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SHAMANIC WISDOM, PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH,
AND A TRANSPERSONAL VIEW: A CROSS-CULTURAL
PERSPECTIVE

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*There in the unbiased ether
our essences balance
against star weights hurled
at the just now trembling scales.*

*The ecstasy of life
lives at this edge—
the body's memory
of its immutable homeland.*

—Osip Mandelstam (1967, p. 124)

PART I. THE LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE:
IN PURSUIT OF SLAVIC WISDOM TEACHINGS

*Upon the shores of a far sea
A mighty green oak grows,
And day and night a learned cat
Walks round it on a golden chain.
When he goes right—he sings a song,
Left—tells a wonder tale . . .*

*. . . There I have been,
There drank the golden wine.
I saw that sea, I saw that oak,
I saw the learned cat.
He sang to me,
He told me wonder tales
And these I tell to you.*

—Alexander Pushkin (1963)

Introduction. I would like to share some of my observations, findings, and insights about Russian (Slavic) spiritual traditions. In this part, I focus primarily not on Siberian shamanism¹ but on ancient world views, wisdom teachings, and healing rituals of the Slavs. I prefer to use the word Slavic instead of Russian because my research includes an exploration of myths, legends, and traditions whose roots originate in the distant past, before the emergence of what is now called the Russian (or Great Russian) nation. Traditional Slavic spirituality seems to be close to what are called Earth religions or Goddess

religions in the United States (e.g., Gimbutas, 1995). I will discuss some elements of the tradition I learned during my trips to Russia in November/December 1993, September/December 1994, and May/July 1995.

Return to the Roots. Last year, when preparing to travel to Russia, I had two lines of research in mind, one being a more formal scholarly study, and another representing a continuation of my personal search for the knowledge and wisdom in shamanic and folk healing traditions.

The idea of the first project is easy to describe. In the course of my research in 1992-1994 into the state of experimental parapsychology in the former Soviet Union (May & Vilenskaya, 1994; Vilenskaya, 1993, 1995; Vilenskaya & May, 1995), I found that Russian researchers primarily focus on studies of distant mental effects or distant influence, in other words, psychokinesis (PK) and bio-PK phenomena, or the possible effects of human consciousness on the surrounding world, including physical and biological systems. These studies were carried out in such prestigious institutions as Moscow State University, St. Petersburg State University, and several research institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences. During my research in Russia, I also came across preliminary data suggesting that the roots for this broad and genuine scientific and popular interest in distant influence and alternative healing approaches in the former Soviet Union can be found in traditional Slavic spirituality and world views. Thus, I decided to undertake a more formal study to elucidate this relationship.²

The second part of my search is more intangible and not easily defined. In the fall of last year, I started feeling a need (a calling, if I may put it this way) to return to my roots. For many years I was deeply interested in various spiritual traditions, including Native American beliefs, rituals, sacred songs, dances, and healing practices (Vilenskaya, 1992). Now I felt it was time for me to tap into the wisdom teachings, the light of knowledge of my homeland.

The Light of Knowledge. In my early childhood in Riga, the capital of Latvia, my mother once read to me a beautiful old legend translated into Russian from the Latvian language. I loved it dearly and asked my mother to reread it several times, although I had not grasped its full significance. I did grasp its meaning very recently, when I had a chance to read it again during my trip to Russia. The story went like this:

In a small village in Latvia, near the capital city of Riga [which is, incidentally, my birthplace], there was once a father who had three sons. Two were thought to be clever fellows, but the third was so simple everyone said the lad was a fool.

One day, the father decided to build a hut at the edge of his pasture. When the small house was finished, he called his sons together and said, "I will give this hut to the one who can fill it completely. Not even a corner is to be left empty."

Without a moment's hesitation, the oldest son said, "I know the very thing that will do it." And off he went to buy a horse. When he brought the animal into the new hut, the horse filled only one corner of the place.

At once, the second son hurried off, saying: "I know the very thing that will fill this hut." He returned with a load of hay, which he hauled into the new hut. The hay filled only half of the little house.

The youngest son scratched the top of his head . . . "I suppose it's my turn to try my luck," he said slowly, and trudged off to the village. There he wandered about for

the rest of the day. Toward evening, as the lights began to shine from the cottage windows, the young lad suddenly slapped his thigh and laughed out loud. "Now I know the very thing that will do it!" he exclaimed.

He bought a candle and hurried to the new hut. Once inside, the lad lit the candle—and the whole hut was filled with light, every corner, nook, and cranny. And so the simple son, whom everyone thought was a fool, won the new little house for himself. (Niedre, 1958)

While riding a train from Moscow to the heart of the Ural Mountains in my search for the wisdom of the Russian past, I remembered: no amount of material possessions can fill our lives completely, can totally satisfy us. To feel whole and to enjoy happiness, we also need the light of spiritual knowledge.

Multiple Realities: Shamanic Views in Russian Art. In his provocative book, *Dreaming with Open Eyes: The Shamanic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art and Culture*, the British scholar Michael Tucker (1992) notes "a shamanic sense of music as transformative myth" (p. 208) in the works of the Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915). Through his music, Scriabin, who gave the world the *Poem of Ecstasy* (1908) and *Prometheus—the Poem of Fire* (1910), was able to experience his version of shamanic flight—"light . . . rapture . . . soaring flight . . . suffocation from Joy" (Machlis, 1963, p. 99). He intended *Prometheus* to be performed in synesthetic conjunction with a light keyboard or color organ (Tucker, 1992, p. 208).

In some of his works, Scriabin turned to legends, tales, and national myths. In his unfinished opera, he proclaims total unity of the world. The hero of the opera so loves the world that he absorbs it, fuses himself with it. This produces a state of bliss which Scriabin later calls "ecstasy" (Bowers, 1969, p. 306). In the text of the opera, the hero affirms:

When my stars are aflame
And magic light embraces the earth
Then will my fire reflect
In the hearts of people
The world will understand the call.
I AM THE SORCERER OF A POWERFUL HEAVENLY
HARMONY
Who lavishes caressing dreams on mankind

With the POWER OF LOVE immeasurable and wondrous
I will make life's springtime for them
I will give them long desired peace
I, BY THE FORCE OF MY KNOWING.

And, in the conclusion of "The Death in Ecstasy"—death becomes the victorious completion of the hero's journey:

You are striving toward completion.
You are dreams, you are the light, and joy,
Only he can know bliss
Who has tasted the sweetness of labor
Who has spent life
In search of charms
Who has found solace in
The might of knowledge.

The World Populated by Spirits: Elements of Slavic Mythology. The exact origin of the Slavs is not known, but by about 800 B.C. Slavic tribes were scattered in a region east of the Carpathian Mountains and west of the Don River (Gimbutas, 1987, p. 353). Around the 6th century A.D., the Slavs began separating into three groups, the West, South, and East Slavs. The ancestors of today's Russians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians, the East Slavs lived in the area bounded by Lake Ladoga, the upper Volga and Don, and the Dnieper. When Christianity was introduced into Russia in 988, the rural population continued to worship the thunder god Perun and all manifestations of nature, producing *dvoyeveriye*, a double faith, in which traditional (I intentionally avoid the term Pagan) deities and festivals merged with Christian figures and holidays (Gimbutas, 1987, p. 354; Hubbs, 1988, pp. 91-93).

