

SUSTO

SOUL LOSS

By Mary Sky

Recently on a bus ride through the high mountains of the Sacred Valley near Urubamba, Peru, I indicated to our driver to stop and pick up a young mother who was walking along the roadside carrying her young baby on her back. This is the usual way that young children are carried here in Peru from birth.

This young mother, dressed in the traditional local attire only spoke the local dialect of Quecha. But through our driver we learned that she was on her way to visit the local resident shaman. The previous evening there had been a lightening and thunder storm and the baby had been severely frightened by this. Since then, had not slept and was very irritable, crying and anxious. The baby, he explained, had "Susto", fright. Sometimes translated as "Soul Loss".

And mum was off immediately to see the shaman to rectify this upset. What impressed me was the immediate response to this event. No waiting around for further symptoms to appear and for this to become an even greater problem.

The Shaman I heard only works two days a week... impressive, something we in the west could learn from I thought. This "Susto", would be treated with prayer, massage and perhaps some local herbal medicines.

There are many reasons why Susto happens. The possibility of this is not recognised in western culture and medicine. This, I believe, is a pity, as I also feel that many subsequent issues and indeed illnesses that emerge could be remedied if Susto or Soul Loss was recognised at the outset such as in the case of this young mother.

According to the Mayan tradition, Susto or fright is the most common spiritual disease. Susto affects the emotional, spiritual and physical equilibrium. Fright is the great thief of "ch'ulel" or life force and sends a deep internal shock through the system. That shock inhibits the immune system from fighting off disease, irritates the nervous system, haunts the psyche, disturbs digestion and can cause headaches, nightmares and panic attacks.

Some people have the feeling that nothing is right in their lives.

DIS-EASE / ILLNESS

There are both physical and spiritual causes of illness.

Soul loss is a universal theme. Ancient cultures believe that souls can be frightened away, wander off or be abducted. Modern day soul loss can spring from the "traumas of modern life"

Sandra Ingerman writes;

"Incest, abuse, loss of loved ones, accidents, wartime experiences, major illnesses, surgeries; these are all assaults that can catapult the soul from the body. Faced with these kind of stresses, the sensitive human soul may flee the body, never to return."

The soul or vital essence separates from the body in order to survive the experience by escaping the full impact of pain. What constitutes trauma varies from one individual to another.

Children are particularly susceptible to soul loss. Soul loss at any age leaves people feeling dispirited, weak, fragmented and disassociated from themselves and the world. Many teenagers and adults make miss-guided attempts to reconnect with their souls, filling the void with drugs, alcohol, food and/or obsessive relationships.

Therapy may not help because as Sandra Ingerman says, *"Nobody is home to be helped"*.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE A SPIRITUAL ILLNESS?

Symptoms might include;

1. Nightmares with recurrent themes
2. Feeling disconnected from the body
3. Feeling depleted and listless
4. Bad luck and misfortune
5. Frequent domestic quarrelling
6. A history of substance abuse
7. A tendency to be inordinately angry
8. A weak immune system
9. Sudden bouts of heart palpitations
10. A tendency to be over tearful

The body and mind will look for many ways to come back into balance and harmony with itself often with little result, other than a deepening of the symptoms. We try again and again ending up looping in endless cycles of destructive behaviours which become exhausting and counter-productive.

HOW TO CHECK IF YOU HAVE SOUL LOSS?

ADULTS

Recent event: sufferers may experience a sudden disruption in their emotional balance.

Older event: Long history of vague illness, failed romances, fears, depression. Easily frightened and jumpy. Often breaking into tears without warning and feeling confused. May be anxious and/or exhibit antisocial behaviour.

Other symptoms may include, hair falling out, dry skin, rashes, eating pattern disturbance. Indigestion and diarrhoea often alternate with constipation.

EVENTS THAT CAN CAUSE SUSTO AND SOUL LOSS.

What might cause Susto in one person may go right by another person.

Witnessing a frightening event of any kind. Seeing a violent fight erupt between adults is traumatising for children, especially in the household. Going to a wake or a funeral too early in life may be traumatising if the age-appropriate explanation and support is not available.

