

Interview by Thierry Soval

(Recorded during our second meeting, January 21, 2021 in Dordogne, France)

Part 1: Shaman?

In your family, do they know that you are a shaman? How do they see it?

So, I don't know if I'm a shaman but my family, yes, they know that I do funny things!

I think my parents, like a lot of parents, are just glad that I am happy with what I do. I think that's enough for them.

My brother, I don't know but I feel nothing but respect.

My sister is the most interested in the sense that we have already done a few things together like shamanic journeys and tree connections. She lives in New York and I would love to do a shamanic workshop there! I am a traveller and decided years ago that "the world is my garden". My shamanic practice very clearly follows this movement.

Do you consider yourself a shaman, then?

I never introduce myself as a shaman. Many people say that I am a shaman but it is above all a facility of the language, the reality is much more complex. Sometimes, immersed in a shamanic session, for example, I have a clear awareness of being me and at the same time "something more than me". These two associated parts, in those moments, know how to do things that I alone cannot do. There are also other times when I am just a practitioner who uses the tools of shamanism, which is not to say that this aspect is any less. Then there are also other times when I feel totally disconnected from everything, just a normal guy. No wonder early anthropologists saw shamans as schizophrenics, right!?

Years ago, I decided to free myself from the word "shaman". I see myself above all as a kind of ferryman who helps people to change shore, a kind of bridge, if you like. I see it all as a personal journey rather than a label. Everything in life is movement.

For me, what is important in the end is the result in the material world and the energy that accompanies it. That is to say, feeling where it comes from; the heart, the ego, a desire for power over the other or is it from co-operating with the other, at the same level as the other? This is so much more important to me than a label!

So, to answer your question, here and now I don't claim to be a shaman. I can, at the very least, assume to be myself, just the way I am, and that's not bad!

Part 2: My story?

How did you come to shamanism?

So, my little story... Do you have something in mind?

Yes, because I have read that most people who have come to shamanic practices or become shamans say that they have had something very difficult in their lives that led them to become shamans. For you too?

For me, there are several things in fact, like several stages. On the one hand, there was a kind of "D-Day", a very special day when everything changed. It happened in a yurt in 2008 in Landes, France. During a shamanic journey I felt something that is really difficult to describe, and I won't go into details but it was a kind of complete reversal of who I was then on all levels. I remember leaving the yurt in a state of ecstasy, "hyper-connected" with everything around me, seeing and feeling the vibrations, the ripples of energy that form our world. That day, I went naked as if "magnetized" into the forest to receive my first initiations. For me, there is a before and after that day in the sense that, indeed, my life has radically changed on all levels. Nevertheless, to bring things back to a more rational dimension, I now know in hindsight that that day is actually part of a long chain of events, a whole life story leading up to that day. Clearly, it didn't just come out of nowhere, either!

Since that day there have been thousands of other initiations, ecstasies, abysses, symbolic deaths and rebirths, but another moment was also very... "particular". I made my first shamanic drum for the new year in 2012. Then in the months that followed I fell seriously ill, until I ended up in hospital for a few weeks in a very weak state with the doctors not being able to figure out what was wrong. I was literally dying. Being HIV positive since 2001, this gave them a welcome rational explanation, even if in the end they never managed to concretely explain what had happened, since all the tests carried out then simply didn't show anything!

So, without going into too much detail, let's say that one of those nights, I received a clear and humorous message from the Spirits who said to me: "Do you really believe that we made you make a drum to let you go now?" I knew then that I was going to live. Then the loud call of a large venerable oak tree in the heart of the forest followed and that's where everything began for me. Having miraculously convinced the doctors to let me out for a day and a night, I went with the help of a friend to see that oak tree. From that moment, back at hospital, I started to recover on my own,

without the doctors understanding anything. That's the closest thing to what you were talking about in your question.

That being said, there is obviously so much more than just these two events that I am telling you about here. I see all of this, once again, much more of a global journey than it seems by just telling you these two pieces of history. My path is obviously much more than that...

Part 3: The caves

There is one thing that especially interests me, that is the subject of prehistory. I have the impression that you have an interest in prehistory that goes beyond a personal interest.