Few written sources remain from these distant times, except for myths, legends, and folk tales which were conveyed orally from one generation to the next. According to one of Slavic creation legends, once upon a time, there was no light, and pitch darkness permeated the world. In this total darkness, there was an immense ocean, and there was *Rod*, or *Bog*,³ our ancestor, the Source of the Universe, Father of Gods. Rod was confined in an egg; it was a seed to be sprouted. When the time was right, Rod appeared from the egg and created *Lada*, Goddess of Love. Together with Love, Light immediately came into being. Then the three worlds, or kingdoms, *Nav'*, *Yav'*, and *Prav'*, were created. *Nav'* represented the Kingdom of Darkness where the God of Death, *Veles*, and *Baba Yaga*, his faithful servant, had their hearth, and where the souls of the dead dwelled; *Yav'* was the name for our world, Mother Moist Earth, with its plants, animals, and people; and *Prav'* was the Kingdom of Light, the Skies, or Heaven, where higher Gods abide. The Sun God *Yarilo*, who was one of the Higher Gods, and his four incarnations—the Spring God *Khors*, the Summer God *Dazhbog*, the Autumn God *Stribog*, and the Winter God *Simargl*—regularly visited *Mat' Syra Zemlya* (Mother Moist Earth), for Gods and spirits possess the power to travel freely between the Worlds.⁴

Simargl, often depicted as a winged dog, occupies a special place in Slavic mythology: he is an intermediary between the Skies and the Earth, the Sky Messenger dispersing the seeds of abundance. Sometimes he is also portrayed as a seven-headed warrior who guards the entrance to the Upper World. Mother Moist Earth (the Middle World) is guarded and protected by the Earth Goddess *Makosh*, and at times is visited by mighty *Perun*, the God of Thunder and Lightning. *Veles*, the God of Death and the underworld, is also believed to be related to music and poetry and at the same time reputed to be a god of cattle, wealth and commerce (Gimbutas, 1987, p. 357; Shuklin, 1995, pp. 47-48).

In the Slavic past, Earth, Air, Fire, and Water were all worshiped in various ways (Famintsyn, 1995, pp. 125, 152). The winds were called the “grandsons of *Stribog*” and often greatly feared. Earth was considered so holy that solemn oaths were sometimes taken while holding a clod of soil. The custom of visiting holy springs or wells whose waters supposedly have healing powers is still preserved in some villages. Visitors bath their eyes in the water and cast a coin in as payment, or tie ribbons and pieces of clothing associated with their illness in the branches of trees overhanging the water (Warner, 1985, p. 17).

Over all elemental deities reigned Svarog, god of the sky. He had two sons, Dazhbog, the sun god and Svarozhich, the god of fire. Svarozhich lived in the oast-houses where a fire was set in a deep pit and sheaves of corn laid on a grating over it to be dried before threshing. Offerings were brought there to the fire god, and even in the last century it was still customary to cast a sheaf into the fire for luck. Long after Svarozhich had been forgotten, beliefs in the power and holiness of fire remained and no Russian would spit on the fire or speak disrespectfully of it. It was even believed that fire could cure certain illnesses (Famintsyn, 1995, p. 334). “Dear father, Tsar-Fire,” runs a nineteenth century spell, “be gentle and kind to me, burn away all my aches and pains, fears and worries.”⁵ During serious outbreaks of cattle disease, bonfires were lit with “living fire,” a flame obtained secretly by revolving a wooden peg very fast in the round holes of a special block of wood, and the cattle were chased

through the flames in the hope that they would be cured (Warner, 1985, p. 16). Some healing rituals also evoked the power of lightning.

Modern Wizard: Some Practices of a Lightning Healer. There is a wide-spread belief in many Russian villages that an individual can heal another through the use of *zagovory* (magical incantations, spells, charms, or prayers), ritual actions, and/or by combination of thought and will alone (Shapiro, 1992, p. 109; Yeleonskaya, 1994, pp. 123-125). Similarly, it is often believed to this day that a person (*koldun* or *ved'ma*—sorcerer or witch) can cause harm, including epidemics, cattle plagues, and poor harvests, as well as numerous individual illnesses, through magical practices called “*porcha*” (spoiling), or by his/her glance alone (evil eye) (e.g., Maksimov, 1989, pp. 71-72, 79-82).

Magical healing and sorcery represent two lines going back to the ancient *volkhvy* (men and women of wisdom), whose function was both to cure others and to make contact with the spirit world for purposes of insuring a good harvest and predicting the future (Ivanits, 1989, p. 122). Some of these worldviews and practices are still preserved in Russian villages, and the traditions are usually conveyed from mother to daughter, from grandmother to grand-daughter, and in some cases from an older sister to a younger one (Yeleonskaya, 1994, p. 103). It should be noted that, while the matrilineal transmission of sacred knowledge and healing powers has been encountered more often, the patrilineal link is also not excluded.⁶

When visiting several villages in the Oryol province this summer, I was introduced to an old *znakharka* (a village healer or medicine woman, if I may use this term to honor her). The word originates from *znat'*, to know, and thus means a woman of knowledge, although it was often given a negative connotation during Soviet times. Therefore, the word *babushka* (grandmother) is preferred instead by the villagers.

Yelizaveta Yefimovna or Baba (Babushka) Liza, as she is called by the villagers, is a stout, energetic 76-year-old woman who looks younger than her age and has quietly continued to practice her art through the turmoil of the Soviet times and the current turbulent time of transition. She is happy to talk, somewhat nostalgically, about the past shrouded in mystery and the no less mysterious present. Sitting at the dinner table in a semidark room in her old wooden house, she spun the narrative of fascinating old legends. My friend Natasha and I were sitting in front of her, and I felt that the presence of the past filled that room as palpably as the heady aroma of dried herbs that pervaded the house:

Not many mortals are endowed with this mighty gift of walking the rainbow⁷ up to the Skies, or traveling down, to the ancestor world, but my grandmother possessed that power. She was born in Byelorussia and, in her teens, was caught by a terrifying thunderstorm in the woods. She was nearly hit by lightning and was frightened out of her wits, but *Perun*, the god of thunder and lightning, rewarded her with the power to travel to the Skies and to heal in his name.

My grandmother was also able to summon spirits in the time of need, and they never failed to come to her aid. They gave her power and wisdom, helped her to *vorozhit'* (predict a person's fate) and to heal. She was friends with *rusalki* (water spirits) dwelling in lakes and rivers, *beregini-zashchitnitsy* (spirit protectors) living close to water,⁸ and *lesoviki* (forest spirits) who inhabit the woods. They sometimes come to me as well when I call them with juniper smoke. But the real power my grandmother gave me is from thunder and lightning. My two daughters, Maria and Vera, also possess that power and continue learning the medicine ways from me, but my son is not interested.⁹

Yelizaveta Yefimovna is not the first village healer I encountered in my travels throughout the Russian countryside, but I found her stories and rituals the most fascinating. She invited me to spend several days in her house and allowed me to sit in when she received clients. Unexpected by me, she vehemently objected to my tape recorder and camera, not allowing me to take a single picture of her. Picture taking, she believed, may allow evil spirits to capture the soul. I was surprised to find such an attitude in our enlightened times but had to respect it. Babushka Liza's features softened, though, and sometimes a shadow of smile appeared on her face when she looked at me as I was sitting in a corner of the small room with my everpresent notebook and pen. Notebook in hand, I often forgot to take notes, because Babushka Liza fascinated me not so much with the rituals she performed but by the almost tangible aura of presence and confidence emanating from her while she worked with her clients.

I was fortunate enough to see some of these healing practices firsthand. In the morning after that intriguing night when we had listened to Babushka Liza's stories, a young woman with an infant entered her house. Nadya (the mother) explained that the boy was crying a lot and asked Babushka to see whether something was wrong with him. Later I learned that Nadya had taken her seven-months old boy to the doctor first, and the doctor apparently did not find anything wrong with the child, but the mother was not satisfied with the outcome of her visit to the doctor's office. Babushka Liza asked Nadya to lay the boy down on a couch covered by a clean sheet and for Nadya to sit on a nearby chair. The medicine woman lit a wax candle and placed it on the table. With semiclosed eyes and an expression of intense concentration on her face, she stood near the boy for what seemed to be a long time, without touching him or saying anything. I felt as if an invisible connection, a bridge or thread between the old woman and the young boy was being created.

