

Shrink Rap Radio #541: My Shamanic Path

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David Van Nuys, PhD, aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Sergey Baranov

(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by James Stake)

Introduction: On today's show, I'll be speaking with Sergey Baranov about his book *Path*, which documents his shamanic quest in California, Arizona, Mexico, and Peru, among other places. For more information about Sergey Baranov, please see our show notes at shrinkrapradio.com.

Dr. Dave: Sergey Baranov, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio!

Sergey: Thank you, David.

Dr. Dave: Well, it's really good to have you here. I first became familiar with your journey and your work as a result of the interview that I did with Nathan Ehrlich about his own healing journey and his quest. Remind me where and how you two met.

Sergey: Well, we met in Peru probably two years ago. It was a very interesting meeting because he was traveling in Peru with another friend and they went all the way up to the Central Andes, to the ancient Chavin culture and somehow they met my teacher, and my teacher referred them to me, and I took it as a sign that I have to meet with them, because that's the first time it happened.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, great. Ok, well I was struck by the fact that your own journey was initially inspired by Carlos Castaneda, his *Don Juan* books, and me and my friends, we were very taken with that series of books. I was in graduate school at the time at the University of Michigan studying Clinical Psychology, but I was also very interested in... well your book is called *Path*... and so, I was interested in *the path*, and that was one of the very strong influences in my development. But I didn't go to the length, nor did any of my friends go to quite the length and earnestness that you did. You really took those books to heart and you started pursuing it with real vigor, making it central in your life. But let's back up a little bit. You were born in Russia and then you immigrated to Israel... at what age? I don't recall. I read the whole book but I don't recall.

Sergey: We immigrated when I was twelve and a half years old.

Dr. Dave: Okay, and you immigrated to Israel.

Sergey: Yes.

Dr. Dave: So, how did that happen? I mean, why Israel, and why at that particular point in time did your family immigrate?

Sergey: Well, you know, first of all, we came from Ukraine so I am not really Russian. I call myself Russian, I speak Russian but technically I am not. I am a Ukrainian Jew.

Dr. Dave: Ok. So I'm talking to a Ukrainian Jew right now who is in Peru, with a wonderful warming fire behind you. Okay, so tell us a bit more about that transition.

Sergey: We immigrated in 1989 and that was, pretty much as I understand it, right when it became possible for the Jews to leave the Soviet Union and we were told that Israel is our homeland and country where we can live without being persecuted for being Jews because where I'm from, from western Ukraine, that's probably the worst place for Jews to be at the time, even now. You know, I never could say that I'm a Jew, people were changing last names, I mean, there was a lot of persecution of parents *and* children.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. And so, when you went to Israel, not only did you have that whole background behind you of fear and escape, but also you now had to learn a new language and a new culture. Even though you were moving to a land of Jews, they were from all over the world.

Sergey: Yes, and these were not exactly the same Jews as we were and we didn't know about that. We were called Ashkenazi Jews, which means European Jews, and the Jews in Israel, they are from Morocco and African origin. So it's not the same thing and we were not aware of that. So obviously, when we came to Israel the confrontation started and we were not very welcome there.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Well, it was a difficult time. You were in Israel for how many years?

Sergey: Twelve years.

Dr. Dave: For twelve years. And was it there that you first discovered the teachings of Don Juan?

Sergey: Yes, this came later, when I around maybe nineteen, twenty years old. I had a friend who was interested in esoteric and spiritual literature, and he was the one who introduced me to that, among other things.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, well, among other things were the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, and what they laid out as the Fourth Way. So is that how you came to immigrate to California?

Sergey: Yes, that's exactly the reason. I got involved in this Fourth Way teaching and all this esoteric stuff and I found out, through the same friend, that there was a center, a spiritual center for people who were interested in the same ideas. So we joined and found out that the center for this organization is in California and this is where the

teacher lives and I just felt like I need to be around my teacher. If I'm serious about learning, I need to be close to him.

