

Rattle Medicine by Steven Ash

The rattle is a mysterious sound healing tool, even in writing this I want to run away. Rattle takes a lot of getting to know, because in truth we have to go back to the innocence of the child in order to use it affectively. Compared to drum, rattle is seen as the follower, coming in to refine a nearly completed job, to deal with anything left over, and to ensure that everything is cleared away out of the energy field that needs to go. Rattle contains all the elements, water, fire, earth and air. But in its own right rattle stands alone as a vehicle for calling in Spirits, helpers, allies and guides.

Elementally the rattles sound is closest to water as rain and reminds us of the cleansing power of the descending watery heavens, yet it is an instrument of fire and activity. When you physically smell a rattle after being used you can smell the carbide like a fire cracker from the sparks and friction of the crystals inside crashing and smashing together in the dark of its hard leather womb. Rattle also has the air element.

Go close to a rattle when it is shaking and you can feel a wind as it displaces the air, a strange quick and pushy wind of water, fire and earth. Earth in the rattle is each tiny round stone, crystal or seed; earth jostling and shaking, giving of itself, being transformed and broken down.

Similar to a basalt rocks used in the Inipi sweat lodge where after the heating of the rocks in the fire the “stone person” is placed in the hollow lodge pit with faces appearing, red and glowing on its surface. Then with the ladle splash of water, steaming and spluttering the rock gives of itself for the benefit of us humans, giving something inexplicable, beyond sane comprehension. Something comes out of the stones for us to listen, read and learn from. It is sometimes called Stone People Lodge for this reason, that the stones speak, it is we who need to learn how to listen.

John Fire Lame Deer speaks about the tiny stones that are used in the rattle in his book *Sioux Medicine Man*, “ There’s an ant power. Some ants have no eyes, but they can feel their way. They go out and bring back those rocks, called Yuwipi to put on their anthills. Tiny rocks the size of seed beads, shiny, agate like, little stones as clear as snow... We Medicine men go out to look for anthills and get these tiny rocks. They are sacred. We put 405 of them into our gourds and rattles... they represent the 405 trees which grow in our land ” Grandfather John Fire later says in his book that “ the 405 tiny stones in the rattle represent the number of available spirit helpers available and ready to assist in a healing or ceremony”

Rattle stones are doing this themselves, giving something to us, sound information, making a noise for us to listen to and translate, sounding for us to hear. In all that clatter, swish, drip dropping, banging and click, there is a language that is inviting you and me to go somewhere, there is mystery in the rattle when used in healing.

In his book *Shamanic Healing* Simon Heather from the College of Sound Healing gives a list of shamanic skills attributed specifically to the rattle. Invocation of the Spirits, space clearing, self healing, aura work, meditation, journeys, grounding and divination.

Rattle is the oldest musical instrument for soul retrieval work, and humankind's imitation of rain according to Angeles Arrien in her book *The Four Fold Way*. “It is a cleansing and purification instrument used to remedy soul loss...depression, disheartenment, and dispiritedness”. She goes on to say that “In practice most Shamans use the rattle for cleansing and purifying, and then they use the rattles sound to call parts of the soul that have been lost in the past, in a particular place or in a relationship”

In the ancient Huna medicine of the Hawaii the medicine people use the rattle specifically for cleansing and purification especially before teaching, a ceremony or healing. The rattle is used on your self and as you rattle up and down your body you look at any anger, sadness, guilt, shame and fear that is sitting in your field. Being held in our memories, these disturbances are like a sticky cloud surrounding as well as penetrating into our physical, emotional and mental body.

The rattle shakes “things” loose, dislodges and uncovers hidden disturbing and potentially disease causing factors in our consciousness, so that now we can choose to release them into the earth, sky or spirit world.

The ancient medicine people of South America are called the Laika they came over the Bering straights land bridge from the Hindus Valley 30,000 years ago, and steadily migrated south through what is now North America. They brought nine ancient transformation rites which are opened using the rattle. The rattle here is used to call up the spirits, spirit guides and helpers from the seven sacred directions of the medicine wheel. This same technique of calling up the available powers is used before trance journeys into the lower, middle and upper worlds, the rattle is used to call up protection and guidance. The Laika healers are regarded as being reborn through us.

Rattle is used as a tool for divining information and assisting visionary work “This is done by asking the rattle through its sound, for any oracular guidance that may be needed” says Angeles Arrien in *The Four Fold Way*. This is well worth exploring. Since we do not have the elders like Wallace Black Elk or John Fire Lane Deer around to teach us, we need to develop the power, skill and trust, turning our attention into the world of spirit and find the answers. These tools the drum and rattle do work, we just need to use them in the right way. Having a sincere heart is the key.