Then Babushka Liza took a twig in her hands, bent towards the boy, and started moving the twig slowly, in a circular motion, in the air above the child's stomach. In a quick, almost inaudible whisper, with a regular, measured hypnotizing rhythm, she pronounced what sounded like an ancient *zagovor*. From our previous discussion, I knew that the twig was from a tree which had been hit by lightning. Such twigs were broken off from the tree with a special charm/prayer, as Babushka Liza was taught by her grandmother. Like the Buryat and Native American lightning shamans (Kalweit, 1992, pp. 46-51), she draws on the power of lightning in her healing work.

During the whole procedure, the boy was quiet and looked to be soundly asleep. Then Babushka Liza poured off some water from a large jar into a smaller bottle, then sat down and recited another charm or prayer, with the same look of intense concentration. She offered it to Nadya, saying that the water was from a sacred spring and that both she and the boy should drink it, several sips two or three times a day. Then the medicine woman spoke with Nadya for almost an hour about many aspects and details of the family life (largely unknown to me as an outsider), e.g., Nadya's husband, her parents, her brother, and their neighbors. They did not object to me sitting in but did not include me in the conversation, except for several brief questions and answers at the end. I could see that Nadya clearly respected the older woman healer, and there certainly was an implicit shared world view and trust between the two.¹⁰ It would be clear to any impartial observer of this scene that if the doctor would spend more time simply talking with the young mother she probably would not be seeking alternative help. Here the healer seems to combine the roles of a therapist, mentor, and priestess, restoring harmony not only in mother/child, mother/family, mother/villagers, and mother/healer relationships, but also in the whole village, similar to ancient mothers who "protected the entire community against diseases" (Hubbs, 1988, p. 60).

Babushka Liza also explained that she often uses *oberegi*, i.e., certain charms and/or amulets or talismans for protection. Even now, before a wedding celebration, table cloths are sometimes put on the tables inside out to ward off the evil eye or sorcery. Babushka Liza remembered that in the past, poppy seeds were used as *oberegi* from witchcraft, because it was believed that it is hard for the dark forces to count the seeds; so, when they are busy counting, the villagers can attend to their everyday activities without interference from "them." (It was customary not to call dark, black, or evil forces

by name, for the words might attract “them”; thus, “they” and “them” were used instead.) “Orlov kamen” (an eagle's stone, i.e., a dark-red or grey stone found in an eagle's nest) was also used for protection, especially during childbirth. For this purpose, the stone was tied to the left wrist or left ankle of the woman. The best *oberegi*, however, were embroideries with intricate abstract patterns, believed to protect everyone around them and to have a healing effect as well.

While the Russian Orthodox Church classifies all nature powers and spirits as *neshistyie*, unclean (not necessarily evil, but not Christian, and therefore forbidden), the village medicine men and women make a clear distinction between helping/healing (white) and harming (black) magic, the major difference apparently being the conscious intent of the practitioner.

To summarize my observations of the healing practices of Babushka Liza and several other village healers,¹¹ in addition to plant medicines, *zagovory* (charms, spells, verbal formulas) still appear to be used often by folk healers in the European part of Russia. The charms are viewed as being effective not by themselves but in conjunction with a ritual which usually involves a vivid visualization of the words repeated in the verbal formula. In other words, if a *znakhar'* says in the healing formula that a symptom of illness has disappeared, he/she is taught to see it happening in an inner vision.

The healing power of *zagovory* is believed to be amplified by elements of nature, in particular, by water, fire, and stone. Thus, the rituals are frequently performed in the presence of a candle, a vessel with water, a power stone (sometimes found at a spot indicated in a dream) or crystal. The power of crystals, especially of quartz and carnelian, to provide protection and to facilitate healing is also often acknowledged. Malachite is believed to possess strong “positive power” that can neutralize external negative effects (including those of purported witchcraft and sorcery) while black tourmaline is claimed to be able to deflect and dissipate undesirable influences in a somewhat different but no less effective way.

Is Reality Changeable? Slavic Views of Divination and Prophecy. In old Russia, before Prince Vladimir converted the Russians to Christianity at the end of the first millenium, and for many years afterwards, there were *volkhvy* (wizard-priests) who knew the secrets of the ancient ways. They were believed to have the gift of prophecy and were consulted by all levels of society. Princes asked about the most propitious time to begin a military campaign, merchants sought advice about business deals, and everyone was curious to learn about the time and manner of his death.

According to the Russian Chronicles, which later became the basis for a famous poem by Alexander Pushkin, Prince Oleg of Kiev, who died in 912, once asked a wizard if he could tell him how he would die.

Before his men he [Oleg] rode in pride,
Their hero-prince, and nothing feared;
But, ere he reached the forest-side;
From out its darkling deeps appeared
Dread Perun's prophet, old and wise,
Who studied in the secret shrine
That he might in each man's own eyes
His destiny and doom divine.

The brave Prince rode toward him, and cried:
“O Wizard, favoured of the gods,
What woe or weal shall me betide?
How soon shall I, beneath the sods,
Lie buried, while my foes rejoice?”

Fear naught; nor speak with faltering words
Whate'er my doom, be thine the choice
Of all the horses in my herds!"

"No wizard dreads an earthly lord!"
The old man scornful answer flung:
"And naught availeth bribe or sword
To loose or bind the prophet's tongue.
Heaven's secrets are not bought and sold:
The future's veiled in mist and gloom:
Yet, as a tale already told,
On thy bright brows I read thy doom."

–Pushkin (1825/1991, pp. 2-4)

Learning that his favorite horse would be the cause of his death, Prince Oleg had the animal banished. He ordered his grooms to feed and care for it but never to bring it into his presence again. Some years later, Oleg suddenly remembered about the horse and wondered what had become of it. When he heard that it was dead, he was greatly relieved and went to see the skeleton where it lay, picked clean by birds of prey, out in the open steppe. Triumphantly placing one foot on the skull, Oleg mocked the dead creature that was to have brought about his death. As he did so, a poisonous snake slithered out from the skull and bit his foot. Oleg sickened and died of the wound, and the prophecy was fulfilled.

Some divination rituals are still practiced in Russia, and I was fortunate to observe one of the techniques in my interaction with Babushka Liza. She asked her client (a girl in her late teens or early twenties named Valya) to gaze at a candle flame and at the same time to roll a small ball of thread (a clew the size of a thimble) over a blue table plate, while the healer went on whispering barely audible words in a regular, measured manner. Then she asked Valya to close her eyes, to continue rolling the ball of thread and to see whether the boy's image (the divination was on the subject whether or not a certain boy loved Valya) would appear in her mind's eye. When Valya whispered "Yes," Babushka Liza asked (sounding like an experienced therapist) if the image was moving and whether the movement was toward her or in the opposite direction. As I learned later, when the client rolled the clew toward herself, the inner picture was supposed to indicate a scene from the past; if it were rolled forward (away from the client) these were pictures of the future. Babushka Liza mentioned another interesting point: by changing these pictures in her mind's eye, the client could change the events of her life. There were some indications which situations or events could be changed and which were immutable but I did not understand the intricacies of how the healer/diviner could make this distinction. Surprisingly, changing past events was supposed to alter the person's present. It was fascinating to watch Babushka Liza's enchanting and powerful presence, as if she truly were in touch with the forces which create a person's fate and alter its course.

This reminded me of a divination technique related to me by another healer, Mikhail Miller, in Moscow several weeks earlier. Mikhail spent some time studying with village "sorceress" Mariya Vladimirovna, and she explained to him how she could "clear the road." When she had to ride a bus on narrow icy roads, she closed her eyes and saw the road in her mental vision. If the road was clear and free of obstacles, it was safe to continue; no trouble was lurking. If the road was covered with black/dark fog or an obstacle in the way was in sight, she had to "clean" (or clear) it in her mental picture—and was convinced that this ritual action opened up for her a safe passage without troubles or accidents.¹²

Conclusion: Interconnectedness and Global Unity. Traditional Slavic spirituality implies the sense of relatedness (Hoeller, 1994, p. 15), interaction, interconnectedness, and global unity. Similarly,

shamanic practices among many non-Russian ethnic groups are based on inherent connection in the world, between the worlds, and with the Earth itself, as is expressed in an ancient grace still repeated in the region of Tuva in Siberia:

Mother-Earth, I beg you to grant me some happiness.