Dr. Dave: Right, so once again you had to learn a new language and a new culture, and because you were such a passionate spiritual seeker, you found this teacher that you were referring to and he had a community in California and you went there, you became part of that community, but unfortunately you later realized that you were in a cult organized around this very charismatic leader and... we don't need to go into a lot of depth on that because I know that was in some ways a very damaging experience for you who were so sincere in your quest.

Sergey: And to many other people.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and I have interviewed many people and met people who were in one cult or another, and it's very destructive and it's very hard to leave. They don't make it easy for you to leave, right?

Sergey: Yes, it was very hard to leave. First of all, I was married with a woman who was many years there. She was involved and she was a very dedicated student, and that hurt our relationship and we divorced at the end when I left. That's the rule of the cult actually: if you leave, everybody who stays has to leave friendship with you. You have to completely outcast...

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and that's the thing that makes it really hard is all your social connections, even to your wife, it was like everybody cut you off.

Sergey: Yes, everybody.

Dr. Dave: Somehow, despite all of that, you stayed on your path and sometime after freeing yourself from the cult you began seeking genuine shamanic teachers. And you traveled all over. You went to Arizona, Mexico, eventually Peru, where you are today. So let's talk about some of your adventures along the shamanic path in those years before you finally got to Peru... Because there is too much in the book to touch it all but you can take us through a few of the highlights.

Sergey: Well, I went to Peru first actually. Everything started here. After this, I went to Mexico, Arizona, and that was kind of in parallel. But I found the real thing here, in Peru. And that was right when I left the cult and I was searching for genuine, psychedelic, shamanic experiences. I was tired of words and concepts, and I wanted to see what this is about, awakening and enlightenment and all of what you read in ancient texts and eastern philosophy. You know, it's all good but it's not enough. It's not sufficient to satisfy the spiritual urge.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Now, you did mention psychedelics and so in part, your quest was – and certainly that played a strong role in the teachings of Don Juan – was that psychedelic quest. Some people argue... there was sort of a Gurdjieffan guy here in Sonoma County where I live. And interestingly, you even were in Sonoma County, Santa Rosa...

Sergey: We were a little bit farther from Sonoma. We were about an hour and a half north of Sacramento.

Dr. Dave: Ok, ok.

Sergey: Not quite, but I am aware of other organizations in northern California. It seems like there were a number of them since the '60s.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, when I first moved to this area I heard of a fellow by the name of Robert de Ropp.

Sergey: I've heard about that, yes.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, he had written a book called The Master Game.

Sergey: I've heard about that.

Dr. Dave: And one of the things that stuck with me, as someone who also was very interested in the psychedelic path, but he said that people who take drugs, it's like a thief breaking into a house. And the thief can't stay in the house, so it's not genuine. And he was a Gurdjieffan. So I don't know if that's in Gurdjieff's teachings or not.

Sergey: Yes, it is very much so.

Dr. Dave: But I'm going to give you a chance to speak to that right now because I think a lot of people have that sense that, well, psychedelics, you know, that's just kind of a place to get lost.

Sergey: Kind of an illegal shortcut.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, exactly. But you argue against that in your book I thought very well.

Sergey: You know, this is a big subject in itself, David. It would take us many hours and many days to discuss it in depth. So I don't know where to start to make a point here. So, what he said... it's not his words, it's going back to, you know, spiritual leaders and teachers of India, many of them, most of them, are against that. It just went from them to Gurdjieff, to this person that you mention, and everyone else holds the same view. I have to say from my personal experience that this is a very wrong view.

Dr. Dave: Right. And so, what is it that in your personal experience, that has persuaded you that that's a wrong view.

