of trying to heal it. And after we do that, we learn that it's possible also to journey forward along your time line to find and install a desirable future, a desirable destiny.

Dr. Dave: Is this stage 4?

Dr. Villoldo: And this is no, this is intervention number 3, which is soul and destiny retrieval. And the fourth is the great rights passage, which includes rights of puberty, of first menstruation for a woman, of manhood, of womanhood, of marriage, of divorce, of motherhood, of menopause and the sage right. How do we enter into the later stages and the most creative stages in our lives? And finally of course of the death rights, which are the great rights. And we learn those rights, which we have forgotten about in the west by actually learning the Shaman's journey beyond death and discovering that on the other side of death there is only life. And this is what allows us to assist a loved one, perhaps even the person who brought us into this world in making their final journey peacefully. And having said the I love you's and the I forgive you's that need to be said. And you know David I get letters every month, from people that say, that I've never met, saying thank you for the last chapter in your book Shaman Healers Sage, thank you I was able to help my mother to die, I was able to help my child to die and they're such touching - touching - notes that we get, the comments we receive, because these are the right that we've forgotten in our culture. We put the dying away where we don't have to see them; we believe that it is contagious in some way. So this is what we train our students in and if anyone is interested in more information they should visit our website which is www.thefourwinds.com.

Dr. Dave: I'll also put a link to that in the show notes on the Shrink Rap Radio web site. Where do you see the Four Winds Society going? What's your dream in terms of the future?

Dr. Villoldo: I think that healing today is not only spirituality it's not only a personal phenomenon it's a political phenomenon. I think that we have to bring healing to our families, to our schools, to our organizations, to your belief systems, to the paradigms that we hold about the nature of sustainability, or ecology or carbon dioxide emissions. So I see our work becoming increasingly political, in the old sense of the word politics, in the sense that it's the totality of humanity, that we are here to dream a new kind of world into being the kind of world that we want our children's children to inherit. Which is not the probable world but it's the possible world, no matter how improbable. So this is what I hold as the greater task for the Four Winds, we want to change the world one healer at a time, one Shaman at a time and help them discover the tools that can allow them to change and bring beauty and healing to many people in their communities.

Dr. Dave: Has there been a time in your own journey in which your knowledge of either psychology or your involvement in the Shamanic practices pulled you through?

Dr. Villoldo: Would you repeat that please David?

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Has there been a time in your own journey, in your own life, in which your knowledge of either psychology or your involvement with the Shamanic practices somehow pulled you through?

Dr. Villoldo: That happens about twice a month for me.

Dr. Dave: Laughs. Can you give us an example?

Dr. Villoldo: You know one of the prophecies of the Americas, of the medicine people of the Americas is that in the year 2012, by the year 2012 there is going to be a tremendous upheaval and revisiting of all of the things we assume and take for granted in the west, and I see that happening internally in people. Not only are economics and war and violence is affecting us but there is an internal reevaluation that is happening. Remember 10 years ago I knew 2 or 3 people that were in crisis and today most everyone I know, I know 2 or 3 people that are not in crisis. And the, in my own life, I've had to reevaluate what it means to be a man, what it means to be a father, what it means to be accomplished, what success means, what aging means. How do I turn that which has been a source of great wounding in my own past into a source of compassion? So I believe that the tools of psychology and spirituality and Shamanism are to be used like a muscle on a daily basis and the more you exercise it the fresher that you remain the less that lifelessness settles into your joints and into your psyche and to me it's a daily practice. I wake up in the morning and I go who am I today and how can I be of service?

Dr. Dave: Oh that's great. I tell you very inspiring just listening to you. Of your many books which would you most strongly recommend to our listeners?

Dr. Villoldo: Well I would recommend Shaman Healers Sage and also my newest book is called Mending the Past and Healing the Future Through Soul Retrieval. And they are both very practical books, they provide you with the techniques and the processes that the reader can do to a great degree, to heal at a core level of our being and at the essential energetic level of our being.

Dr. Dave: Is there a book by some other author that you would recommend to the interested listener that wants to learn more about Shamanism?

Dr. Villoldo: I think to learn more about Shamanism you have to go to Joseph Campbell. You have to go to the mythologists; you have to look at the history of the divine from the perspective of the feminine. Go to Maria Gimbutas the anthropologist who discovered all the Paleolithic goddess figures of central Europe. Go to a book call "The Alphabet Versus the Goddess" by Leonard Shlain. But I would start with Campbell because he gives us the language images and myth and of the feminine that is so essential.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah you know I've been teaching out of Joseph Campbell for 25 or 30 years and he certainly ranks up at the top for me too. Well look I know that I've interrupted your writing warming here, so I really want to thank you for giving us so generously of your time and your wisdom to Shrink Rap Radio.

Dr. Villoldo: Oh it's a pleasure to have been with you David any time and thank you for inviting me to the show.

(Music plays)

Dr. Dave: I hope you enjoyed that conversation as much as I did. I don't get to see Alberto or spend time with him nearly as much as I would like to, that might be changing however. Over the dinner I referred to in the interview he invited me to consider working with him as one of his workshop leaders, I'm very flattered to be offered this opportunity. As I've remarked in previous episodes, I'm interested in leading my life as intuitively as possible. When an opportunity such as this suddenly appears out of nowhere I feel an obligation to follow up and see where it might lead. So I've begun Alberto's latest book, *Mending the Past and Healing the Future*, and I plan to attend the training that he will be leading in Park City, Utah this coming July, and then we'll see if it feels like a good fit for both of us or not. Much like dream work, the tarot deck can be a useful tool for getting in touch with your own intuition. After our dinner I went home and consulted the tarot by shuffling the deck and pulling a random card. The card came up, or the card that came up for me is called the Chariot and this cards depicts a young prince whose chariot is being drawn by two sphinxes one black and one white, on his shoulder the prince wears applets which are half moons, and the moon is associated with the feminine and intuition, the white sphinx has black stripes in his head dress and the black sphinx has white stripes in his, so these two creatures are suggestive of yin and yang the balancing of opposites. Some how this card seems particularly fitting, it suggests to me that I should proceed on this journey, but also that I will meet or harness powerful forces that might tempt to pull me one way or the other. I'll need to listen to my intuition and steer a course between the extremes. Ill keep you posted as the journey unfolds.