Yes, because there is also a shamanic interest. I don't know if what I'm going to say is correct but that's how I see it. The shamanism that I practice is a shamanism whose roots lie in something archaic, prehistoric. I realized this when I came to live in Dordogne, France and encountered the energy of the caves there. I feel that it nourishes my practice of shamanism.

What do you feel in the cave?

It depends on the caves. There is such a wide palette! If we take the example of "Combarelles", which is one of my favourite caves, I feel a powerful energy of initiation every time. When I'm there, I can't shake the sensation of imagining the humans who entered this place crawling in the light of their oil lamps with the vision of thousands of engravings in all directions for hundreds of metres along the long underground passage. And I feel that, somehow, you could only come out of it different, transformed. That's what I call an incredible initiation!

Because it is not just entering or being in the cave that moves me, but also the moment you come out. Going into the light again and capturing the return of the birdsong, the sight of the trees, the air so different from that of the cave, etc. All of this is an opportunity to come back to life. This type of cave contains the potential for metamorphosis, death and rebirth. In this sense, it is for me, deeply shamanic.

Do you feel closer to the earth there?

I mostly feel as if in a womb. It's a bit of a cliché to say it, but it's the case! The cave is still a very special place. It is dark, humid and almost always has the same

temperature, so it is a timeless place, or rather out of “normal” time. Staying inside a cave gradually makes our usual points of reference disappear and creates new ones at the level of all our senses. It is a kind of passage to another world. This is why, once again, it is very shamanic. One can suddenly feel in a state of being between two worlds like in shamanism. We find ourselves between the world outside and the one behind the wall. The wall is a communication interface, a porous membrane. It is not there just for us to make pretty drawings on... Moreover, even without engraving or drawing anything on it, the simple fact of touching the wall, which of course is prohibited in our protected caves, is a profound act of communication. Any human being, in front of a wall, has the instinct to want to touch it, as if facing a majestic tree or a stone. Going beyond words, which can be debated, it is good to feel its energy and communicate its own energy. Feel the energy of this vast and mysterious other dimension. It is recognizing that it is not totally detached from us and that we can, therefore, communicate with it. This is what shamanism does. This is why the caves nourish my being and my practice.

Part 4: One or many Shamanism(s)?

I have read that there are several kinds of shamanism. Which do you practice?

There are apparently various types of shamanism but beyond the details, shamanism is for me, first and foremost, the oldest cultural background common to humanity. This is for me the most important and what especially resonates the most with my shamanic practice, which I feel is connected to this archaism.

Later, of course, cultures evolved and shamanic practices have been coloured by these cultural differences to the point that they sometimes seem very far from each other. In this sense, I feel that my shamanic practice essentially has its roots in our European roots, because I am European. At the same time, because nowadays our planet is like a village, my practice is also irrigated by shamanism from other horizons. This is why it is more important for me to feel above all an open and traveling human being. I do not deny my roots and at the same time do not reject anything that comes from elsewhere.

That being said, there is still for me a specific shamanic path, the one of “hallucinogenic plants or mushrooms” which, so far at least, is not my path. I have no judgment on this path that I deeply respect, I just see, here and now (and who knows what the future holds) that I have not encountered it. The one I practice is much more based on sounds, body movements, trance, drumming, etc. But here too, what I have just said must not give the impression that I am separating shamanic paths which wouldn't have bridges and wouldn't interpenetrate; No, that's just a personal observation. And I suddenly come back again and again to the old common fund. Shamanism is alive and well and adapts to everything, since the beginning of time. I don't know of any two shamans who practice exactly the same way.

Part 5: Quetzal?

Where does your name Quetzal come from?

The simplest answer is: after years of shamanic journeying, I received the name 'Quetzal' from the Spirits. Like every name, it is first of all a vibration but also the fruit of a story, mine, intimate, shamanic, family, ancestral, etc... I could write an entire library about my shamanic name with so many ramifications that I see in every direction! But beyond that, I feel the profound accuracy, wisdom and crazy precision. What I mean is that I have been observing for many years how every "detail" of the path is exactly, precisely, in its place. Also, my name. And all my cells recognize themselves in this shamanic name.

Quetzal, is it a bird from Mexico?

Among others things. It is also the root of the feathered serpent, Quetzalcoatl, but also, as I just said, a thousand other things that cannot be reduced to these two aspects. And like every shamanic name, I still discover certain aspects of it from time to time, like a long and continuous initiation through what at first glance seems banal, a name.

