

TOGETHER WE ARE STRONG

My name is John Lockley, and my sangoma name is Ucingolwendaba which means 'the messenger', or 'bridge between people and cultures.' I am an adopted member of the Xhosa tribe, the same tribe that gave us Nelson Mandela, and Desmond Tutu



Sangomas are the dreamers and medicine people, or - if you will - the traditional dancing monks and nuns of Southern Africa. Sangoma medicine forms the bedrock of thousands of years of Southern African spirituality.

As we forge a new vision of our human family we need to know where we come from. Xhosa sangoma medicine forms a link in our collective human story, for unlike many traditional cultures, they have not lost contact with their old ways and traditions; their culture is like gold because their

medicine lineages are timeless.

The world, as we know it, is dying, and we all need to stand together to bring through a greater awareness of nature and our connectedness with the past through our ancestors. Within these areas, Xhosa medicine is invaluable because it has maintained the timelessness of humanity through remembering its elders and the old ways of working with nature.

As we all are said to come from Africa, it is important for African spirituality to be explored and understood more, and as

understanding of traditional South African healing grows, there will be more respect and trust.

Part of my work is to educate people about sangoma spirituality, as for too long African healers have been misunderstood and collectively tarnished with the brush of 'witchcraft' and practitioners of 'black magic'. This negative stereotyping has severely affected sangoma medicine culture. Sangoma teachings are called *Ubuntu Ubunzulu* which means 'the depth of humanity,' and I think Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu are fine examples of this.

Below: the reality of life in the overcrowded slum-like South African townships





left: John and another sangoma during a thanksgiving ceremony

I am sometimes shocked at how shamanism is glamorised in the West, and I think it is important for people practicing shamanism to know what it is like for traditional shamans who carry the old ways of our ancient humanity.

It is also important to distinguish between traditional and contemporary shamanism; in our culture someone can only be called a sangoma after the elders have witnessed their gift. These medicine elders are part of a timeless lineage, to be an apprentice to them means to serve your teacher and community, and serving brings about humility, and humility is what connects us to the Great Spirit.

With grinding poverty, disease and a high death rate, it is very easy for hopelessness to sink in. So part of my role is to spread hope. I hold a mirror to the people and show them how beautiful their culture is, and how beautiful they are. I have started a rallying cry amongst the sangoma medicine people in our family - *zingceni ngamasiko enul* (Be proud of your culture!)

I encourage my Xhosa community to remember the old ways of their ancestors, the ways of dreaming and plants, because these ways are so fragile and so beautiful.

In South Africa I am on the front lines between white and black, Western and traditional, poverty and illness set against health and wealth. This is a unique position, and has taught me the true value of what it means to be human. It has taught me *Ubuntu*, humanness, and this is what I teach. I spend about four months every year in South

Africa, and three of those with my teacher and fellow sangomas in townships and rural areas of the Eastern Cape.

Townships are the areas where black people were forced to live during apartheid. Now they are working class areas inhabited almost exclusively by black people.

Most of my fellow sangomas suffer incredible poverty, and in the last three years, four members of our inner circle have died due to poverty, illness or tragedy. It is hard returning from my travels to the graveside of a friend.

Many of my friends in the township see Europe and America as a way out of poverty and think that if they could work and earn pounds or dollars then all their problems will go away. But I tell them this is not so. Europe and America don't have the connectedness to the ancestors and the spirit world the way they do.

I have been given permission by my elders at home to spread these unique and ancient medicine teachings, and every year I travel around the UK, Ireland, the USA & Mexico. In Europe and the Western world I show people how to remember their ancestors and dreams through prayer, meditation, ceremony and medicinal plants.

I am currently fundraising for renovation work on my teacher's herbal consulting rooms. Her house forms the focal point in our community, and is where she runs her sangoma training school. Extra funds will go towards our traditional ceremonies, and a medical fund to help my teacher in her old age.

Today, I ask for your help in keeping the Xhosa traditions alive and remembered, and for helping

me with my vision of remembering the old ways of our Ancestors - for we are all connected. As the traditional Xhosa way is honoured then *Ubuntu* or humanity is strengthened. And so I ask the international shamanic community for funds to help maintain and strengthen the sangoma practice.

The words *sinamandla kunye* means 'together we are strong', and we can all make a difference to preserve traditional culture and ancient medicine teachings! As one person begins to connect and dream of his ancestors, so a profound remembering of the human spirit is achieved and we all benefit as a human family.

John Lockley is a traditionally trained Xhosa sangoma or African shaman from South Africa. In his late teens he received his calling in South Africa to become a sangoma, unfortunately apartheid was in full force then and he was not allowed to go into the townships to train. Eventually he left South Africa, but returned again in 1993 at the time when apartheid was crumbling and John met his teacher Mum Gwevu, a well known sangoma in the Xhosa tribe. John apprenticed with Mum Gwevu for over ten years, becoming one of the first traditionally trained white men in recent years to be given the title of sangoma

For the last five years John has been bringing traditional sangoma medicine to the West, and is now appealing to groups or individuals for support in helping him to bring these teachings to the world, as without support he will not be able to continue to return to the West. His main requirement is help with the organising of workshops.

If you would like to be part of John's vision and work, please contact him or make a contribution towards his 'Ubuntu fund'.

Donations can be made via Paypal to this email address john_leaf@yahoo.com

Please title the payment 'Ubuntu - Sangoma township fund'.

John wishes to give special thanks to all those people who have already contributed!

www.african-shaman.com



Left: John and other sangomas rest after a ceremony