Sergey: If the psychedelic experience has the capacity and power to heal and teach and impact your life in a positive, productive way, would you be able to discredit it? On what basis? On what basis would you say that this is invalid, [inaudible], temporary, if it has the power to transform your personality, your mind, your life, and lead you to happiness?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, and I think that's a good point and I think your book substantiates that as you talk about how your life developed and changed and so on... so, that will probably come up more as we move along. Now, among the plant medicines that you experiences were Ayahuasca, Peyote, and another cactus-based psychedelic called San Pedro, which I hadn't heard of San Pedro before encountering your book. We should mention that all of your experiences were in the context of ritual and ceremony, rather than recreation. None of this was recreational for you. I think often it was very challenging I think rather than recreational.

Sergey: This is not a joke, these are serious things. These plant teachers are a very serious spiritual endeavor, which can be physically demanding, psychologically, spiritually... I had a great respect for that from the beginning before even being able to formulate and say about that as much as I can say today after many years of working with it. But even in the beginning I sensed a tremendous healing potential in working with it, and had a great admiration and appreciation for that gift to humanity, which I wanted to learn about.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Yeah, as a matter of fact in the book, towards the end, you go into it as a gift to humanity and you imagine a world that embraced this more and you envision it as a more healed world than we are looking at right now.

Sergey: Absolutely. I strongly believe in that. I strongly believe that if more people would have that experience, we would eventually be able to change the way we live in this world. We would be able to have a better world. A world with less violence and less insanity, and more peace and joy for everyone.

Dr. Dave: Now, when you talk about healing, are you talking about physical healing or psychological healing, spiritual healing... all three?

Sergey: I'm talking about all of them. There is a physical, psychological, emotional, mental, spiritual... you name it. It's the healing of your being. It's the healing of who you are in all aspects, and we are many things. Physical aspect was never my thing because I never came to this plant out of a need for physical healing. I was healthy, both physically and psychologically. For me it was a spiritual quest. I was looking for answers to big questions that I had from childhood. But as I progressed on the path, I saw many people

who came in search of physical healing. And I've seen the healing, and that kind of expanded my take, my understanding of what it is.

Dr. Dave: Uh-huh! Going back to those three medicines that you have substantial experience with – Ayahuasca, Peyote, and San Pedro – can you give us a sense of the different effects?

Sergey: These are very different medicines, Ayahuasca and the sacred cactus, very different in many ways, in chemical structure, in the experience. Ayahuasca, you drink at night, in full darkness and it's a very visionary plant, and you work with *icaros*, which are the magic songs of the shaman who directs the ceremony. It's a very internal journey. It's a journey within, through a portal to some other dimension, which is not human. It's work with spirits, mostly spirits of the plant. You invite spirits of other plants to cure the patient. So it's a portal, Ayahuasca, it's a portal to that spiritual dimension, as opposed to the cactus, which is very different work. You can do it both at night and in the day but I work in the daytime. I work with daylight, with beauty of nature, and this is my way to facilitate that work. I found an immense amount of healing energy that comes through that *enhanced experience of beauty* that brings gratitude and understanding and clarity... you go through a very very intense process of healing and analyzing your life. It's a very different sense that you are functioning in that medicine. You know, we are talking, we have discussions, we are walking. In Ayahuasca, you sit in one place, in a circle, the *maloka*, and it's a non-movement kind of thing. You're not moving outside, not talking to other people. It's a very very kind of inward experience.

Dr. Dave: I can really relate to that difference that you're talking about. One of the things that I found difficult back in the '60s when I was experiencing various psychedelics was, taking them at night turned out for me to be a mistake. I was unable to sleep, my body was depleted, as it normally is at the end of a day, and I learned for myself that I would at least start the journey in the daytime and that went a lot better for me. I really like what you say about the appreciation of nature and how important that is. That was, for me, one of the most mind-opening and interesting things. I remember, I was probably on LSD at the time, going outside and it looked like the plants were dancing to like an Indian raga, and they were just swaying and dancing. I was seeing in a different, new way that I just loved and I'll always remember that.