Mother-Earth, I beg you to present me with luck.

Mother-Earth, I beg you to protect and take care of my children.

Mother-Earth, I beg you to protect my native *aal* (home).

–Kenin-Lopsan (1993, p. 142)

In Slavic rituals and folk healing practices, gifts of the Mineral Kingdom—crystals and stones in general—are viewed not as inanimate objects but rather as living creatures which are an inherent part of living nature. The world of stones, of plants, and of animals is believed to represent those intermediary links through which we are attuned to our planet and the Universe. I will discuss this issue in more detail in Part II.

PART II. THE SCIENCE OF WISDOM AND THE WISDOM OF SCIENCE: NOTES ON PSI RESEARCH IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

The highest wisdom has but one science—the science of the whole—the science explaining the whole creation and man's place in it.

–Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*.

Psi Research in Russia: A Personal Perspective. In this section,¹³ I present some of my observations of parapsychological (psi) research in the former Soviet Union resulting from my trips to Moscow in October/November of 1991 and in September/October of 1992, and to Moscow and Novosibirsk in April of 1993. The last two trips were undertaken together with a colleague from California. While narrative overviews of our findings regarding some aspects of psi research in Russia are presented elsewhere (May & Vilenskaya, 1993, 1994; Vilenskaya & May, 1995), I would like to discuss here the relationship of some of the phenomena studied to shamanism and their implications for understanding our global interconnectedness.

Seeing at a Distance: Studies in Extrasensory Perception. Among the skills described in many shamanic practices is the ability of vision at a distance (Eliade, 1972, p. 184). In all shamanic cultures, the shaman, in mediating between the sacred and the profane, is also the diviner, who, through divination, reveals unknown past events, things, and persons lost, and future things to happen (e.g., Basilov, 1984, pp. 94, 132, 158; Hulkrantz, 1978, pp. 37, 54). In other words, shamans are purported to perceive various kinds of information without known senses and known means of communication. For example, shamanic practitioners among the Sauteaux Indians (the Ojibwa-speaking people of the Berens River in Manitoba, Canada) are believed to possess clairvoyant powers which enable them “to secure news about people who are hundreds of miles away, or learn of events that are taking place in another part of the country, [or] . . . discover what is going to happen in the future” (Hallowell, 1942, p. 12). Shamans in Siberia are reportedly “consulted to find men or animals gone astray in the tundra

or the snow, to recover a lost object, and so forth” (Eliade, 1972, p. 184). Scientifically, similar abilities are studied in research about extrasensory perception (ESP) or remote viewing.

Numerous studies into extrasensory perception were conducted in the Soviet Union. In the 1970s, Ludmila Korabelnikova, an artist in Moscow, participated in 5,000 ESP trials which employed standard double-blind techniques. From them, 109 test series with ESP cards in opaque envelopes (these cards depict five symbols: a star, cross, square, circle, or wavy lines) with 25 trials in each series, i.e., 2,725 trials, resulted, on the average, in 14.5 hits per series (25 trials) instead of the 5 expected by chance. Over 2,000 trials with numbers from 0 to 9 resulted in 14 hits per series (also 25 trials), instead of the average 2.5 expected by chance (Kobzarev, 1984, pp. 95-96; Kogan, 1988, pp. 226-227).

More recently, Korabelnikova took part in different tests, this time including more varieties of tasks than just identification of ESP cards or numbers (Stefanov, 1992). In one of them, she was given rolls of EKG paper with electrocardiograms of patients, all of whom were unknown to her and asked to state whether or not each of the patients was alive at the moment. She reportedly did not make a single mistake. Two interesting details transpired during the test. Once Ludmila said, referring to one roll of EKG paper: “He was dead and now is alive.” When she heard herself saying this, she got angry at herself, “I’m sorry for talking nonsense; I must be tired!” It turned out, however, that her “nonsense” made perfect sense: the person whose EKG was given to Ludmila experienced clinical death and was resuscitated. Working with another roll of EKG paper, Ludmila described it in the following way: “There is nothing dead or alive here.” This was a calibration curve of the EKG machine (Stefanov, 1992, p. 27).

Unfortunately, Russian researchers do not always give enough methodological details in their reports for readers to judge whether all sensory clues and conventional modes of receiving information were excluded. We need to maintain closer contacts with our colleagues in Russia and to be able to better understand their experimental and theoretical approaches. To Korabelnikova’s credit, she is well-known in Moscow and beyond for her reported success in locating missing persons and other practical tasks.

Vladimir Safonov, a healer and remote perception operator in Moscow, is also often approached by police to locate missing people. Similarly to Korabelnikova, he is reputed to be able to identify whether or not the person was alive—and the cause of death, if not. For this purpose, he works with a variety of objects. These include photographs of the deceased individuals (taken when they were alive), undeveloped film, a person’s name, and at times even the person’s fingerprint (Fomin, 1991a, 1991b). Most of Safonov’s statements were reportedly correct. In particular, Yuri Fomin (1991b), an engineer in Moscow, described the following experiment:

Safonov was shown the fingerprints of an unknown individual. The person who brought the fingerprints to Safonov did not know anything about the person to whom they belonged. Safonov described the prints as belonging to a shortish woman, slender, with straight hair, aged 30-35, now dead; death had resulted from a blow on the back of her neck, and she was naked when killed. The prints belonged to the dead body of a naked woman indeed. She was in fact killed with a blow on the back of her neck. Her appearance was described correctly. (p. 153)

Carefully designed studies of remote viewing have been conducted in the USA since the early 1970s (e.g., May, 1995; Puthoff, Targ & May, 1981). Our Russian colleagues seem to focus their efforts more on applied aspects of remote viewing rather than on experimental research. While in Moscow, I met with Ivan Sokolov, head of the Center of Alternative Diagnostics in St. Petersburg, and Anna Smirnova, an associate of this center. For the past several years, their group has reportedly been using remote viewing for solving practical tasks in geology, construction, engineering, and ecology. Specific

tasks included a search for ore and mineral deposits, e.g., one of the projects involved a search for kimberlite pipes–diamond deposits in Siberia, and another, a search for structural and technological faults in buildings and technological equipment. Sokolov also talked at length about their recent ecological project performed for the city of St. Petersburg in which they identified the areas contaminated by heavy metals in the vicinity of the territory called Krasny Bor in St. Petersburg province.¹⁴

Action at a Distance: Psychokinesis. It is maintained in many cultures that some individuals are capable of affecting the surrounding world by yet unknown means. Some shamans, such as those on the Chukotka Peninsula and Altaian *yadachi*, are believed to be able to influence the future, in particular, the weather, to cause and stop snow storms, rain or hail (Basilov, 1984, p. 15; Czaplicka, 1914, p. 200; Hulkrantz, 1978, p. 37). The Beaver Indians of northeastern British Columbia believe that they can affect creation “through a combination of thought and will” (Mills, 1982, p. 37). “If one wants to stop someone in his course of action . . .” they hold, “imbuing one's thoughts with power, or *mayine* [as they call it], and directing them mentally to that person has the effect of bringing about the state desired” (p. 37).

Psi research programs in the Soviet Union have primarily focused on experimental studies of distant influence on animate and inanimate systems, i.e., the phenomena termed psychokinesis (PK) and bio-PK by Western researchers (e.g., May & Vilenskaya, 1993; Vilenskaya, 1984). Bio-PK effects have been studied in Russia at all levels of complexity of natural systems—solutions of organic substances, tissue cultures and micro-organisms, plants, animals, and humans. Some of these studies conducted in the former Soviet Union are reviewed below. A paper by Braud and Schlitz (1991) provides a good overview of respective Western studies for interested readers.

