

Alive and Wiggling - A Shameeah Experience with the Pacific Herring (Clupea pallasii)

When the herring comes to spawn, spring has arrived at the Canadian West Coast where we live. Millions and millions of silvery bodies moving in amazing synchronicity. It is an explosion of life. The herring do not come alone. They come with the sea lions, the eagles and thousands of ducks. The herring feed them all as well as us.

I was out in the kayak on one of the few sunny days in early March and I had hoped to get a few herring to surprise my wife. Well, I have to admit, I did not get a single one. Then an old tug boat captain stopped his boat next to me. We talked about boating and fishing and living on the coast. It was a pleasure to see how this man loved the land and the water and everything alive here. With eyes radiant with joy he told me about the clouds of herring surrounding his boat and how they moved in amazing unison and elegance to get away from the attacking sea lions.

“They are one hour further east from here”, he said. I probably looked a little disappointed as I shrugged my shoulders telling him that I had to get back to work and could not make it there today. He turned around, opened his cooler and with a big smile he handed me a bag chockful of freshly caught herring! What a joy!

“I got herring, honey!” I called, sporting the bag of herring when I came home. “Well, hmm, I did not really catch them but I got them.”

“At the sea food store?”

“No, when I was out with the kayak. Really!” Then I told her the story. We laughed and had our joy. That evening we had fried herring for dinner. I think they tasted even better than if I had caught them myself. The story with the tug boat captain was just too good.

That day I felt so full. The herring, the captain and the land filled me up with food, with beauty and with generosity.

A bag of herring goes a long way. The herring did not all end up in the pan. One smaller bag went to Spirit Eagle, our Native elder whose sweat lodge ceremonies and whose advice we appreciate.

That still was not all. 0.06 grams of one herring went into a special bowl. It went into the mortar, where we ground it down with a pestle in 6 grams of milk sugar in a process called a Shameeah ceremony. We – that was my wife Barb and I.

What is a Shameeah? It is a sacred ceremony in which we communicate with a being of nature, in our case with the herring.

Grinding down a substance with mortar and pestle is an ancient act which healers of all cultures all over the world have performed for thousands of years. While a tiny little bit of the herring is ground down, its energy releases and creates a vibrational field. We resonate with this vibration. And now the journey starts, the herring guides us into its realm and allows us to see the world a little bit through its eyes. In this way it reveals a very specific wisdom.

The basic structure of a Shameeah Ceremony has four C-levels, each level consisting of six rounds of ten minutes of grinding the substance with a mortar and pestle. While grinding we write down thoughts and sensations as they arise. We go through the different energetic levels of a substance called C-levels.

C1 deals mainly with the physical level and with the individual, C2 focuses on the emotional aspects and relationship, and C3 refers to the mental level. While C1 and C2 usually feel more or less uncomfortable, it is in C3 that we get a better understanding of the problem. In C4 we usually touch the sacred core inherent in every natural substance. Here a transformation usually occurs. What seemed to be a problem in the lower levels, reveals its deeper meaning and therefor turns into a blessing.

What follows is the journey that the herring took us on. There were only the two of us, my wife Barb and I. In quotation marks you can read the direct expressions that we used during the event. As you are reading it, try to open yourself to the energy of the herring. Then it is not only a story that you read but you will be a part of the experience.

C1

In C1 we had a few physical symptoms as would be expected. Most of C1, however, was about the experience of happy and fast movement.

“My eyes are itchy and watery, my left eyebrow is itching too.”

“I feel light and small, gliding through the water like through air. Freedom. I feel like grinding fast and the pestle feels so light. Like a motor bunny. Zip – zip – zip! I love the feeling of speed, of gliding this way and that way. Boy, I love being alive! I love being ADDish.

“I do not have a name or identity, I just love the speed. The coolness of the wind and the cold water touch my face.

“All of a sudden I am exhausted from zipping around so much. All of a sudden it is dark outside, I did not notice the change. Then speed again. Start –stop! Even when I am chased, I am not

scared about it. I just want to go fast. I do not know where I am going and I do not care. What matters is that I am not alone.”

“Thousands of little voices chirping around me. My body is wiggly, wants to move, to wiggle and make this sound that children make with their lips: It is like brrrh, but with lips closed and vibrating, bubbling. Like a chaos of millions of little sounds like that and of thousands of blinking lights. As if all the stars of the universe all of a sudden are whirling around with great speed, making these bubbly sounds like little children or like a small stream coming down the mountains. Flashing of lights, blinking of sounds.