Sergey: Yes, it's very much the effect of the mescaline-based cactus. You see the world become alive. It's an incredible feeling that cannot be described. It's not just the movements and the breath of the mountains and the movement of the trees. That's kind of a visual joy. There is more to it. It's the connection you make with it that cannot be described. We can talk about the visual effects, but the connection, the feeling that comes from this experience, that's indescribable and that's the feeling that brings healing. This is something that was misunderstood by science all along, beginning from the beginning of the 20th century until all the way into the '70s, when mescaline was banned even for research. It became an illegal substance to even research. So

thousands of studies, decades of earnest, sincere research did not bring much results, as far as I can see, in terms of psychological and spiritual understanding of the plant, of the human mind, of the shamanic tradition, and things along with that.

Dr. Dave: There's a huge difference between the scientific approach, as you point out, which is in a sterile environment and everything is kind of controlled in mostly a sterile sort of way, as opposed to embarking on it in a nature-based and also empathic way, with somebody there who is empathically connected to this person who is being launched into a new experience with no idea of what's about to hit them.

Sergey: Completely, and there's more to it. Not only did a ceremony become a clinical trial, that's bad enough, but also a living plant became an alkaloid. So what they did, they just extracted one chemical, one alkaloid, from the living plant, which has a thousands of years old tradition behind it, and took this alkaloid and gave it to a person who has no spiritual background, no spiritual worldview, and they expected to see results. But what can you expect by recording the symptoms of someone who has a psychedelic experience? It's a superficial study, it's a study by observation. It cannot be effective, and that's my point.

Dr. Dave: Right. Of course, there have been other researchers more recently who really went to some lengths to move more in the direction that you're talking about right now.

Sergey: Yes, absolutely. But the problem with that is that you cannot do this kind of research and remain bound by the system. You will be kicked out. If you are a psychologist or psychiatrist who is licensed, you cannot, it's just impossible. It's a prohibited way of studying. They will kick you out and you will be an independent researcher, and if you are courageous enough and sincere enough, then that will be a path you will take. But how many people would be willing to sacrifice ten years of study and a lot of investments to become part of it?

Dr. Dave: Going back to nature, which you say is really central to your approach, and one of the things that I really enjoyed in the book is some of the remarkable interactions you had with animals, and maybe you could share one or two of those. You talked about a dog or two, very profound interactions that you had with them, an owl, a falcon...

Sergey: Yes, well I was surrounded by animals all my life. I just loved animals, you know, cats and dogs. And I had a dog in America and we had a very deep bond, and I suffered greatly when I lost her, and I dedicated a chapter to her. But that's different from meeting wild animals, just a different sense. When I started to meet wild animals, like falcons... well, that just came recently. It was owl and hawk. And these were signs, those meetings were signs in which I saw the coming change, and a few months after that I actually moved to Peru.

Dr. Dave: Oh, they were signs to you, they were suggesting, you felt beckoned by them...

Sergey: It was a very clear message, especially the meeting with the owl. In her eyes, I saw everything I was always looking for in human eyes. You know, I saw the world, which I was feeling about... I actually saw that in her eyes, and this world was calling me.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, yeah. So, eventually, after a number of years traveling around the US and to Mexico and other places, you permanently moved to Peru and so, once again, big language change, big culture change.

Sergey: It's a whole different life here, yes.

Dr. Dave: It's kind of psychedelic when you move. That's been my experience, that travel disorients you sufficiently that it's a bit of a psychedelic experience.

Sergey: Oh yes, in itself that is a mind-expanding experience just to move to another country and try to make it there I mean, it will mix you up in itself, just daily life. Plus on top, if you use powerful psychedelics, it can be a very dramatic change in your consciousness, in your lifestyle.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. And all along your journey, both in Peru and Mexico and some of the other places that you went to, you have been drawn to various power spots, places that shamans in the area recognize as having some sort of power. What's your experience with that? I remember Don Juan talked about, you had to find your place, you know, and if they were off doing something, you had to walk around where you were and find your power spot. Is that something you've experienced?

