Conversations with Edward Tick, PhD
EDWARD TICK, PHD:
ON ASKLEPIOS, DREAM HEALING,
AND TALKING WITH THE DEAD
Interview by Bonnie Horrigan • Photography by Emma Dodge Hanson

Edward Tick, PhD, is the director and senior psychotherapist of the Sanctuary: A Center for Mentoring the Soul in Albany, New York. He has been practicing clinical psychotherapy since 1975 and is known for his groundbreaking work with Viet Nam veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. He is the cofounder and co-director of the Sage Center on Violence and Healing at the Sage Colleges, where is also an adjunct professor. Tick received his master’s degree in psychology from Goddard College and his doctorate degree in Communication and Rhetoric from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He is also ordained as an interfaith minister and initiated in several traditions in the practice of earth-based spirituality and healing.

Dr Tick is the author of two books, The Practice of Dream Healing: Bringing Ancient Greek Mysteries into Modern Medicine, and Sacred Mountain: Encounters with the Viet Nam Beast. He has also authored three collections of poetry and more than 50 articles on psychospirituality, the psychology of war and its healing, classical Greek culture and American literature. He lectures and conducts workshops at universities, religious institutions, medical, health, community, and veterans organizations all over the United States and Greece. Since 1995 he has led annual healing journeys to Greece. Since 2000, with Prof. Steven Leibo, chair of International Studies at Sage Colleges and co-director of the Sage Center, he has led annual journeys to Viet Nam. His next book, The Golden Tortoise: Viet Nam Journeys, will be published next year.

Alternative Therapies interviewed Dr Tick at his Sanctuary office in Albany, New York in the late summer of 2003.

Alternative Therapies: How did you get so deeply into Asklepius healing?

Tick: It evolved from my professional work. I was fiercely against the Viet Nam War during college. I struggled with the moral quandary about the responsibility of a male from any culture to help protect his country in times of danger versus the severe moral and spiritual implications of an immoral war such as Viet Nam. I was released from that quagmire by a high lottery number but still felt something incomplete in myself and wanted to serve peace and healing and my country in some form. Then, in 1979, when I was a young psychotherapist, Viet Nam veterans started to come into my practice.

For the first 8 years of my work with them, I tried to give vets the best psychotherapy I could possibly give. But I learned that what we think of as mainstream psychotherapy, even at its best, is not enough to heal some of the profound wounds that we carry. I learned that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a soul wound that pierces to the core of a person’s being. The kind of violence, technological brutality, horrible cultural conditions, and immoral behavior we forced on our soldiers and the Vietnamese people produced such appalling wounds and distortions of the soul that their entire systems became misaligned, maladapted, and dysfunctional. Ordinary psychotherapy, while it can help people manage stress and dig out some of the psychological components of PTSD, can’t touch and reorient the soul deeply enough to heal the disorder.

By the mid 1980s, I understood how deeply disturbed these veterans’ souls were. I realized that I needed to turn to spiritual dimensions for much greater healing than psychotherapy alone could provide. So I went on a worldwide search. I had several critical questions. They were: To what extent was PTSD an inevitable result for any human being participating in such unmitigated violence and brutality? Does it always happen in war or was some of it due to the particular conditions of the Viet Nam War and American culture? And, if veterans from other cultures, wars and times have these symptoms, how did those cultures treat their returning veterans? Did they help heal and reintegrate their veterans any better than we did?

I studied with Native American elders and participated with their veteran groups. I did an enormous amount of reading and studying about warrior traditions worldwide, and traveled to other countries to study their warrior traditions. In 1987, as part of this research, I went on a solo journey to Greece, which turned out to be an enormous spiritual breakthrough for me in numerous ways.
Epidauros, the principle Asklepiian sanctuary, like most others, has a beautiful ancient theater that seats 14,000 spectators. I arrived there for the opening night of the Ancient Theater Festival.

The play in performance was Euripides’ The Trojan Women. It doesn’t show war scenes, but instead shows the suffering of the women and children of Troy after the Greeks conquered it and took them into slavery. So I was searching for how the Greeks had responded to war and its damage, and after arriving at the principal healing sanctuary of the ancient world, I sat in front row of its theater watching the anguish of the Trojan women. I soon experienced what Aristotle describes as catharsis—the purging up and purging of emotions.

That night in the Asklepiian sanctuary, not only was I purged and cleansed, but I also experienced a moral realignment. When a person is exposed to severe violence, the soul gets misaligned along primal poles. Life and death, creation and destruction, war and peace—these exchange places and influence in the soul. One of the characteristics of PTSD is that the wound is so big that it completely fills a person’s consciousness. All the rest of life which is, of course, most of it, recedes into a tiny space. Death has taken over. And that was happening to me from so much veteran work.