Bio-PK Experiments with Tissue Cultures and Bacteria. In studies by Konstantin A. Chernoschekov and Alexei V. Lepekhin (1993) from Tomsk Medical Institute in Siberia, 17 operators attempted to affect several kind of enterobacteria. In 28 instances (26.9%) from 104 experimental series, a change in the inherited properties of bacteria was observed. Another researcher and practitioner, Yevgeny G. Bondarenko, demonstrated in his experiments that some individuals were capable of affecting certain properties of blood red cells in vitro.

Bondarenko also was an operator in another study in which he was asked to affect hybrid cells that contained a double set of chromosomes from two of their predecessors (i.e., normal cells of a mouse's spleen and a tumor line of cells also obtained from a mouse). In these tests, an inhibition of the growth of cellular clones of the hybrids with dominating activity of the genes of tumor origin was found (Tyagotin & Bondarenko, 1991).

A well-known sensitive and healer, Djuna Davitashvili, was asked to affect a kidney cell culture. She held her hands at a distance of 10 to 20 cm from a container with the culture for 7 to 10 minutes. After 24, 48, and 72 hours, histological studies were conducted. In seven series of experiments it was established that the relative number of mitoses throughout the given area in test cultures was 20 to 30% higher, as compared to the control (Kaznacheyev, Mikhailova, & Vladimirsky, 1990, p. 85; Kaznacheyev & Trofimov, 1992, p. 69).

Another sensitive and healer, Yevgeny A. Dubitsky, while in Moscow, attempted to affect tissue cultures in Novosibirsk. The cells were in three test tubes each marked by red, blue, or green. In Moscow, Dubitsky chose the color of the test tube he wanted to work with in Novosibirsk, leaving the other two as controls, and informed one of the experimenters (who later did not work with the tissue cultures) of his chosen color. After he attempted to affect the tissue culture in the selected test tube,

researchers in Novosibirsk studied RNA synthesis in all three test tubes and found it different in the affected culture as compared with the other two (Mikhailova, Merenkova, & Feldman, 1991, p. 5).

Bio-PK Experiments with Plants. A study conducted at the Research Institute of Fine Mechanics and Optics in St. Petersburg, involved a sprout of corn placed in an aqueous-alcohol solution, which also contained a dye changing its color with a change in the acidity/ alkalinity (pH) of the solution. The test tube was tightly closed, and an operator was asked to affect the solution at a certain distance while the pH of the solution was measured. There also was a control test tube, not affected by the operator, with the same kind of a sprout and the same solution. In the test solution, a change in pH was observed from 4.9 to 6.44, while no noticeable change was found in the control solution (Dulnev, 1990, pp. 5-6).

On the one hand, this study reportedly yielded a positive outcome. On the other hand, it is not convincing because of drawbacks in the reporting style of our Russian colleagues. In particular, this report does not state: the total number of trials, the distance between the operator and the test tube, whether interchangeable attempts to affect test and control test tubes were implemented, and whether the order of test and control trials was randomized. The following studies reported used somewhat better standards.

A group of researchers from the Russian Agricultural Academy in Moscow (Morozova, Polikarpov, Suponitsky, & Ilyina, 1991) describe several series of experiments which involved a human operator effect on plant seeds resulting in an increase in germination of the seeds. In other tests, operators were reportedly capable of stimulating or retarding plant growth, as well as causing two sprouts from one wheat seed (according to the authors, this phenomenon was observed spontaneously in only one of 967 control seeds, but in one or two seeds from every 10 to 15 seeds subjected to an operator's influence).

In experiments with kidney beans, sprouts of the seeds subjected to an operator's influence had an additional number of leaves (with the control seeds, in one series, one sprout from 38 control seeds showed this effect while four sprouts from 10 test seeds showed it; in another series, four sprouts from 31 control plants showed the effect while 14 sprouts from 32 test plants showed it). Further studies by Morozova, Dolin, and Suponitsky (1993) confirmed that some operators were capable of affecting plant seeds in such a way as to cause irreversible changes in various plants, such as an increase in the germination of seeds or an increase in the frequency of natural mutations.

Yuri S. Dolin, Ph.D., a biophysicist in Moscow, has conducted a number of bio-PK experiments together with a group of researchers in the Ukraine, which also involved a human operator's distant influence on plant seeds (Tkachuk, et al., 1992). Enzyme activity in some metabolic processes in winter wheat plants grown from treated seeds was studied as compared to untreated seeds. Three-minute exposure of the seeds to distant influence turned out to be more effective than nine-minute exposure. In another test series, the pigment content and chloroplast leaf cell photochemical activity of plants were studied after an operator's influence on winter wheat seeds. Again, the three-minute influence turned out to be more effective than the nine-minute influence.

Back in the early 1970s, Veniamin N. Pushkin, Ph.D., of the Research Institute of General and Pedagogical Psychology in Moscow, reported that changes in the psychophysiological state of a person in hypnosis or in a state of self-regulation affected the electrophysiological activity of plants (Dubrov & Pushkin, 1982, pp. 94-99). Recently, Yuri S. Dolin and his associates confirmed these findings in carefully designed experiments (Dolin, Davydov, Morozova, & Shumov, 1993).

Bio-PK Experiments with Animals. Dmitry G. Mirza, M.D., head of the Research Division of the National Center for Traditional Folk Medicine in Moscow, and his associate V. I. Kartsev, conducted three experimental series on the bio-PK (healing) influence on grey mice exposed to lethal doses of

ionizing radiation (Kartsev, 1993). The mice were subjected to 850, 900, and 915 rad from a Cs¹³⁷ source in the first, second, and third series, respectively. All the mice for each series (i.e., the test and control groups) were irradiated simultaneously with the 30 rad/min dose power. There were 10 mice in each test and 10 in each control group (except in the second series where one test group contained nine mice).

The results of the second and third series are most interesting. There were four experimental and four control groups in the second series that was conducted beginning in August, 1991. For controls, the mortality was 100%, i.e., all 40 mice died without a single one surviving the 19th day after the irradiation. In the test groups, in 19 days, the mortality was 90%, 50%, 40%, and 22% (the last was in the group of nine mice), respectively. While other operators worked at relatively small distances (meters from the mice), the operator who turned out to be the most successful affected mice located in Moscow from the town of Yalta in the Crimea, at a distance of about 800 miles. In January 1993, 15 mice from 39 in the test group were still alive as compared to zero in the control group. In the third series, nine out of 10 animals in one test subgroup and all 10 in another subgroup survived, as compared to three mice in the control group.

Bio-PK Effect on Human Physiology. Yuri S. Dolin, whose experiments with plants were discussed above, showed us the equipment and design of another interesting experiment. In this test, a subject was located in a dark, soundproof, electrically shielded chamber, his electroencephalogram (EEG) was monitored, and changes in the brain wave spectrum as the result of remote attention were recorded. The recorded variable was the relative alpha power change during effort compared to control periods. There were experiments conducted both at short distances, when an operator was from 5 to 100 meters from the subject (receiver), and at longer distances, from 1 to 10 km. The choice whether a given trial was a test or control and the direction of influence (activation or inhibition of the subject's alpha rhythm) was determined randomly. Thus, the subject was not aware whether the given trial was a test or control. With four operators and two receivers, 109 trials were conducted: 53 control and 56 test trials. From these, 21 test trials had the operator attempting activation of the subject (thereby intending to decrease the subject's alpha power) and 21 test trials attempted inhibition, thereby intending to increase the subject's alpha power; in the rest of the test trials the direction of effect was not specified. The results were statistically significant indicating that it is possible to affect alpha power of the sensory-isolated receivers (Dolin, Dymov & Khatchenkov, 1993).

The operators' method of distant influence in this study is reminiscent of the above-mentioned shamanic concepts of "bringing about the state desired" through a "combination of thought and will" of another person (Mills, 1982, p. 37). During the bio-PK session, the operator attempts mentally to impose on the subject an image of an event which would be pleasant (in calming-down trials) or upsetting for the subject. It was specifically pointed out that if the operator attempts to impose a picture which may be upsetting for someone, but which is not a part of the life or experience of this particular subject, it does not work: the operator has to know what can be emotionally arousing or upsetting (or pleasant) for a given subject.

