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The banner features a central image of a golden Buddha face surrounded by colorful mandala patterns. At the top, the text reads "Holistic Asia" with the tagline "...where heaven and earth meet...". A search bar is located in the top right corner. Below the main title is a navigation menu with the following items: Home, Articles, Asia Visitors, Resources, Events, Products, Forum, About Us, and Contact Us. The banner is divided into three columns:

- Events:** Lectures, talks, meditations, yoga retreats, massage courses, etc. in Hong Kong, Thailand and elsewhere.
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Animist – Humanist: Modern-Day 'Shaman'

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by L. Anne Hilty, PhD

As part of our occasional series on 'How i came to my Faith' Dr Anne Hilty describes her remarkable life and spiritual journey.

I have known myself to be a healer, ministering to others, for nearly as long as I can recall. My professional and spiritual selves are intertwined, and my life is "of a piece"...and surely handmade.

My ancestors were stillen im lande, the quiet people of the earth – my maternal line Amish and paternal Mennonite – and, for good measure, others were Quakers. Pacifists all, and several clergy among them – still others, 'barber-surgeons', as the country doctors of Switzerland, one of my two ancestral homes, were once called. Though my parents themselves weren't farmers, we nevertheless lived on farms for two distinct periods in my early childhood, and my first memories are of a deep connection with Nature in its myriad forms... and a lack of distinction from the natural world, a visceral impression which remains to this day.

By the time I was 5 years old, my father had adopted a more fundamentalist religion. He became a minister, and for much of my youth I gained a deep sense of community and service to others while developing an intimate relationship with the world of spirit. Soon thereafter we relocated to New York, where I became acutely aware of art and the creative act as a source of beauty and wonder, enrichment and expression of humanity's potential, spirit made manifest in much the same manner as the natural world had always been for me. Having abandoned the religion of my youth by late adolescence, for the past 3 decades I've explored shamanism and other animistic, magico-religious traditions, worked in ritual with pagans and witches, and sampled Judaism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Hinduism, Unitarian Universalism, and the Society of Friends [Quakers].

Shamanic touchstones: generally blessed with strong constitution, at the age of 6 I was bedridden for two months with a significant autoimmune illness; at 14, in the ocean immediately following a thunderstorm, I underwent a near death by drowning; at 32, I experienced three months of altitude-induced mental instability. In childhood, I had a powerful dream of shamanic themes that included flying above a single ancient oak tree in a flock of giant waterfowl with human faces; I've also had a lifelong recurring dream of emergence that begins with my swimming fathoms deep in the ocean in a state of bliss. In adulthood, I've experienced three profound visions and multiple other transcendent events. One such vision was a powerful spontaneous healing from the harms of my youth; another took me to a forested sanctuary and, as many native peoples would say, my totem creatures, while the third introduced me to my ancestral Council of Elders and an intermediary, all of whom I've worked with closely, in a trance state, for 20+ years. I've encountered various natural disasters, been the recipient of violence several times in the form of street crimes in New York, witnessed extremes of poverty, destitution, disease and homelessness, and experienced the longterm aftereffects of mass destruction in the wake of the World Trade Center disaster. All of these contributed to my spiritual growth.

At the tender age of 16, I was helping people to die. I worked as a nurse's aide in an eldercare facility, the policy of which was that no one should die alone but with companionship – and grace, and dignity. For more than three years, I sat with the dying, holding their hands, often in poignant silence as they hovered between the worlds, bathing and redressing their bodies following their final breaths. In my adulthood, I volunteered with a hospice and revisited this experience. I've also served as witness to the death of my beloved grandmother as well as that of a dear friend of the heart, and the traumatic near-death and longterm recovery of my sister.

Traveling widely for the purpose of connecting deeply with others and understanding culture, including art, folk medicines and mythologies, has enriched my spiritual life. I traveled to Cuernavaca, Mexico, on several occasions to assist a mentor there in healing work. In Reykjavik, Iceland, I discussed natural medicines with a woman from a 400-year lineage of healers, the only ones given government permission to harvest medicinal herbs at Thingvellir. There I also met with Jormundur Ingi, a druid and the government-sanctioned spiritual leader of the traditional Teutonic religion Asatru; for 3 hours we discussed mimetics and the resurgence of interest in animistic religions. In semi-arid Guanacaste, Costa Rica, with its black volcanic beaches, I joined a funeral party as we paraded through the streets while carrying the coffin and shovels; in Puerto Rico I had an out-of-body experience at the base of a waterfall in the El Yunque rainforest – on my 30th birthday and at the time of my birth; in Belfast, Northern Ireland, I met with a social worker who was facilitating social relationships between Catholic and Protestant youth. I've listened to the repeated Islamic calls to prayer that order the days in Morocco and Egypt, and crossed the border on foot into Israel – Palestine, where I visited the Holocaust Museum and viewed the wall being built between peoples. In New Delhi, I discussed ayurvedic medicine with a family from Kerala, the ayurvedic center of India; with the father of this family, a retired army general and devout Hindu, I explored pacifist methods of national security, the premise of the "think tank" that he developed and leads. Across the globe, I've attended worship services in cathedrals and temples, mosques and synagogues, and countless other sacred places, and visited numerous houses of art.

In Korea, Mongolia, and Siberia, I've witnessed and participated in shamanic rituals. One such ritual in Korea took place over an 8-hour period on a large flat boat in the Yellow Sea, an annual event for the blessing of the fishing season which was led by Kim Keum Hwa and supported by two dozen shamans and musicians of North Korean heritage, with 200 of us in attendance. Another occurred in Eastern Siberia in the hills near Lake Baikal, again an all-day affair this time in the Buryat tradition for one extended family, including the sacrifice of a ram by the bloodless Buryat method. To reclaim my own heritage, I traveled to two small villages near Berne, Switzerland, where I met with town historians and genealogists in order to detail my family lines: to "sing flesh onto the bones" of long-dead ancestors, in the way of a shaman.

In addition to my work as an integrative psychologist, having also been ordained as an interfaith minister, I've studied Asian philosophies and practiced Chinese medicine for many years. Having now lived in two Asian countries and traveled to several more, I've integrated many of these spiritual values into my being. As well, I've experienced and studied – and shared with others – multiple forms of healing and consciousness-shifting, to include transpersonal psychology, meditation and trance, guided imagery and visualization, and various somatic and energetic therapies. Countless times I've experienced the power of spirit in the healing process; from a six-month old baby to a 92-year old man and the spectrum in between, I've been privileged to witness transformation.

An abundance of spiritual teachers and mentors from an array of perspectives and cultures have served as my guides. In addition to each of those already mentioned, of particular note are Dr Bou Yong Rhi in Korea, a neuropsychiatrist and Jungian psychologist with a 40-year study of shamanism and its effects on the cultural psyche; Dr Elizabeth Serkin in the US, clinical sociologist and specialist in the treatment of trauma and of addiction, a lifelong Quaker from a family of artists; and, Dr Sandra Rasmussen, psychologist and nurse, who guided me closely in my doctoral work.

Significant relationships throughout my life, connection and community, are in fact primary elements of my spiritual self, and I've been most fortunate in this regard. The experience of love, of cherishing and being cherished by another, on several occasions has opened my heart and soul to the spirit world in an indescribably profound way; the love of friends and family has provided me with an extensive and complex global community, and a deep sense of support. Humanistic values in outward manifestations of social and political activism, pacifism, and sustainability have directed my adult life and further determined my spiritual development.

Connectedness, authenticity, and deep experience. These are the themes of my spiritual journey.

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