“It is a young, spring-like, vivacious cloud of life and I dissolve in it, become part of it. It feels like a clear, cold, sunny day in early spring. The beginning of life, born out of itself. This is the spring of life.

“My body is restless. I want to wiggle and trill and shake myself. I am longing for movement, not for an activity that makes sense, just for movement. My muscles are fibrillating, my legs bouncing up and down. I have a restless-leg-syndrome but all over my body. And I want to make these high sounds like didlidlidl. It feels joyful, happy and effortless.

“Shivers of restless desire move up and down my back. It is not only a desire, it is a physical need to make these small fast movements in a very fast pace. It is not a desire to get somewhere, it is simply a desire to move.

“I am fidgeting around. Sometimes it is a tremor, a quivering, oscillating this way and that way, bending left and right in a fast rhythm.

Barb is grinding as if she is in a race.

“I want to dance to this fast techno music that shakes the body. It is bright around me, but I cannot see really. I forget about myself, I am in abandon. No worries. Life is light, fast and easy. Blissful abandon.

“At the very end of this level I felt a sense of fragility and vulnerability coming up. I feel unprotected like a child.”

C2

In C2 the physical restlessness turns into a movement with direction. We can see that a typical quality of the energy we are exploring is that things go fast and changes are sudden. Transition stages do not seem to exist. Life and death can turn into each other without anything in between.

“I am sitting in a lecture theatre, lots of students around me. I do not know anybody and I do not want to know anybody. There is a lack of seriousness in this school, I am really not concerned with passing this course. I do not think there is an exam either, there might not even

be any lectures. We are just all together in this pointless group but it feels good. I feel safe here. I still want to move but I am not as frenetic anymore as in C1. I am more focused, there is a task at hand, I just do not know what it is.

“Mindless. Caring but not caring. I feel mindful in a pretty basic way, I have a sense of who I am and what I am but I do not know where I am going. We are just hanging around waiting for something to happen like teenagers in front of a drug store. Anticipation that something might happen. Then I am excited: Maybe there is a party coming up!”

“Now I am getting a sense of direction, moving ahead. Before it was only wiggling, now it goes forward, and fast so. I have a strong desire to be in a group, to be with others.

“Then all of a sudden my joyful restlessness is interrupted, I feel helpless, like dead. I do not have much resilience, no stored reserved strength that would help me to bounce back. All my joy and aliveness is in motion, is tied to movement. When it stops, then it is over, I do not exist anymore.

“I fell out of this game. Within this energy, there is no slowing down, no time to rest. There is no in between, either fully alive and moving or dead. Children splashing in a pool come to my mind, then mom calls and all is over, the world stops. Nothing stays, not even a blissful memory.

“This is pure kinetic energy. All the joy is in the running, running around with other little boys carelessly. Do not stop them. To stop them is killing them. Do not ask them to slow down. That would be the end.

“There is no aging here. Never get old, never grow up. Live – and in the next moment it is over. There is no in between. It has to go on forever. The game never stops.

“If this would be music, then there would be no low tones and no slow passages.”

C3

“My mind is wandering all over the place, way more than usual.

“I feel like I belong. I am not close to the others but it is a feeling of belonging. Like a herd of wild horses flowing over the rolling hills. They act and move as one great cloud, moving in sync. Or a big swarm of birds moving in unison. I am part of a bigger whole, a bigger plan. No worries, I just go with the flow. No fears, simply acceptance of my place in the world. I do not need to be special. I want to fit in with the others. I see a storm but because we are together, we will make it through. Even if some of us would get lost, no worries. The rest of us will keep going. Togetherness for the greater good, individuality is not important, go with the flow.”

“I need to keep moving in order to stay alive. Aliveness is motion. Any standstill would be the end of existence. Nothing else exists than the joy of being alive which equals moving joyfully. Death is not a problem, it does not feel like a threat. Just move on. Happiness in motion. The only real threat is standing still, ceasing to move. That feels like sinking into darkness, disappearing into oblivion or getting lost in an abyss of non-existence.

“Put me in a cage and I die. Lock me up in four walls and I die. This is not who I am. I am the ever joyful promise of spring. I am the ever joyful source of life, a natural spring bubbling with life. I am giving and giving and giving, birthing and birthing and birthing.

“There are no blues in this energy, only bubbly life. No space for depression is here, no regret or guilt. Only life in fast movement is what counts. There is hardly any fear here in spite of all the childlike vulnerability. Stick your hand in it and you will feel it tickling, surrounded and touched by a million of tiny, gentle and encouraging nudges. No fear – just the giddiness of moving, moving ahead.