Although I did participate in some tests using this stimulation vs. inhibition approach, I would prefer to send love instead of upsetting images. Rein and McCraty (1993), in the USA, reported that coherent heart frequencies of individuals focusing on generating deep feelings of love, care, or appreciation caused conformational changes of DNA from distances of up to 0.5 miles from the test area. Perhaps these data will lead us to a better understanding of unity in living nature.

Oneness: New Evidence for Global Interconnectedness. Traditional Slavic mythological views and folk healing practices, discussed in Part I of this series, are supported by the results of modern parapsychological studies. In reviewing publications in the field of psi research in the former Soviet

Union, I came across findings describing interactions at all levels of the biological systems hierarchy, i.e., between tissue cultures, plants, animals, and humans.

About 25 years ago, Vlail P. Kaznacheyev (a member of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences) and his associates discovered a phenomenon of communication between cells. In their tests, one tissue culture was infected by a virus or subjected to an influence of lethal poison and placed in optical contact (occurring through quartz glass which is transparent to ultraviolet light) with an intact culture. According to methodological details published by the researchers, accidental contamination of the second culture was reliably excluded. A number of hours later, the cells in the second culture, as if showing empathy with their infected counterparts, died with the same specific features of cell death as in the infected culture. The transmission of toxicity was reportedly successful for poison and viruses; however, the pattern of cellular death was different, specific for each toxic agent (Kaznacheyev & Mikhailova, 1981, 1985). The interaction between cell cultures in various conditions of their growth, at different distances from each other, was also studied by a number of other researchers in the former Soviet Union, including Kirkin (1981), Molchanov (1985), and Mostovnikov and Khokhlov (1977).

It was also found that nonradiated plants were apparently capable of relieving radiation injuries in radiated plants at a distance (Sanayev & Zorina, 1977, p. 80). Nikolai Sochevanov (1980), in Moscow, observed a response of a plant to a drastic stimulation of another plant by an electric shock or burn at a distance of up to 800 meters. In the 1970s and 1980s, Sergey Speransky (1983, 1990), from Novosibirsk, demonstrated anomalous communication between two groups of white mice. Distant synchronization of changes in animal electroencephalograms was observed by researchers in Simferopol (Makeyev, Volvovskaya, & Rebezova, 1975, p. 319). In a study conducted in Novosibirsk back in the late 1960s, communication was discovered between rabbits at a distance of up to 7 km (Perov, 1984).

These findings emphasize a more profound meaning in the worldviews of native people who “practice, and believe in, a kind of telepathy between people, animals and plants; indeed between all elements of creation” (Mills, 1982, p. 37). They also remind us of the interconnection between different dimensions in our own lives—logical and intuitive, scientific and spiritual. By perceiving these dimensions not as opposite but complementary, we restore balance and richness to our lives. In adopting a transpersonal view of reality, it is important to remind ourselves from time to time: “You are all included as part of All That Is . . . The ONE” (Black & Black, 1992, p. 26).

PART III. WHERE MYTH MERGES WITH REALITY: SLAVIC MYSTERIES

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

.....
*He who Doubts from what he sees
Will ne'er Believe, do what you Please.
If the Sun & Moon should doubt,
They'd immediately Go out.*

—William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence”
(In Keyes, 1966, pp. 431-433)

Initiation Rituals in the Slavic Tradition: Traces in Mythology. Among all the strange characters found in Russian folk tales, Baba-Yaga is perhaps the one who occurs most frequently and is the best known. She is believed to have a horrifying appearance. An aged, ugly crone, she is emaciated like a skeleton. Indeed, she is sometimes called Baba-Yaga Bony Leg. Her nose and teeth are long and sharp. She is usually depicted living in the forest, riding in a mortar, rowing herself along with a pestle and brushing her traces away with a broom.

This strange figure appears to be connected with the world of the dead. Not only does she look like a skeleton herself, but the fence and gates of her house are built of human bones, along the top of which are stuck human skulls with glaring eyes. Some folklore researchers (e.g., Propp, 1986, pp. 73, 77) say this house and its mistress guard the frontier between the territory of mortals and the spirit world.

Although Baba-Yaga is generally thought of as a cruel, witch-like creature, this is not entirely fair. There are really two Baba-Yagas, a good one and a bad one, and the good one may often help the hero of the tale and bestow miraculous gifts on him/her. In one legend, Vasilisa the Fair (or the Beautiful), a hard-working girl, was sent to the woods by her stepmother and stepsisters to get the light (knowledge). She meets Baba-Yaga and is granted an unusual gift, a skull with glowing eyes from the fence (i.e., she touches the realm of death). The skull lights Vasilisa's way, burns the wicked stepmother, and brings Vasilisa luck and good fortune (Magnus, 1916, pp. 109-118).

In his detailed analysis of Baba-Yaga legends and folk tales, Propp (1986, pp. 52-111), a Russian ethnologist and folklore researcher, concluded that they describe, in mythological form, ancient initiation rituals: the hero undergoes trials, is taken to the realm of death, and returns to this world with new and often magical gifts, abilities, or skills.

Here another intriguing point should be noted. In virtually all Baba-Yaga legends, she offers the hero something to eat or drink. While treating a guest to food is certainly a part of the Russian custom of hospitality, more often than not, Baba-Yaga's visitors are treated to special, magical foods or drinks intended for the dead and not for the living (Propp, 1986, pp. 66-67).

Of the magical foods, mushrooms seem to be most common, and some Baba-Yaga tales contain references to mushrooms in several different contexts. Illustrations for these tales (although certainly done much later than the tales themselves) often depict Baba-Yaga surrounded by red fly agaric and other mushrooms. In one of the legends, Baba-Yaga sets off into the woods to gather mushrooms and parsley for the stew and finds a hedgehog sitting on a top of a big mushroom eating a mushroom. She intends to cook the hedgehog, together with the parsley and mushrooms, for dinner but he persuades her that he can be useful to her in a different way. Baba-Yaga extends her good will towards him, and the hedgehog is not harmed but is allowed to finish eating the mushrooms. Suddenly he turns into a boy named Dmitry who possesses the power to find a mythical black sunflower! (Small, 1966, pp. 28-41). In another legend, Baba-Yaga puts the hero in touch with magic creatures (spirits), Lesovik and Borovik, who live under a mushroom and provide the hero with magical gifts which show him the way to reach his goal (Shuklin, 1995, p. 237).

In Russian folklore, strange things often happen when people go mushrooming. One folk tale (Afanas'yev, 1969, pp. 25-27) describes an old man and his wife who had no children. One day they went mushrooming, and as they walked along they saw a nest under some bushes, and in the nest there was a pretty little duck. They brought it home with them, and the old man made a soft cozy nest for it under a bench. The following day the husband and wife went mushrooming again and when they came home they found that everything had been put in order; the table had been set for dinner, and dinner was ready. They decided to hide and see who was doing the housework for them and discovered that the duck turned into a beautiful girl—they wanted very much to have a girl, and their wish had come true! But they made a mistake of not accepting the miracle as it was and interfering with it (this

is what the ego, the rational mind often does): they found the duck's feathers and threw them into the fire. When the girl learned that the feathers had gone she wept bitterly. "I would have stayed and been as a daughter to you if you hadn't burnt my feathers and taken away my wings," the girl said, "but now I don't want to stay with you." So she left—and the old man and his wife were left alone.

In traveling throughout the Russian countryside, I found an ambivalent attitude toward mushrooms. On one hand, people feel very friendly toward mushrooms; they are knowledgeable in distinguishing the edible species from the poisonous, and they gather a variety of mushrooms in season. On the other hand, in many villages (at least around Moscow) people seem to avoid talking about mushrooms, especially in the context of their possible relation to healing or sorcery—as if it were an indecent, improper, or outright forbidden subject. The reason for such an attitude was never clearly stated. Perhaps I am jumping to conclusions but I perceive it as an echo of an ancient taboo, a sacred prohibition against revealing secret knowledge of the initiation into "Slavic mysteries."