Sergey: Well, we experience that every time we take the medicine, anywhere. The power place becomes any place where you take the medicine. It's not a specific location, although there are specific locations, which we call in Peru *huacas*, which means sacred site or power place, and these can be man-made or natural geological formations, which have a certain energetic charge and you can connect to it, you can feel the energy, when you take the medicine, especially the San Pedro cactus, which is the key to that energetic realm, when you take the medicine in the proper way, among other things, and that goes beyond psychology, it goes beyond therapy, that already goes into the realm of pure mysticism and these places are portals, ancient portals, which you can connect to and you can feel that energy, that ancient energy which was there forever, and you understand what was that which ancient people worshipped. That was not an entity. That was not a specific god or something. It was something that cannot be put in words. The closest would be energy, spiritual energy that you experience as divine in that state of consciousness.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. So the cult experience, you had gotten married and then you were forced to divorce. So for a long time, I think you were probably pretty lonely as you were traveling around having these experiences. Fortunately, you met a beautiful young educated Peruvian woman, you got married, you now have a daughter who I saw on camera as we were testing out the technology and she looked delightful, and you've built what you call your "cactus house." How is it a cactus house?

Sergey: Well, I am actually right now in the cactus house... well, before we built it, over a few ceremonies I was thinking about ways to get closer to the spirit of the plant. I was thinking that I am eating the plant, I am drinking the plant... what else can I do in order to get closer? And then this idea came in a ceremony that, whenever I build the house, I have to dip every brick in the medicine and build a house, thus creating a "cactus house." I am actually living in the cactus right now. Every brick you see here dipped in the cylinders of medicine, which I made from hundreds of cactuses, which I cut around for many days, and that's why I call it the "cactus house," not because we have cactuses growing outside.

Dr. Dave: Now, do you feel that energy of the cactus, living in the cactus house?

Sergey: You know, for me it's hard to answer this question because after ten years of working with the cactus, I feel it all the time. It's like, I'm one with my medicine. I feel it everywhere I go, every time of the day. It doesn't matter if I'm in the house, on the street, I feel connected. So for me it's very very hard to distinguish a difference between being here or not being here but from people who come to stay here, that's what they say, that they feel a very positive and special energy here in the house.

Dr. Dave: So your experience has been that the cactus has a spirit. Would that be a good way to say it, that there is the spirit of the cactus?

Sergey: Yes, definitely I can say that, that there is a spirit to it. There is a certain intelligence to it and... it's very hard to talk about it because it's not like an entity, you take the medicine and then an entity comes and talks into your ears like in the Carlos Castaneda books, which I find a little bit exaggerated. Nevertheless, the spirit does exist in his work, which everybody feels, including me. But there is a certain intelligence, which becomes accessible when you access that realm. And that's undeniable, that's experimental, that's experiential, you can repeatedly experience that. This is not a random occurrence. It's a guarantee ticket to that realm.

Dr. Dave: Wow, I like that way of putting it! We haven't touched on the relationships that you've had along the way with various curanderos, shamans... how important a component is that?

Sergey: Oh very much so. I was very very lucky to find real shamans, real people, genuine healers, not the commercial people. From them, I learned certain things that I

employ in my work. However, most of the teaching comes from the plant itself and that's the truth of it. It's hard to say percentage-wise but if I would be forced to do that, I might say maybe ten percent came from teachers, from the humans, and the rest comes from direct experience, from the plant itself. I did have teachers, I do have them, I see them more as friends now, but I'm kind of my own thing.

Dr. Dave: I would think you would have been cautious – I would be, I'm putting myself, imagining myself, in your shoes – having been burned in the cult, I'd be very cautious and a little fearful about bonding with some other person who supposedly represents spiritual truth.