Last night I awoke at about one in the morning feeling unsettled, I sat on the sofa wrapped in a shawl and began to rattle around my head and body to release those unsettled feelings that woke me up. Time went by and I must have gone into a light trance, because I distinctly felt the presence on my right side of someone sitting beside me. With my eyes closed I looked and felt a warm friendly being sitting there waiting, we both smiled and I saw that it was White Feather my spirit guide. It was lovely because I wasn't trying. In the next moment I noticed others there, just patiently waiting and I began to feel so very grateful for having such good friends looking after me from the other side of the veil.

Dancing with the rattle is very powerful. Dancing is a method for empowerment and soul retrieval used by all native cultures. “We stay up and sing the ancient songs all night to purify ourselves, so that our dancing and our prayers can do good for everyone” a Hopi holy man explains in *Rare glimpse into the Evolving Way of the Hopi* by James Page. Dance connects us to the warrior within. The *Five Rhythms* by Gabrielle Roth are a wonderful and elemental method of reclaiming lost parts of our being. Combining these five rhythms as a rattle dance using one or two rattles is a powerful experience.

The flowing rhythm reclaims fluidity and grace.

The rhythm of chaos disentangles inhibition and announces the intention of creativity.

The staccato rhythm teaches refinement and definition

The lyrical rhythm ties it all together integrating and synthesis bringing completion.

The rhythm of stillness teaches contentment, gratitude and peace.

Very good fortune came to Renata and I after doing an Inipi Lodge with Grandfather Wallace Black Elk, he adopted us both as his grandchildren which is a great honour. He wrote a book with William S. Lyon called *The Sacred Ways of a Lakota* and in it he describes how the spirits work with the rattle, here are some examples “ So when that rattle comes into the lodge, he talks. All you are going to hear is a sound that sounds like a baby rattle flying around in there. But those stones in that gourd talk.

There is a talk in that rattle, but you have to be educated in these spiritual ways to understand it. Other times you will see those little lights flashing around in the dark...it comes from the stones.” And later he describes “Then I filled the Chanunpa (sacred pipe) my wife Grace played the drum and sang the pipe filling song...a whistle came from all the directions. Here these birds came, and a man appeared...Then you could hear this little gourd rattle right there in the green” He later describes how when in the Inipi lodge the rattle is being shaken the spirits of the medicine people come in and talk, its through the stones in the rattle that they communicate.

Here is a soul retrieval exercise described by Angeles Arrien in *The Four Fold Way* you can do this standing up. “Shake the rattle all around you in long horizontal and vertical movements and imagine you are being rained on purified and cleansed. Move the rattle in large circular motions on the right side of your body, this will call back lost parts of your dynamic nature. Do the same on the left side of your body, to call back lost parts of your magnetic nature.” You can add to this rattling up and down the midline in the front focusing on how you are going to approach your future bring your attention on your chakras, do the same on the back clearing your history.

So many cultures use the rattle with babies, babies and children are fascinated by the river of clattering sound and although you would think the drum with the emphasis on the mothers heart beat would be more inviting, for some reason it is the rattle. The Huna medicine of the Pacific is the remnants of the ancient civilisation of Lemuria, and in this medicine great emphasis is placed upon the health of the inner child, This is called HO-OPONOPONO and they say that most mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual disease is caused by the inner child being caught up in tangled, abusive and disturbing memories within the subconscious.

Maybe rattle is the way through into the realm of the inner child. Maybe as medicine people we have to listen to the words of Master Jesus when he talks about us having to be like children to enter the kingdom of heaven. Heaven is on Earth if we choose it to be so, and if we wish to awaken our consciousness to the bliss available here in each breath we are given; we will have to learn to use the tools that worked for our ancestors, which have been handed down to us. Rattle is as ancient as civilisation and a doorway into the mystery of healing, being open and spontaneous, dancing and shaking ourselves loose, we become the rattle.

Our bones not just holding our flesh up begin to shake and the shaking loosens muscles, sinews, nerves and veins. Our energy meridians pulling heaven to earth and earth to heaven flow and brighten with sparkling light, just like the little lights Grandfather Wallace describes in the lodge with the rattle, at the joints and in the nerves, sparks fly. We are just beginning to understand, relearn and remember the mystery of this ancient children's toy. Dear little rattle is one powerful helper in our quest for wholeness.