Sacred Mushrooms. We are indebted to R. Gordon Wasson (1956) for drawing the attention of the Western world to certain kinds of mushrooms known to various remote tribes in Siberia and to Indian peoples in Mexico. Among the former, he noted the Kamchadals, Koryaks, and Chukchees living on the Pacific Coast of Russia from Kamchatka to the northeastern tip of Siberia, as well as the Yukaghirs farther to the west, the Yenisei Ostyaks, and finally the Samoyed Ostyaks in the valley of the upper Ob River (Wasson, 1956, p. 610) who reportedly used *Amanita muscaria* mushrooms in shamanic rituals and initiations. Wasson was more specific in his description of the effects of a different kind of "hallucinatory mushroom with extraordinary virtues" used by the Zapotec Indians in their ceremonies:

[The visions] they [the mushrooms] inspire seem to the eater more real than anything he has seen in his normal life, in a literal sense the very archetypes and Platonic ideas of all things. They confer on him, he thinks, miraculous power of mobility. He finds himself translated to heaven, to hell, and he enters into the very presence of very God. . . . He calls the mushroom, in the language of the Aztecs, *teo-nanacatl*, God's flesh.

. . . He knows awe, wonder, reverence . . . and by a singular schism in his soul he experiences self-perception, as though he were outside his own body looking at himself. The mushroom tells to him who consults it how the absent loved one is faring, where the lost or stolen animal is to be found, the cause and prognosis of the sick person's trouble. (Wasson, 1956, pp. 608-609)

Valentina Pavlovna Wasson (of Russian descent) and R. Gordon Wasson (1957) elaborated further on the role of sacred mushrooms in human culture in their eminent work (now a bibliographical rarity), *Mushrooms, Russia, and History*. Over two decades later, Wasson, Ruck, and Hofmann (1978) addressed the possible role of plant sacraments in the ancient mysteries of death and rebirth, such as the Eleusinian mysteries that were conducted for almost two millennia in Greece. In their book, *Road to Eleusis*, the authors collected impressive evidence suggesting that the sacred potion *kykeon* used in Eleusis contained ergot derivatives chemically close to LSD (quoted in Grof, 1988, p. 283). Later, the mushrooms discovered in Mexico, *Psilocybe mexicana*, were found to contain the mind-expanding substances psilocybine and psilocine (Schultes & Hofmann, 1992, p. 22).

Wasson (1972) also connected the Eleusinian Mysteries to a possible use of sacred mushrooms:

For me there is no doubt that the secret of Eleusis lies in the hallucinogens. I shall like to think that the agent was a mushroom, and there are clues hinting that it was, but the plant world withholds from us in our modern times many mysteries that may have been known to the untutored herbalist of former times. (p. 194)

When Marija Gimbutas (1995), the Lithuanian-born archeologist who conducted extensive studies of ancient cultures in Old Europe, was asked whether she thought that the Goddess-oriented cultures in Europe incorporated the use of mushrooms or some kind of psychoactive plants into their rituals, her response was positive:

I'm sure they had it. The knowledge still exists in rituals like Eleusis in Greece, where now it's clear that psychedelics were used. From the depiction of mushrooms you can judge that this was sacred. . . . Mushrooms? Maybe. But what else? The hard evidence is not preserved by archaeological record. It's disappeared. (p. 22)

When living in Russia, I heard some stories about village “witches” gathering reputedly poisonous mushrooms to work their magic. During a recent visit to Moscow, I came across two articles by Russian scholars about the historical and mythological uses of various mushrooms, including the ones similar to those found in Mexico (Toporov, 1979; Yelizarenkova & Toporov, 1970). The studies abound with references to English-language sources but contain scant information related to Russian traditions and mythology. Of note, the connection of mushrooms in general with the elements of water (rain, which is obvious) and fire, especially lightning and thunder (Toporov, 1979, pp. 253-254, p. 268; Yelizarenkova & Toporov, 1970, pp. 42-44, 46) is emphasized, but this was analyzed earlier in detail by Wasson (1956).

In traveling around Russia in the Fall of 1993, I was exploring, among other issues, ways and means to enhance extrasensory perception. When I was told that someone found something “of plant origin” that apparently possessed such properties, I immediately attempted to learn more about it. A researcher and yoga practitioner (whose name I won't mention for obvious reasons) said to me that, at that point, the nature of the psychoactive substance which he found to have some potential to improve ESP, is a secret not to be disclosed—not a government secret but that of a group of his friends; he just believes that it's the best way to handle it. When I explained my motivation to him (i.e., that what was important to me was not to become a “psychic” for some utilitarian purposes but to explore possibilities for gaining more knowledge for personal development and growth), he said that he would introduce me to his friends. At that point, I was told, like in a fairy tale or in a science fiction story: “Meditate on it and see whether you are ready. Please understand that if you go further you'll never be the same again.”

This is how, due to a chain of coincidences, I came to be in touch with a group of spiritual seekers in Moscow who rediscovered (or, to be more exact, recreated by following their inner guidance) ancient sacred mushroom initiation ceremonies. They believe that during the ceremonies the spirit of the mushroom guides the participants to healing, facilitates restoring inner harmony, and even, at times, enables them to see the future. One night, I was fortunate enough to be invited to observe such a ceremony.

In preparing this paper, I faced a difficult dilemma of how to reconcile my role as a researcher with that of a spiritual seeker. On the one hand, I agree with Kalweit (1992) who warned against “the hollowness of mere researching, of not wanting to experience” (p. 223). On the other hand, I feel that mysteries are not something to be dissected and that the secret and sacred wisdom entrusted to me by my friends in Russia should remain secret (especially given the prevalent attitude of our Western culture regarding this path of self-exploration and spiritual search). In pondering this dilemma, I remembered a teaching story about a guru who initiated his disciple with a sacred mantram and told him not to reveal it to anyone. “Whoever hears this mantram will be liberated from the bondage of ignorance,” the guru admitted, “but you will suffer damnation.” The student immediately ran to the temple, gathered a large crowd around him, and repeated the sacred mantram so everyone could hear. When confronted by his guru, he replied, “If my damnation can liberate so many people, then it is my supreme desire to be damned” (quoted in Friedlander, 1973, p. 42).

If my knowledge were to possess such enlightening potential, I would not hesitate to share it fully, whatever the consequences! Believing, however, that this is not the case, I prefer not to specify whether I chose to participate in the ceremony or elected to remain an observer. I would like, however, to include some of the visions and dreams of one of the participants, who gave me her permission to share them without using her name.

Visions and Dreams. In one of the visions, I saw three spheres, one golden, one white and luminous, and one purple/violet, semi-transparent, and I realized that these were two of my Russian friends and I, that we were together for several lifetimes, and we have to work together in this lifetime. Then the three spheres became nine, of various beautiful colors, and there was a realization again that nine of us had worked together in ancient times and we will find each other and work together in this life. Then there was a huge cloud-like white-blue sphere, and although the image was not clear, I understood that it was the globe, the earth, and there were colored spheres scattered on its surface. I didn't see the continents, but I could guess; I had an impression of Europe, Asia, and North and South America. The spheres were everywhere, at some places there were more of them than in others, and many of them were connected with golden threads. Again, a quick realization followed: these are people around the world working to facilitate learning and transformation, some are connected with each other, and it's time for me to connect with this network. Then the spheres became small lights, many of them also connected with each other. We are a part of this network, and there is nothing more important for me now.