Sergey: Yes, absolutely right. This element was present for sure, and this experience in the cult taught me that strongly. So, you do have that flavor of skepticism when you meet new people and when you are presented with a certain spiritual authority which, in my case, I have none any more and I cannot relate to people in this framework. I can only relate to you heart to heart, human-to-human, with respect of course, as one who has greater knowledge and went farther but I cannot... I will never kneel to you or to anybody else. This thing has been completely eradicated from my thinking. I'm speaking about the spiritual authorities, that people have that feeling of conforming to, or worship. So, I don't have that thing. Yes, it was a challenge at points but I saw it. I saw it in myself, I saw that manifestation. I tried to relate to that which I respected in the person, to that which made sense, not the title, not the ceremonial clothing, and all that nonsense. I relate to what you say and the way I resonate with it.

Dr. Dave: Speaking of the ceremonial clothing, I should let people know that there are a lot of photographs in the book and they're like snapshots that somebody takes on their vacation, except you weren't on a vacation. That adds a very nice flavor to the book and helps to persuade me, the reader, that this legitimately happened and here is a picture of the person that you visited, and here are some of the ceremonial objects and so on. It really grounds it in the world because it's not like all magical-looking, it's like a circle in the dirt, you know, something like that.

Sergey: That's real. That's why I wanted to share these pictures so people see what is real, what is a real ceremony, what is a real shamanic experience among the Indians, not all as you said, all fancy and...

Dr. Dave: It's not romanticized. It's like, I'm not necessarily going to get all excited to go get in the dirt... I'd have to want it.

Sergey: Yes, you have to want it very very badly. Because it's a challenge in many ways, especially for the western person who is used to comfort and safety and a hospital down the road, it's a challenge in many ways.

Dr. Dave: Now one of the things that I really like about your work and about you is that you really emphasize the importance of direct experience. That's something I really agree with and resonate to and have a view of traditional religion that I think you share that if someone had an experience that is profound, other people notice it, and that person will develop a lot of theories about it, and then that becomes dogmatized, and that's for everybody now. Instead, you argue that people need to find their own direct experience somehow and come from that place.

Sergey: Yes, I completely agree with that. I think that the individual, the personal, direct experience is the best teacher. It's that which provides you with immediate experience of reality. It's beyond dogmas, it's beyond concepts, it's beyond words, it's beyond description of what the world really is. And when you have that experience, it empowers you. It empowers you with that knowledge of the moment. That's why it's important. It gives you a certain quality. It teaches you to trust in yourself, to trust in your intuition, to trust in your conviction, and at the same time, to be open for greater knowledge.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, I can see that. In your travels, you've bumped into a number of sort of new age types, hippie types, etc. with new age spiritual ideas, and you really take them to task in your book, and I found that part kind of delightful. Some of the things that you challenge are ideas that are kind of very easily said, like "always be positive," "there's no duality; we're all one," "there's no right or wrong."

Sergey: Right, "there is nothing," basically. It's a very nihilistic point of view, I would say. You know, I'm not against those guys. I have a lot of friends who are hippies and they're good people, basically, well-meaning, good people, but I find the whole movement a bit misguided and lacking a certain philosophical core to it. To me, it seems like a bit more like living without direction, without meaning, without vision. Peaceful, which you have to give them credit for. They're peaceful people mostly and I believe they're sincerely trying to balance the materialistic way of life, which we're used to in the west. However, I also think that this whole mentality is being somewhat controlled and intentionally misguided in order to disorient a person and to keep him in some kind of spiritual vacuum and being disengaged with reality, with what is happening in the world, and kind of it doesn't matter, anything... "I wake up in the morning and have my joint, and all is good," you know. "And everybody is brother and sister," which is ok but it's not enough to live in this world and it's definitely not enough to ensure a future for our degenerated world.

Dr. Dave: Let's talk a little bit about ceremony because that's very central for you. It's not just the plant medicine but there is ceremony around it. So what do you want to tell us about that?

