

Change Your Story, Change Your Life: Using Shamanic and Jungian Tools to Achieve Personal Transformation

An Interview with Carl Greer, PhD, PsyD

by Nancy Eichhorn, PhD



Carl Greer started wandering along a shamanic path close to 15 years ago. Perhaps even longer if you consider his passion for the esoteric, his extensive martial arts training, and a deepening Qigong practice that began well over 20 years ago. Today, at age 74, Carl is walking in yet another reflective dimension—the sense of wanting to give back to the collective consciousness that fueled his journeys into clinical psychology, Jungian analysis, shamanic healing, teaching, and private practice. His thoughts about giving back and how that would look motivated him, in part, to write this book.

“It found me. I found it,” Carl says when asked about grounding his spiritual work within a Jungian analytic frame and writing *Change Your Story, Change Your Life*. “I was interested in shamanism all my life. I read stories by Lynn V. Andrews (*a shaman, healer, teacher, and New York Times bestselling author*). But I never felt I was able to pull up and apprentice someplace for eight months at a time. I had a cognitive understanding. I was fascinated. But I never had the

experiential. Then, in (*the year*) 2,000, I read Alberto Villoldo’s book, *Shaman, Healer, Sage*, and went down the path with him. I trained at his Healing the Light Body School and taught as a member of his staff.”

“Over the years I have gone to a variety of places around the world to work with shamans,” Carl adds. “And over those years, I chronicled my adventures.”

Carl culled a decade of journal entries detailing his experiences. Initially, the stories were jotted down for himself. Writing was a useful tool to help him capture ideas, sensations, considerations, to make sense of all the experiences he was having in the jungles and mountains with various shamans. He knew that he needed to excerpt and



refine the material for his book, needed to rein in the larger expanse of his knowing—he could have gone down more paths, he said, commenting that the early drafts of the book involved quantum physics. But Carl knew that he had to be parsimonious in deciding what to emphasize. It was quite a process winnowing the material down, deciding what he wanted to have and then condense it. He wanted to create a balance between left brain ego consciousness and analysis and right brain experiential. His focal point was always his audience: Who am I writing this book for?

Participants in a workshop on Carl Jung and Shamanism, which Carl led, expressed interest in doing further training with him. He decided to teach his workshop participants how to operationalize their transcendent experiences into everyday life—the spiritual aspects of their lives were currently not tied into their day-to-day reality; they wanted integration. Carl noticed that people attending his trainings and workshops as well as clients coming for healing work (be it psychotherapeutic or shamanic) were hungry for ceremony and ritual, for being in nature—nature is transformative, it has its own wisdom, and through it we can connect to our own innate healing. Yet, figuring out how we can best relate to nature respectfully

and cautiously, and move beyond the criticism that this is merely new age “woo woo” thinking, poses a challenge.

“People were stuck in their story. They had no traction in life. I used the story motif in my workshops, and I really got into the flow of writing my book when I decided to base my work on stories. It liberated me. I like stories, we create our lives around stories. Story then became the idea for the book. A lot of things flowed at this point.”

“We all have a story that we can change if we’re not happy with it. I want the book to be a message of hope that it is possible to change. I offer a pathway, not the only way, but a way to do that, which requires using the Ego consciousness to reflect upon what our story is. At first, people don’t want to tell the story that is, they want to share the story they want others to believe about them. In order to make changes in your life, you have to be truthful with yourself first, then you have to take stock of ‘what is’ without becoming emotionally attached.”

According to Carl, anyone can do it but you have to be ruthlessly compassionate with yourself and look at the entire truth. You have to be honest with yourself and ask, “What do I want and what is realistic?” Carl offers an example in the book of a 50-year-old man who wants to become more athletic. Sure, he can’t do the 100-yard dash in 10 seconds but he can participate in a race among athletes in his age group. Ruthless compassion involves looking at themes, patterns in your life; for instance, why do I work so hard but never get to the top? Or, why am I always the bridesmaid and never the bride? Or, why do I get into significant relationships and then they fall apart?

“I found if people are patient with themselves, if they are willing to honor little changes, a little hint of a change, and then in their next interaction they might try to do things differently. Perhaps they will decide to not eat the same food, or drink. It sets the stage for experiments so they can try to get out of the habitual way of responding and



maybe move toward change. It's difficult to get it to stick, to follow through."