- The sudden death or suicide of a family member.
- Violent spanking and physical abuse.
- Violent toilet training.
- Violent movies and television shows.
- Being in an accident.
- Abandonment.
- Severe bullying by peers.
- Hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, tornados, floods etc.
- Being born into and living in war zones.
- Receiving bad news.
- Susto babies are cranky and unhappy, do not play or smile as much as they should and may tend to aggression with their peers. May not eat well and throw up frequently. Rashes and diarrhoea are common.

CHILDREN

The child with Susto behaves poorly and erratically and probably gets into trouble in school.

There seems to be a pattern in his or her behaviour. These children can have trouble making friends and can often fuss more than play when they do have playmates. These children may also be labelled hyperactive or emotionally disturbed. May have erratic sleep patterns and night terrors.

It appears to me that what is missing in our allopathic culture of medicine is soul care, care of the whole of the person. We treat the knee, the hip, the liver even the physical heart. We treat the part not the whole. And the spiritual aspect of the person is certainly missing from the culture. We are so much more than our physical body and we are so much more than the pain that can manifest in this body. Our bodies exhibit discomfort and pain for reasons that are sometimes unknown to us. Our intelligent body is constantly attempting to communicate with us. If we are not, or cannot listen then the message perhaps gets louder until we can do nothing but listen. Louise Hay was a great pioneer of the intelligence of the physical body. Her book *You Can Heal Your Life* has been a pivotal book in the embodiment movement.

Embodiment being the coming into communion, into harmony, comfort and well-being within your own body. How many of us take "ownership" of the gift of this human form? We inhabit this form for a short time only, so very often not even occupying it totally.

Soul loss can be an insidious, slow disenchantment with life. Low energy, lack of enthusiasm, apathy. All these and more are the more hidden and taken for granted symptoms of soul loss. Often those experiencing these symptoms expect this and less

from a life that can be ruled by the clock and by exhaustion. Our western culture of materialism demands a lot from us. So much so that we hardly notice the vitality being sucked out of us until often its too late. And we end up in a hospital bed at the mercy of the pharmaceutical industry to keep us ticking over, barely.

Recently I was at the behest of the medical system for an x-ray of a broken rib. A small thing thankfully that will heal with love, gratitude and patience. While having the x-ray I was being pushed and prodded with so little empathy for the pain and discomfort I was in that I turned to my torturer!! A young man barely qualified, I reminded him quite fiercely which was the machine he was working with and which the human being!

So desensitised was he that he barely saw that I was in pain and not just a "rib", that had been broken. Was he a victim of soul loss.....possibly? He certainly was not present either to himself or to me on a basic human level. I hope the reminder prodded him to consider a more gentle approach to his patients.

So much of this dissociation is present in our western culture. Could soul loss be the cause? How many of us have experienced traumas, either at birth or as children and ongoing into our life? How many of us have been treated by a system ignorant of soul, only for our symptoms and not for the root cause of these symptoms. Why do we get ill? Why do we have accidents?

Why get depressed, lonely, anxious? Where is the root cause of our symptoms? When do we become a victim of our culture rather than an empowered member of a society that can heal itself? For within each one of us is a vast wisdom and intelligence, within this very body there are many secrets on how we can heal ourselves.

I remember as a nurse standing at the bedsides of the ageing elderly, of men and women who had ceased to be able to self-care or for that matter to be able to do anything for themselves. Pondering the question, when does this begin? How does this begin? Each one of these people had been at some point in their incarnation a vital, vibrant human being. When do we begin to give up on life?

These questions have urged me onward to consider different cultures ways of treating illnesses and of treating Susto or Soul Loss. I feel we have so much to learn from these traditions, so much to re-member from our deep soul.

Soul Loss can be addressed with self-care, with prayer, with recognition that there is an incomplete feeling or absence within oneself. With an empathic healer these symptoms can be addressed before they exhibit symptoms that require hospitalisation and or medication.

Meditation and mindfulness practices can assist in bringing the fragmented aspects of the self, of the mind home. Gentle massage and healing helps to re-enter the body, to enliven the parts that have been left vacant, empty of self, of essence. For it is the essence of the person that departs, that becomes frozen in the time and place of the trauma and that needs to be called home. Called back to the body from which it departed for whatever reason.

The incident on the mountain in Peru impressed in me the need for presence with our children, with our newborns and with each other. Any sign of Susto, or soul loss can be addressed immediately. But we as parents, teachers and friends etc need to be awake to recognising it when it occurs. Presence but also action. This young mother, through her fast response was possibly averting future issues with her child.