Sergey: Well, ceremony is a way to help you focus, really. It gives you a certain framework and mindset, which prepares you mentally and emotionally for the journey

ahead. So it's an important element. However, I'm trying to keep it to the minimum, not to impose too much of that on the person, because I understand that what's more important is the experience itself.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, there's a danger that ceremony could turn into that sort of repetitious, religious, dogmatic...

Sergey: Yes, that's exactly the danger and I see it happen and I'm trying to avoid it and I'm trying to maintain that neutrality, to respect the way and yet to minimize its effect on the experience of the person. The whole point is to provide a safe environment in which a person can open up and do his work.

Dr. Dave: I really admire not only your persistence on this quest and journey, but also your intellectual rigor around it. You've studied, you've looked at the science of these plants, you've studied that, and what you just said right now about maintaining a certain skepticism about a lot of the stuff that surrounds all of this, I really admire that.

Sergey: Well, it's actually important to maintain a healthy degree of skepticism in your life, in every way. It's not a contradiction at all, living with trust and yet you maintain that until you find more information, more understanding, and you feel into it and you understand "ok, that makes sense," and then that removes the skepticism. That actually should be a scientific approach. It's an inquiry into the nature of things. Unfortunately it has become dogma but that's what I'm trying to reverse, and revive science as I'm trying to contribute to greater knowledge of the shamanic path as I find it myself, just sharing my personal findings and understanding.

Dr. Dave: You're now leading workshops in Peru, where other western people can come and spend time with you and explore some of the things that we've been talking about. What would you like us to know about that?

Sergey: It's not really workshops, you know. I make the house available for people, they can come anytime, and we take the medicine every second day with a day rest in between, we always do it in nature and we embrace that experience and we talk about things, and I see a lot of healings happening here and that's very encouraging and it's very rewarding to see a person coming with one expression on his face and leaving a completely different person in a few weeks. During the years, I've seen a lot of things, which many would be impossible to describe and even to classify. The only thing you could say is, "it was a miracle." That's impossible, but that's not very convincing when you speak to a scientific mind.

Dr. Dave: Now, is this part of how you support yourself though, is people come down and spend time?

Sergey: Yes, absolutely, that's my full time work. That's my work. I see it as a work and as a service. That's how I maintain my family and my life, and that's what I call happiness. Because happiness for me is a very concrete term. It's not a vague, abstract term. Happiness is simply when you are making a living by doing what you love, and I love what I do to make a living, and I am supported by people who love me. So, that's happiness.

Dr. Dave: Do you consider yourself a shaman, do you consider yourself a healer?

Sergey: I consider myself a student of nature, who simply facilitates healing. The healer is the plant.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Well, as we wind down, those are the questions that I had. I wonder if there's anything more that you'd like people to know. One thing is, I'm sure people will want to know your website. I think you have a website.

Sergey: Yes, the website is shamansworld.org, all one word. If I may, I would like to speak directly to your audience and tell the real reason why I'm here today and it's not about my book, that's a side issue of course. The real reason is that for many years now I've been thinking about the idea of bringing shamanism to another level by introducing that into academia. Why? I will explain why exactly. These are the people who are directly involved in the production of [inaudible], because the government consults with certain people in different areas. In this area, in psychedelics, in plants, it's very important to have people who consult the government, who writes the law, in this case prohibiting the use of psychedelics. It's very important to get to those people and to open their minds, to educate them, and to show them a greater deal about that which they think they know. That's why I came to your show because I saw that you have an academic credential, you're a doctor in psychology, and I was very encouraged to do that and through this interview, to call, to invite people to come here with academic credentials – psychologists, psychiatrists, scientists, anyone – who is willing to actually conduct a serious, real research into these phenomena but with a different approach. Instead of measuring the hallucinations and being preoccupied with the size and locations and all that stuff, which is all by observation, I want to change the approach from observable to perceivable. I want you to perceive it directly and then write about, talk about, let's have a mature discussion about psychedelics, about what it is. What it is when you experience that? Not when you take an alkaloid, give it to a person in a clinical setting, creating a completely different environment for him, but to make it experiential. Otherwise, how would you learn about water if you're never willing to swim? So I want to invite people to swim with me in a safe, beautiful, inspiring environment. And most important, in a legal way. What we do here is legal, it's lawful. There is no need to hide, to lie. What we do is known, is legal, and we have to take advantage of this time while it's still legal. I hope it will be that way.