But after viewing The Trojan Women in the healing sanctuary, I felt realigned in several ways. One was a rebalancing of the forces of creation and destruction, good and evil, in me. Another important realignment was that I realized that the Viet Nam War was not unique. It was our generation’s war so it was our generation’s passage through the underworld that we could turn into an initiation for individuals and the whole culture, if we were wise enough. But it was archetypal rather than unique. What war is, what war does, and how it affects people and the ecology is a universal experience. The Iliad, for example, can be read, not just as a gory history of the Trojan War, but also a demonstration of PTSD. Achilles’ rage, the abuse of commanders, the enmity between some commanders and their troops, the manipulation, deceptions, slaughter—there are so many manifestations of PTSD in this 3,000-year-old story.

My own Asklepiian healing freed me from a localized devotion to healing from the Viet Nam War and opened that work up to all of human history and experience, so that by now I have treated survivors of WWII, the Holocaust, Korea, Lebanon, El Salvador, the first Gulf War, Serbian concentration camps, and others. War is at all times and in all places evil and destructive. It always harms the soul. Once I understood that, and experienced that the Asklepiian tradition could help people achieve peace and regain our health after an experience of violence, I was propelled into a much deeper search into the origins, the meaning, and the practice of Asklepiian medicine, which is, after all, the origin of the western medical and psychological traditions.

AT: And you now use Asklepiian medicine to help treat the veterans?

Tick: Yes. But let me backtrack. PTSD is a disturbance of the soul. Socrates said that the essential function of the soul is to distinguish good from evil. But all of these essential soul functions—such as how we locate ourselves in the world, the way we perceive time and space, our aesthetic sensibilities, and our morality—are so disturbed by war and violence that they become distorted and misaligned, imbalanced, and don’t operate correctly. War survivors live in a war consciousness at all times, even when it is no longer necessary.

Several of the most disturbing symptoms of PTSD are chronic grief over those we lost or killed; nightmares, especially of the dead; and intrusive memories, again especially of combat and of people who have been lost. From a psychological perspective, these are symptoms of psychological and/or neurological disturbance and of severe stress. But from the spiritual or archetypal perspective, all of these symptoms can be understood and interpreted as the spirits of the dead trying to make contact again with the living. My article “Lost Souls in the Wars of the World,” presented in Spring Journal, presents this interpretation. When I present it to veterans, they almost universally feel relief and hope and a rightness about the interpretation that they have unfinished business with the dead and the dead have unfinished business with them. From there we can design and participate in practices that work toward achieving reconciliation with the dead and also help care for the souls of the dead.

For instance, the Native American warrior tradition says that when a warrior takes the life of an enemy warrior, he becomes responsible for the soul. So if you kill somebody, you are supposed to pray for them and help their soul travel on. If you do this properly, then the powers of the slain warrior becomes your own or enter into an alliance with you. I guide both veterans and civilians in creating rituals and practices of various kinds that work toward communication and reconciliation with the wandering dead.

From 1987 to 1991, I directed a veterans’ treatment program in the Catskill Mountains. I created many ritual events and psychological strategies that would enable the veterans to help reconcile with the dead. For instance, one Memorial Day evening we climbed a mountain in the Catskills and lit a watch fire on the top. Among Native American people and some other warrior traditions, villagers lit watch fires to guide their wandering warriors and hunters home. We built our watch fire for the lost spirits of the veteran’s dead companions and said prayers, told stories and cried out to them to return home.

I also have many examples of doing this kind of work when Professor Leibo and I take veterans back to Viet Nam. Unlike us, the Vietnamese have active and enduring relationships with their ancestors. They believe that when somebody dies, the soul of that relation remains with the family for 100 years. Thus they keep altars in their homes that honor their dead ancestors for four generations. When the next generation starts to die, they believe the fourth generation back is released and can then move on in its cycle of reincarnation. Further, their ideal is that a person be buried in their home village, though there are far too many war missing and dead for them to do this all the time.

Vietnamese people have a unique phrase, que huong, (pronounced kwai hung). They don’t ask, “Where are you from?”
Instead, they ask, “What is your que huong?” Que huong is everything—your family, your school friends, the kite you flew when you were young, the smell of the rice grass and buffalo dung—the entire natural and human ecology that you are a part of. They teach that we are part of this before birth, during life, and after death.