“Shake off the dust of lingering, you have been sitting far too long! Come into the clear water, you have been shrivelled and dried up far too much! Open your fearful fingers that were digging into something to hang on to. Get lost with us into life! Trust the current so it can take you away. Surrender into the vastness of life and start trusting where there seems to be no ground to carry you safely. Get lost with us into this movement.

“Quit taking your stingy little sips from the well of life! Come in and drown in the ocean, become life itself. Let life take you over, and let your body and your whole being be directed by it. Listen to its song and become this song so that every fibre of your body and every vibration of your soul sings it.

“I am the bait of life! My joyful being is the lure teasing you, tantalizing you. Do not vegetate in your garden bed, risk and live! Life is an ocean and wants you to become ocean. Become an ocean by joining this ocean. Become alive, become life itself!

“You might think that we are small. Look at the humpback whale and you see us. Look at the orca and you see us. It is us when a whale breaches, it is us when the salmon migrate up river. We are the life of the ocean –come join us! Leave behind your fears. We are the calling of life. Get up from your cozy chair by the fireplace. Live!”

C4

Usually C4 brings a turn-around. Here it brought a deepening of our understanding.

“We are food for the planet. We are abundance and we recover quickly. We are an indicator species like the canary in the coal mine. We give ourselves to the world. We are all over the world. The final ecstasy is being eaten with joy altogether. Joy is felt in the motion, not sexuality. I felt, when they were spawning, that it was less sexuality but more the joy of release.

This evolved into joy of movement, of life, of giving oneself freely without regrets or second thoughts for the greater good.

“They are feeding the world. Ideas, movement, creation, recovery. Coming together in an explosion of creativity. Coming from elsewhere to create new ideas in the world. Others may come also and take in our ideas or ourselves, which is also okay for the greater good of the world.

“The ecstasy is when we are really in a Time-Space-Rhythm, in the flow of life when energy is moving all over easily. Then it all comes together for an explosion of ideas.

“It felt like when a flow of ideas comes over me, way bigger than myself. It is not individual, it is a group.”

“It is a joyful ride. The pestle is stirring in the bowl so effortlessly, it is like flying. My whole body feels energized, tickling with joyful energy. I am closing my eyes and allow myself to sink into this sparkling aliveness.

“A desire for sex comes up but different from what I know. It is like diving into a sexually charged atmosphere. It is a sense of being sexual, not really of having sex. It is more like an erotic radiant aliveness, less a desire for a partner.

“Being fully alive is attractive, is sexy.

“In the lower levels it was a way of moving; here it is a way of being. I feel an energized stillness in me wanting to be expressed into life, wanting to be real, to become manifest.

“The herring is the bait, its promise is joy. Life’s promise is joy. Life’s promise is life including death. Dying has a place within life but life is so much bigger. It is not limited, not by dying and not by anything else.

“Hermann Hesse’s poem “Steps” comes to mind:

*The call of life to us forever flowers...
Anon, my heart! Do part and do recover!*

The words of this poem echo in my soul.

“My heart opens, my chest expands, my eyes wander over the ocean, I merge with the endless expanse, my yearning enters my joy. The pain of the past and the yearning for a future merge right here, becoming one deep and joyful breath, one wholehearted Yes to life. Take me life, I am coming! Swallow me up, devour me, I am becoming!

“The herring is the innocent desire to be alive, unprotected, unarmed and fearless.

“The herring is the great Yes to life in whichever form and on whichever path it will lead us.

“The herring is the limitless trust in life without any need to understand or to control.

“The herring is the bait in the huge mouth of the ocean waiting for us to become alive, waiting for us to give ourselves away to life.”

A comparison with the salmon suggests itself. The salmon was about endings, the herring about beginnings. The salmon had aggression and danger and death. In the herring energy, even death was a part of the game, and aggression was not felt at any point during our exploration.

The salmon felt energetically old, the herring young. It is fairly obvious, as we hardly notice the herring outside of the spawning in early spring and we mainly notice salmon in the fall when they die. You cannot overlook the importance of dying in the salmon. It surprised me to learn that a herring can get up to 15 years old; that means that they can get much older than any salmon which spawn and die already after two and five years.

There is no doubt that the food we eat influences how we feel. The herring definitely made us feel young and happy. I think that in the future I will eat much more herring than in the past as did the indigenous peoples of the coast before the colonization.

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