Dr. Dave: Well, that's extraordinary. I know in the '60s, when I was doing my personal explorations of psychedelics, there was always that fear in the back of my mind, particularly when you're wide open and so vulnerable, that somebody could come in and break the door down.

Sergey: That's where you get bad trips. That's what they call bad trips, when you get fear injected in your experience, become paranoid, and it's very hard to get out of this state and it's very dangerous in that sense. If you do it in the right environment, with the right people, with the right attitude, and you know that what you do is legal and it's actually beyond that, what you do is actually a deep exploration of human consciousness and of reality, when you understand that it's your human right to do that and it is supported by local laws, it is a completely different journey. Completely. Together we can find a lot of things. And I respect science, that's why I'm knocking on that door. I respect the scientific approach. I respect scientists. And do you know when it started? Do we have still a few minutes to talk?

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Sure.

Sergey: It started actually a few years back, maybe two years back, when I had a person who came from Russia who was brought by another friend who was here... he wanted me to help him to get rid of alcoholism. He was an alcoholic, but he was a doctor in sciences in Russia. And in Russia, a doctor in sciences is a post-doctorate, it's beyond a PhD kind of thing. It's a title given to people who actually contribute to science and his particular way was something with sources of life. His job was to find the sources of life and protect it. That's the level. He was a professor in a university. But he had an alcohol problem, he was an alcoholic. So he was brought here to me for healing. And during this time – we spent a few weeks together and I took him to some sacred sights and ancient caves, it was incredible – but I found him to be such an interesting person, a true scientist with a great mind, an encyclopedic mind. And yet, this experience, for which he was very skeptical... he came out of necessity, "ok you know, you think that will help me? I am going, but that is going against my education, against everything I believe in." And during these weeks, the transformation I saw, I thought, "my god, these are brilliant people, great people." It was a pleasure to talk to him. Pure scientist. And he was taking people to mountains before I was born. When I was in kindergarten he was already doing expeditions into Russian mountains. And we were sitting here in the mountains, peak of the mountain with a beautiful, gorgeous view, and he's crying, and he's saying you know, "this," referring to this experience because we took the medicine and we are both under the medicine, in it, and he said, "this is the thing that was missing all my life, this is thing." And just crying. A person, he was, I don't know maybe sixty years old. Fifty years of academic studies. And he's telling me what I know. He's confirming that which I know and that which I am trying to express. So I think this is where it started, moving in that direction instead of confronting science, instead of fighting with them. Of course there are dogmatic scientists, and leave them alone. You can't talk to these kinds of people. But not everybody is like that. Same in religion, same in spirituality, not

everyone. So there is a segment of people who are open-minded and willing to explore, willing to break through conditioning and truly explore the meaning of life and the nature of reality. So these are the people I am trying to reach. And I have already started it in spiritual communities. So now I want to do the same with science and bring together two great aspects of human life, religion and science. Because not everything is bad about it.

Dr. Dave: Well, there are many people in academia – many may be too large a word – but there are certainly people in academia who are very passionately interested in the kind of vision that you’re expressing here. I know some of them, I’ve interviewed some of them, there are major conferences on these topics, and maybe eventually you’ll be presenting at some of those conferences. So I think it’s a good vision. I want to thank you for what you’ve shared with us here today. I think at this point we’ll wind it up, but I want to thank you for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio, Sergey Baranov!

Sergey: Thank you, David. It was a pleasure to be here and I enjoyed talking to you.