When someone dies, the soul tries to return to its que huong. It cannot be at peace or continue in the cycle of reincarnation until it reaches its que huong, is buried in its ancestral land, and the living survivors do proper prayer and ritual for it.

We don’t teach anything about the afterlife, but the Vietnamese teach that if someone is missing in action (MIA) then his or her soul is still wandering, trying to find its way home. So until we recover the remains, bury them properly and say the proper prayers, the soul will keep wandering and be stuck in between worlds. This is why the Vietnamese make an enormous effort to find their MIAs, (of which there were a quarter million) as well as ours (about 2,000) and to recover remains and give them proper honor.

A lot of veterans know these truths instinctually and experience the incompleteness just as the Vietnamese do. The Vietnamese say that through dreams and visions, they sometimes hear the spirits of the dead wandering in the jungles, singing or crying or lamenting, trying to reach the living. Our veterans report this phenomenon through nightmares. So when I take veterans to Viet Nam and teach them the Vietnamese philosophy about the dead, they say, “I knew that. My unconscious had been behaving that way all this time, but in America they’ve been telling me it’s just a psychological problem.”

It’s not merely psychological. It’s an inevitable spiritual reality from participating in so much violence.

Not only do I teach the veterans about this, but Leibo and I make great efforts to guide vets back to the sites where friends were killed or where they did killing themselves; we pray for the dead right there where they were killed. One man who went to Viet Nam with me, and to Greece afterwards, experienced enormous healing. We were driving through the countryside on a narrow road built over rice paddies when I noticed that he was staring out the window with a tortured look on his face. When we next stopped and everyone got off the bus to see a Cao Dai temple, he and I stayed behind and sat under a tree together. He fell into my arms crying, “I saw them all.” He had seen the legions of the dead walking toward him. First he saw his dead comrades. Then he saw dead Vietnamese. Next he saw the faces of some of the people he had killed. One especially called to him—a fourteen-year old boy who was the first Viet Cong he had ever killed.

He was crying and saying, “I killed that boy and lost my soul.” Tears were dripping down his cheeks so I took his hands and touched his own face with his own hands. I said, “Bob, what are these?”

He answered, “Tears.”

“And which part of us feels our feelings? Which part of us tells us whether we do right or wrong, good or evil?”

“The soul,” he answered. At that moment he began to understand that his soul was returning. “That boy,” he said, “I am so sorry I killed him. I feel love for him and I want to help him find peace.” Then he realized that the spirit of the boy he had killed was actually trying to help him get his soul back.

So we climbed Nui Ba Den, Lady Black Mountain. It was a place of fierce fighting during the war but there is a beautiful Buddhist pagoda on top of the mountain. We went up to the pagoda and Bob performed a ceremony for the soul of that dead Vietnamese boy. We asked the Buddhist monks in residence for help, and they chanted for both our vet and his victim. Bob prayed his heart out and achieved catharsis; he cried and cried and cried. We lit incense for the dead boy in the Vietnamese way. When Bob’s tears passed, he closed his eyes and said, “I see him now. He is smiling at me and is at peace. He’s telling me that he will be my ally, my helping spirit for the rest of my life.”

Now Bob’s nightmares are gone. He has finished his college degree and has decided to get a PhD in medical ethics and devote his life to this kind of healing and reconciliation. He declares that the boy is right by his side, helping him every step of the way.

AT: That’s an incredible story.

Tick: Bob has traveled to Greece with me twice since Viet Nam. The first time, he had a healing in the Asklebian and shamanic traditions at the Minoan Palace of Knossos on Crete. Everywhere Bob walked through Knossos he encountered a lot of noisy crows. He called me over and said, “I’m trying to find some corner of this sanctuary where I can be quiet and meditate and pray but these damn crows keep following me and cawing at me.”

I told Bob that the crows were trying to talk to him. “Listen with your heart. Listen with your inner ear,” I said. “See if you can hear what they are saying to you.”

Bob awoke at dawn the next morning and went to Knossos to be there alone with the crows. He sat under a dead tree and just listened. He reported to us that a huge flock of crows came into the trees surrounding the dead tree under which he sat and that they cawed and cawed until these words fell together into
the human sentence, “You are a good man,” repeating it over and over until he cried again.

A year later, he brought his wife to Greece with us. Because of his PTSD they had been alienated and were on the verge of divorce. He wanted to bring her to the place where the crows had helped his soul cleanse and restore goodness. We found the old tree under which he had sat. The year before it had been dead. But now it was in full bloom. So he and his wife asked me to perform a remarriage ceremony on the spot. We called the rest of the group together. As we gathered, the crows arrived and cawed out their joy as these two people remarried. And their marriage is healed. They have a great relationship now.