"I suggest to people that because some of the practices are lengthy, that it's useful to do them in small pieces. I wanted a blend between right brain and left brain approaches. I don't want readers to be so involved with the left brain that they don't have the experience, or so involved with the right brain that they don't apply the experience to their life. This was a challenge and fun to wrestle with how best to do it. The practices I include do echo my use of Jungian language—shadow, persona, anima, animus, complex, and archetype. I explain those terms in the book."

The exercises in the book teach people how to look at the circle of themes—themes within themes—and the reader's own ability to self-heal those themes on a cognitive level and in an experiential field. They can be done solo, in dyads, and in a group format.

"No one knows us as well as our self," Carl says. "Our 'Inner Knower' can access our Self through an inner process. We have to be

able to laugh at our inner foibles, to laugh at the experience of how I manage to get myself into this same pickle again. There is no state of perfection, we just move a little bit at a time. We move a little closer to Spirit. Anyone, wherever you are, can move along that dimension."

Writing the book became an organic, one-step-at-a-time experience. "If you would have asked me three or four years ago if I was going to publish a book I would have said, 'You're nuts.' I'm somebody who finds the actual physical process of writing is difficult. I do everything by hand or dictation. I don't type and the actual process of writing is arduous. I had wonderful editors, and my secretary, who has Photo by Marcela Lobos been with me for 47 years (*she's 87 years old and she's never missed a day of work because of illness*) typed numerous drafts. Then there's the whole world of publishing and how to publish a book today. I got an agent. The publishers asked: What have you written before, who is your audience, who is your social media following? I had never written a book, and I had no social media presence."

A Blend of Science and Spirit

Shamanic work requires people to come within, to be in a quiet place where there is less brain wave activity, less frontal lobe action, going from a sympathetic nervous system existence to a parasympathetic state. Breathing exercises, meditation, rattling, and drumming are ways to enter this place, to access and be more available to the energies around you. Here, innate healing possibilities are said to exist and to potentially be stimulated by the practices Carl suggests. His exercises are designed to help readers connect to other realms, what Carl calls the “transpersonal realms”, to reference the energy and transformation that is all around.

“Everything that comes in is information and it affects our thoughts, emotions, and our body chemistry. Our thoughts have consequences. Particularly the parameters that interact with respect, gratitude, willingness, and the sense of ‘thy will be done’. Ultimately there’s a greater agency that we can’t control. We come from the quiet

place before Creation, the place before the Big Bang Universe. We can co-create with these energies, more than we think, in our lifetime.”

“Just like homeopathy is the energetic essence of something that has the same biological effect as the chemical from which it was derived, internalized thoughts can affect us. If you put a new symbol into the mix, it affects all of our systems.”

Working as a licensed clinical psychologist, Jungian analyst, and shaman, Carl explains that although his time frame shifts—frequent one-hour sessions when doing classical analysis versus working with a client for several hours then not seeing the client again for several weeks (sent home with exercises to practice over that time) when involved with Shamanic healing—the basic foundation remains the same: making the unconscious conscious. He comes from a depth psychology perspective and works with transpersonal places in the unconscious.





Shamanic nature paintings donated by Carl Greer

“The dialogue process I describe in the book is like the Jungian active imagination and Perl’s chairs. The relationship with inner figures and symbols is consistent across all three (*psychology, analysis and shamanic work*). Sand tray work represents the inner psychic phenomena; I’m giving the same perspective in the book in the sand painting work in nature. I’m trying to have left brain practices like journaling and reflections as a way to explore the impasse where their story is known, they know what they would like it to be, so why are they not living their new story? Good intentions are not enough. Other parts of ourselves are keeping us from doing it. We get to those parts with practices (shamanic and Jungian), making the unconscious more conscious.”

Carl Greer PhD, PsyD, is a practicing clinical psychologist, Jungian analyst, and shamanic practitioner. His shamanic work is drawn from a mix of North American and South American indigenous traditions and is influenced by Jungian analytic psychology. He has worked or trained with shamans on five continents and trained at Dr. Alberto Villodo’s Healing the Light Body School, where he has taught. Carl is involved in various businesses and charities, teaches at the Jung Institute in Chicago, is on the staff of the Lorene Repogle Counseling Center, and holds workshops on shamanic and Jungian topics.

