

Transcendence in Tribal Cultures ~Shinzen Young

00:00:00 Yes, in tribal cultures, this is interesting. Tribal cultures typically do not have a technical
00:00:24 vocabulary for these kinds of things. Typically, they do not have systematic exercises. That's
00:00:36 characteristic of literate civilizations.

00:00:45 So, when these tribal cultures encounter the elaborate philosophical and technological
00:01:04 cultures of the modern world, previously there had been a tendency to sort of think of themselves
00:01:17 as being less than, because it's like, wow, all these ideas and the literate cultures
00:01:27 foster that notion. And I don't just mean imperialistic Western culture, there's also
00:01:35 imperialistic Chinese culture. I mean, it's a human thing, okay? But actually, it's exactly
00:01:43 the opposite. It's actually to the credit of those tribal cultures that they didn't
00:01:51 have techniques and didn't have concepts, in a sense. Why? Because they didn't need
00:01:58 techniques and they didn't need concepts, they actually experienced the stuff as part
00:02:05 of their daily life and as part of their rituals, their ceremonies. So, whereas the literate
00:02:17 cultures had words for things but weren't necessarily actually having experiences, the
00:02:25 tribal cultures didn't need the words or the techniques. Life and ceremony sort of
00:02:32 did it for people. So, I would say, you know, it's not elaborated like that. Yet, having
00:02:42 said that, look what's implied, we'll just take one example of a tribal situation, the
00:02:50 one I'm most familiar with, which is Native American, specifically the Lakota or Western
00:02:59 Sioux approach to things. If you sort of look at the symbolism of the ceremonies, it's
00:03:05 all about complementary polarities. The sacred object, representative sacred object is the
00:03:16 pipe. That pipe has a bowl made of earth and a stem made of wood. And they're kept separate.
00:03:26 The bowl stands for Mother Earth, which is a contractive force. The stem stands for Father
00:03:35 Sky, which is an expansive force. The tree grows up to the sky. Eventually, the bowl
00:03:41 goes back into the earth, okay, to its source. So, you have these two, you're actually holding
00:03:50 in your hands the fundamental forces of the universe. And when you bring them together,
00:03:58 okay, then there's an empowering to do things. When you do the sun dance, you dance around
00:04:09 a cottonwood tree or aspen, and they're forked like that, okay. So, it's one becoming two,
00:04:19 becoming one. That's what you're looking at for four days. There's different ways that
00:04:29 people get pierced. You may have seen in movies like that movie, The Man Called Horse. By
00:04:36 the way, unlike in that movie, no one screams and cries, okay. But let's say you get pierced
00:04:43 the way it's shown in that movie. So, you get hauled up by these skewers, and you are
00:04:54 now completely at the mercy of an expansive force of the sky that's pulling your flesh
00:05:04 up, the contractive force of the earth. Those forces are totally beyond what any human mind
00:05:13 can deal with. So, you just have to surrender to that, and however long it takes for that
00:05:24 which is caught in between the fundamental forces to give, exemplified by about a square
00:05:34 inch of skin on either side, you just have to wait. At the moment when it breaks and
00:05:44 you fall to the ground is when your prayer is delivered to the source. So, this sort
00:05:51 of polarity thing is over the, symbolically it's all there. It's there in the ceremonies.

00:06:01 I've heard one medicine person, when you start a sweat lodge, okay, you put five rocks in
00:06:12 the center like that. So, one medicine man said that actually the original Lakota way
00:06:23 was there was just four rocks indicating the basic, the directions, okay. And the source,
00:06:37 God, Tonka-ashila, was represented by the absence. But because people couldn't wrap
00:06:45 their mind around that, they ended up actually putting something there just to symbolize
00:06:51 that. So, I could go on and on, and I'm sorry for getting digressed, but you asked about
00:06:56 tribal cultures. I think it's there in the life, it's there in the symbolism, it's
00:07:02 there in the ceremonies. It is not as I've ever been able to see there in terms of organized
00:07:10 techniques or philosophical concepts, but as I say, I don't think that that represents
00:07:15 a less than situation. I think it represents a better than situation. They didn't need
00:07:21 that stuff. They just lived it, or at least some of them. I'm not saying all our remote
00:07:26 ancestors were like that, but is that a sufficient answer about tribal?