Can you give me an example?

Yes. A few years ago, for example, I suddenly realized during a shamanic journey that the first and last letters of Quetzal are the reverse of my last name Lecoq. And I could develop so many things, just with this "detail"!

Receiving a shamanic name is not intended to replace my original family name. On the contrary, the two co-operate, are complementary; one pays his taxes and the other navigates a shamanic world, at the risk of sounding schizophrenic! Both define me on different levels. Different but not opposite, because the goal for me is to be whole. Getting just a little closer every day to who I really am, which is to say, like everyone else, a mix of energies.

And yet, it was not easy at the beginning and for quite a while to assume my shamanic name. Behind all this, there is the path to legitimacy and the courage to bring it to light, to even pronounce it, to be gazed at by another; an inevitably false perspective since they do not know me, etc... I think this part of the path is important and helps to have perspective, relativity and humility, at least for me. All of this is part of a sort of safeguard to remain grounded, which for me is crucial if you want to do shamanism. Anyway, that's how it is and it's perfect like that!

Part 6: Nature

Has your relationship with nature changed since your first shamanic experience?

Yes, it has absolutely changed one hundred percent!

What has changed?

Absolutely everything. Here it's a total reversal, too. Before, I was literally afraid of the forest, a real terror, and for me back then, the "worst" forest was the forest in Les Landes in France! Yet it was precisely there, in that forest, where it all began. As I have already told you, my first act after this jump into the shamanic cauldron, was to go alone and naked into that forest and be taught by the trees and animals I encountered there. It's hard to make a more radical change!

Since then, it's been the other way around, I find it difficult to imagine my life without the possibility of immersing myself in nature, of being connected to it in one way or another. I have lived and continue to experience my greatest initiations there. I feel humble and often very small in nature, aware of being faced with something so vast, so deep, so magical. It's like an open book of small and big miracles.

Do you ever go into the forest and sit there without anything, with no drum, just sitting among the trees?

Yes, of course, in the end that's what I do most often, simply taking the time to sit at the foot of a tree, on a rock and let my senses simply be there in an exchange of energy. It is, for me, like a concentrate of shamanic practice, that is to say, patiently learning to dialogue with "the subtle". Sometimes I play the drum or the jaw harp but that's not at all obligatory, it's more the exception than the rule.

What seems more important to me is the quality of being, the attention paid to what surrounds me at that moment. I now know very well how I "function" in nature. Even when I go there without any purpose, I often let myself be called by a stick, a leaf, a stone, a pine tree, a moss or something else, something that I keep in my hand while I walk. Then, this something will be offered at some point to a place I come across, whether it is a tree, a rock or something else. What I mean is that when I let my human nature be free, it naturally begins to dialogue through exchange and gratitude, first by offering, then eventually by receiving. Even if the offering is often just a pleasure without expectation, a simple way to nourish the "path of beauty", as I call it. A tiny piece of moss can then be transformed into an extraordinary altar. And if I remain open, whatever the colour of the experience of the moment, I come out changed, different, generally having grown.

In these moments, I am aware that I am in a space that welcomes me. I often ask the entrance guards for permission to pass. I do not enter there as a conqueror but with the humility of someone who is not at home. In the end, it's like meeting a stranger or going to see a friend. Even more so in places where we often return, there is the joy of meeting an old friend. This is what happens in these so-called personal places of power. Power in shamanism does not mean that we have control over something but rather that somehow, we co-operate with the place, which gives us strength. It is like an anchor point in the shamanic cartography which is both from the subtle worlds and this earthly world. They are places where we have woven something special. They balance us and are, for me, essential points of the/my great web of life, of the "wyrd" as they say.

So yes, like everyone, I simply love walking in nature but I also love feeling called by a tree, a piece of wood, a stone, the moon, a shape, a colour, following the thread and seeing where that takes me. Everything is teaching when you take the time to listen. I'm not saying this as a moral or advice, it's just my experience. Sometimes, I come back with immense gifts, a staff of power, a drumstick, a witch's broom; and in any case most often with the heart, the cells, the soul, realigned, expanded, taught by the Spirits of the great web of life. Or more simply, just lighter, just right. Can we dream of better than that?