

Healing Empathic Overload

Shamanism and Energetic Boundaries

By Mara Bishop, MS, THM, CSC

Our biggest challenges in life can also be our biggest strengths. Perhaps because this has been true in my personal and professional life, I can help clients to see that pattern more readily in their own lives. We are often drawn to work in a given field, not only because of an innate ability, but because we can deepen our understanding of ourselves in the process.

I've dealt with the challenges of being energetically sensitive. Early on I didn't realize what caused certain reactions, but knew I was affected in ways not everyone seemed to be. This took its toll on my body, mind, and spirit. I remember being at church with my family once when I was a teenager. My attention was drawn toward the front of the church to a man I didn't know. I knew he was in pain, although there weren't any external indications of his suffering. Nevertheless, I hurt; feeling his sadness as if it were my own. Later I learned this was an empathic reaction—a moment of transcending personal boundaries and feeling another's emotion. I had taken his sadness on as my own, without intention or control. It was a pivotal moment for me, at once disturbing, tender, and revelatory.

Other experiences as a young person made me question the nature of reality and how we relate beyond the physical. That exploration, and particularly how we use that understanding to help alleviate suffering, became the focus of my professional path. Practicing shamanic journeying and healing, and other spiritually-oriented modalities, helped me engage the world with new awareness. I'll always have heightened sensitivity for other conscious beings and my surroundings, but generally those perceptions inform my world for the better now, rather than overwhelming me. Years of practice and some wonderful teachers have allowed me to become more adept at opening and closing my energetic and personal boundaries as I choose.

If you have a naturally porous energetic personality type—habitually absorbing energy from people, places, and situations—empathic overload can take its toll. However, working consciously with the heightened perceptions that often accompany this personality type can be a gift. I work with clients to share what I've learned. It's incredible to see the shifts that happen with a combination of looking at old patterns in new ways, experiencing healing work that directly addresses problematic situations, and making changes outside of session time.

One client I worked with absorbed what wasn't hers, and was not healthy, at a young age. This contributed to physical issues (chronic throat issues, headaches, gastrointestinal issues) and corresponding emotional/interpersonal issues (an inability to speak up for herself, lack of self worth, inability to trust others). I started by clearing intrusive energy. Next, I sought to restore her innate energy that had leached out over time or disconnected through trauma, causing a lack of personal power and often an overreaction to outside stimuli. After several sessions, she reported a significant decrease in headaches, a reduction in her throat issues, and that she was speaking more effectively on her own behalf.

Often sensitive people who are raised in households with unpredictable or unsupportive caregivers—such as the presence of alcoholism or emotional abuse, for example—struggle with their energetic boundaries. They are frequently reacting to, or trying to predict, someone else's mood. Often the feedback they receive about their worth is negative and the appropriate caregiving dynamic is skewed. This initial experience colors future interpersonal dynamics. Addressing this from a purely physical or psychological level can only go so far. By working directly on the energetic level, in parallel with medical or psychological care as needed, we can make significant shifts.

Just as it's important to have discernment over our levels of physical and emotional intimacy, it's important that we make deliberate choices about levels of energetic intimacy. It leaves us vulnerable in relationships when we are unable to say "no" to an intrusion on our energetic space. Our bodies can overload and respond physically with chronic pain or overblown immune responses. Cognitively we can become foggy and out of focus when we've absorbed too much. And emotionally we can become anxious or depressed. Specific methods address these effects. Many of my clients report a decrease in troubling symptoms, and a greater ability to help themselves independently, after just a few sessions.

While everyone has an individual path, it helps to work with a practitioner who has traveled some of the same territory and has personal understanding of the dynamics of energetic sensitivity. Shamanism has been invaluable to me. One of my great joys is sharing that journey with others; literally, with the specific technique of shamanic journeying, and more broadly in helping others on their journey to create healthy, vibrant lives. **h&h**



Mara Bishop is a shamanic practitioner, intuitive consultant, teacher, author, and artist. In her Personal Evolution Counseling™ practice in Durham, she combines intuitive consultations, shamanic healing, and energetic healing. She works with clients locally, nationally, and internationally. She is the author of Inner Divinity, Crafting Your Life with Sacred Intelligence, and the companion CD of guided meditations.

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.

DISTANCE HEALING SESSIONS

Monday, March 7 – 6:00 pm

Wednesday, March 16 – 12:00 pm

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