During my second experience, I was in the woods illuminated by eerie moonlight. Suddenly golden light came upon me and profound peace enveloped me. I was connected with All that Is! I was loved and loving, and everything was connected—I was connected with all my friends in this world, with spirits of the Unseen World, the spirit of this land, with its past, present, and future, with the Divine in me and in the Universe; no distinctions, no boundaries, no questions, no doubts. Everything around me was alive—I was surrounded with tiny gnomes and elves of my childhood fairy tales and could understand the language of trees which granted me healing. Everything was luminous, emanating auratic light of different colors. From time to time, lightning-like multicolored flashes appeared, and each splash of a bright color evoked profound joy, and an awesome feeling of wonder and reverence. The line from a Russian poem came to me, “*Za vsyo tebya blagodaryu ya . . .*” (For everything, I'm grateful to You . . .), and I started chanting this line of deep gratitude over and over again. Then, with my eyes closed and moving deeper into a meditative-like state, I saw an old, grey-haired woman with penetrating eyes. She extended her hands towards me. Without a single word, we were in communication, in total understanding. With an almost imperceptible gesture, she gave me clarity, peace, and knowledge and invited me to take it. I accepted the energy and repeated the words of gratitude. The spirit of real Russia, of its past and present, was within me. The initiation was completed!

In my dream that night, I saw a Being of Light, a semitransparent radiant, luminous silhouette, enveloped in golden light. She (I felt this was a woman, although I cannot tell why) had a crystal which emitted light, representing continuance of her light, embodying her purity and wisdom. In a moment, a ray of light moved from this crystal to my “third eye” and touched it. I felt a burning sensation there and (still in a dream) closed my eyes. As a vision within a dream, I saw bright radiance emitted by an ethereal crystal embedded in the third eye area. I was extremely happy with a sudden realization that this crystal would stay there permanently, forever. Then I opened my eyes (still dreaming), and the Being of Light was still there. She moved the crystal around my body three times, making three consecutive oval-like outlines, and then brought it again to the third eye, almost touching and not touching at the same time. I did not hear any words but I knew that I was invited to concentrate on the inner screen and to observe images or symbols that would appear there. The image that became clear was of the same old woman I saw in one of my previous visions.

The circle of exploration continues, and there probably will be new people and new knowledge, at many levels. But I would never forget my adventures in Russia and the experience of profound unity.

Conclusion: Extrasensory Perception, Nonordinary States of Consciousness, and the Transpersonal Realm. To conclude, I would like to return to the issue of extrasensory perception and other parapsychological (psi) phenomena discussed in the second part of this paper. If we step outside the laboratory and examine anthropological data, apparent psi perception of information inaccessible by ordinary means is reported to occur in nonordinary states of consciousness in all cultures that employ shamanic practices (e.g., Kalweit, 1992). In describing a “hierarchy of levels running from normal to higher consciousness,” Kalweit emphasized that “the principle that binds the various levels is an increasing feeling of unity” (p. 218), and that “. . . telepathy and clairvoyance arise through a strong feeling of unity between oneself and the environment” (p. 219).

Stanislav Grof (1988), a well-known researcher of consciousness, has expressed a similar view:

There exists one interesting subcategory of transpersonal phenomena that can be frequently validated and even researched experimentally. Here belong telepathy, psychic diagnosis, clairvoyance, clairaudience, precognition, psychometry, out-of-body experiences, traveling clairvoyance, and other instances of extrasensory perception From a broader perspective, there is no reason to sort out the so-called paranormal phenomena as a special category. Since many other types of transpersonal experiences quite typically involve access to new information about the universe through extrasensory channels, the clear boundary between psychology and parapsychology disappears, or becomes rather arbitrary, when the existence of the transpersonal domain is recognized and acknowledged The transpersonal phenomena reveal connections between the individual and the cosmos which are at present beyond comprehension. All we can say is that somewhere in the process of perinatal [experience] unfolding, a strange qualitative Moebius-like leap seems to occur, in which deep self-exploration of the individual unconscious turns into a process of experiential adventures in the universe-at-large, which involves what can best be described as cosmic consciousness or the superconscious mind.

While the nature of transpersonal experiences is clearly fundamentally incompatible with mechanistic science, it . . . is of critical importance for any serious approach to such phenomena as psychedelic states, shamanism, religion, rites of passage, mythology, [and] parapsychology thanatology, and psychosis. (Grof, 1988, pp. 162-164)

This approach seems to be readily accepted by some psi researchers in Russia. Many Russian researchers explore the possibilities of lucid dreaming, holotropic breathwork, meditation, and other ways of achieving nonordinary states of consciousness to facilitate psi, as well as for healing, self-discovery, and spiritual growth.

Parapsychology aside, I feel that my recent trips to Russia were, in a way, an initiation into what can be called *Tainaya Mudrost* (secret and sacred wisdom) of the Slavic spiritual tradition, or “Slavic mysteries” if I dare to express it in these words.

Currently the land of Russia and her people, struggling through times of transition and turmoil, are undergoing their own initiation. At the same time, the ancient spiritual knowledge has miraculously survived and is accessible again. Like the magical firebird and the phoenix of magic tales, that land will be reborn from its own ashes.

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NOTES

1. Some Russian archeologists and folklore researchers (e.g., Rybakov, 1994, pp. 59-71; Larichev, 1972, quoted in Kritov, 1995, p. 223) discuss connections between some ancient Slavic beliefs and practices and shamanic traditions of non-Slavic peoples in the Urals and Western Siberia, along the Ob and Yenisei Rivers. These detailed scholarly discussions, although clearly outside the scope of this study, suggest a possible continuity between the traditions.
2. This study, conducted primarily during my May/July 1995 trip to Russia, was funded, in part, by the Institute of Noetic Sciences, Sausalito, California. A version of Part I of this paper was presented at the 12th International Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing, San Rafael, CA, USA, September 2, 1995.
3. The word *rod* means kinship, extended family, and is the root of such words as *priroda* (nature), *rodina* (motherland), *urozhay* (harvest), *rozhat'* (to give birth), and *roditeli* (parents). *Bog* is Russian for God.
4. Personal communication from Yelizaveta Yefimovna, the Oryol Province, July 1995. See also Dvornik (1959, pp. 48-50), Famintsyn (1995, pp. 145-157, pp. 205-291), Gimbutas (1971, pp. 162-168; 1987, pp. 355-357), Rybakov (1989, p. 413; 1994, pp. 530-531, 547), and Shuklin (1995, pp. 39-47).
5. Personal communication from Yelizaveta Yefimovna, the Oryol Province, July 1995. Another spell calling on the healing power of Tsar-Fire can be found in Savushkina's work (1993, pp. 96-97).
6. Personal communication from Nataliya Sugrobova, Moscow, October 1994.
7. The motif of the Tree of Life or World Tree as a means to travel between the worlds is more widespread in Slavic mythology than the rainbow (e.g., Hubbs, 1988, p. 10; Platov, 1995, pp. 16-23).
8. The word *beregini* can be derived from *bereg* = bank or shore, and also from *berech'* = to take care, to spare, or to protect. Note the same root in the word *oberegi* = protection talismans.
9. Personal communication from Yelizaveta Yefimovna, the Oryol Province, July 1995.
10. An analysis of Yelizaveta Yefimovna's healing work shows that, without being aware of it, she incorporates the four fundamental principles of healing identified by Torrey (1973) and emphasized by Villoldo and Krippner (1987, p. 192), i.e.: (1) a shared worldview between the healer and her client; (2) positive personal qualities of the healer that facilitate the client's recovery; (3) client expectations of recovery that assist the healing process; and (4) specific techniques, materials, and healing procedures that are conducive to recovery.

11. Observations of and personal communications from: Nadezhda Babayeva, Moscow, July 1995; Maya Bykova, Moscow, November 1994; Alexander Char, Moscow, June 1995; Dunya Kovshova, Oryol Province, July 1995; Mariya Krasnonoska, Oryol Province, July 1995; Valentina Parkulab, Yekaterinburg, May 1995; Nataliya Sugrobova, Moscow, October 1994, July 1995; Nataliya Sukhodolova, Oryol Province/Moscow, July 1995; Yelizaveta Yefimovna, Oryol Province, July 1995.
12. Personal communication from Mikhail Miller, Moscow, June 1995.
13. A version of Part II of this paper was presented at the 10th International Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing, San Rafael, CA, USA, September 5, 1993.
14. Personal communication from Ivan Sokolov, St. Petersburg, April 1993.

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