

Transpersonal *Longevity*

By Mara Bishop, MS, ThM, CSC

Particularly around the holidays, I think of those who came before me—family members, both living and dead, with whom I share bonds of genetics, rituals, and memories. Through rituals, emotional and temporal links are forged season after season. For example, my paternal grandmother's spirit is kept alive in our hearts in holiday celebrations and throughout the year through her recipes, which we enjoy with a generation who never met her when she was alive. And my maternal grandmother is alive in spirit as well. Her love of nature lives on in me, and her drum is used in my shamanic practice and will one day be passed on to my daughter.

When I think about the continuum of our lives as individuals, families, and communities, memories of generations past and thoughts of generations to come blend together. As we age we may become less concerned with our individual needs and more with those of our children or the others who depend on us. Sometimes those needs are immediate or short-term, sometimes they involve long-term planning. Neither of my grandmothers was especially concerned about healthy diets, or supplementing with vitamins, or certainly with getting enough exercise, but they were both interested in longevity, and what they were leaving for the next generation.

Vibrant mental and physical health paired with a long life hopefully equates to the privilege of enjoying more time on this beautiful planet with those we love. This is a healthy and natural goal; however, the pursuit of personal longevity and youthful appearance have become cultural obsessions. After 20 years of working with clients (and aging!), I find myself more interested in the concept of transpersonal longevity.

Creating transpersonal longevity, as I'm using the phrase, is about creating healthy living systems that are broader and deeper than any one individual. One aspect of that for me means thinking about my ancestors in relation to my descendants. It's keeping alive the stories from my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents: who they were, where they lived, what they cooked,

what choices they made and why, how they struggled, where they found joy. Talking about these things goes beyond nostalgia. Honoring our ancestors links the genetic and spiritual chain of the generations to help us learn and expand from those who came before.

Each generation has an opportunity to learn from the previous one, but we also have the opportunity to help heal some of their woundedness as we relate to those who come next. This relationship parallels the way we interact with the physical environment. What are we doing now that positively or negatively affects the air, water, and land that will greet our great-great-grandchildren? Similarly how are we teaching this generation to treat each other and themselves, and how will those values ripple out temporally into the future creating compassionate communities, or those indifferent to suffering?

From the shamanic perspective everything is connected: the physical and energetic systems in our bodies, the environments we are part of, our families and communities, those who've passed on, and those who've yet to be born. Our relationship with each system impacts our collective health and longevity. Of course we should tend our own bodies and surroundings well. But we should also pay attention to how our actions contribute to the health and wellness of those who come after us, or are near us, or who are connected to us in some other way. Our transpersonal longevity, and more importantly the quality of life associated with that longevity, will be measured by how we affected those beings and systems. hkh



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She holds master's degrees in Energy Medicine and Theology and a bachelor's degree in Art and Communications. She is a graduate of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies Three-Year Program in Advanced Shamanism and Shamanic Healing, Sandra Ingerman's Shamanic Teacher Training program, and advanced training with Betsy Bergstrom. Mara is the only Harner Certified Shamanic Counselor® in North Carolina.

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