His is just one story of many that illustrate that the re interpretation of PTSD symptoms along spiritual lines gives us strategies and practices that address the symptoms and conditions from a spiritual perspective. These can be enormously transformative.

AT: From reading your book, The Practice of Dream Healing, I would say that you could take any condition and heal it in this way.

Tick: That’s right. The Asklepius tradition says that any condition of body, mind, or spirit can be treated by these holistic practices. One of its principles is that we recognize when we have reached the limits of human healing and need to appeal to transpersonal sources. Once we decide we mortals can’t do any more, we need to appeal to the unconscious or the spirits or the transpersonal powers or the archetypes or whatever name we are comfortable giving it. But any condition can be turned over and we can seek healing for anything.

AT: I was amazed to learn that there are thousands of testimonies or votives regarding Asklepius healings that have been left by the ancient Greeks.

Tick: We literally have thousands of documented testimonies from the ancient temples of Asklepios. We know of 320 Asklepius medical sanctuaries in ancient Greece and thousands of testimonies that span 2,000 years. For instance, there are testimonies from soldiers wounded in battle with spear or arrowheads embedded in them so deeply that their conditions were inoperable; who then slept in the temples and through a dream healing saw Asklepios or one of his helpers performing a dream surgery in which the projectiles were extracted. When they woke up the next morning, the arrowheads had popped out—without human surgery.

The Asklepios at Corinth was especially noted for treating reproductive and gynecological problems. Many votives have been recovered from that site. There is a museum in Corinth with a room full of these recovered votive offerings in the shapes of breasts, genitals, and wombs. But there hasn’t been a single medical instrument found there, so the evidence seems to be that these were all dream healings. In some other Asklepias, like the one on the island of Kos where Hippocrates had his medical school, both dream healing and scientific medicine were practiced. Medical instruments as well as testimonies have been found there. But in some places like Corinth, there is no evidence that scientific medicine was practiced. So even for what we would think of as purely physiological conditions, such as tumors, dream healings occurred and were successful.

AT: What is a dream healing?

Tick: In essence, a dream healing is having what Carl Jung would call having a “big dream,” but for a specific disturbance of body, mind or spirit. Jung differentiated between big dreams and little dreams. A little dream is what we consider an everyday dream made of everyday experiences and dealing with daily life and the material in the personal unconscious. Most of our dreams are little dreams. But every now and then we get a big dream, which is a breakthrough from the collective unconscious or from the transpersonal dimensions. Jung got his concept of big dreams from the Asklepios Indians of Labrador who taught that Mistápeo, a million-year-old man, occasionally reveals himself to us and speaks his wisdom through dreams. When he appears, the Asklepios call it a Big Dream. Jung took that concept and said that anytime the archetypes are clearly and strongly present, trying to affect significant life transformation and revealing themselves to us through a dream, then that is a big dream.

Asklepius healing is a particular medical/spiritual practice.
that combines the principals of both naturopathic medicine and sacred practice. First one prepared the seeker, who suffered some affliction that human medicine couldn’t help, to attempt to achieve a big dream. In such a dream, an archetypal helpers would appear to the person. The god might appear, or else one of his archetypal helpers instead, perhaps his daughter Hygieia (the derivative of our word hygiene), his dwarf helper and fertility demigod Telesphorus, or any of his animal helping spirits—the snake, the dog, or the cock.

Asklepios or one these helpers might heal directly, for example, with a dream surgery, after which the patient would wake up cured without ever having any physical surgery. This direct intervention from which the person woke up cured was more common in chthonic and Greek times. The types of dreams and their content changed during Roman times so that prescriptive or pharmacological dreams became more common. Asklepios still came, but he would tell the person what he or she would have to do to heal themselves. “Eat a mixture of ground acorns and ashes from the sacrificial fire under my altar for a week and you will be cured of dropsy.” Those kinds of remedial prescriptions became more characteristic of the later era of Askleopian dream healing.

Either way, the formula was to try human scientific medicine first. If you decided that that could not bring about healing, you then appealed to the divine powers. After deciding to appeal, you removed yourself from the daily life that was causing you so much stress and worry and went on a pilgrimage and retreat into an Askleopian sanctuary. The sanctuary was the ideal holistic healing center. You received the best of nutrition, diet, exercise, massage therapy, hydrotherapy, astrological readings, music performances, poetry readings. All of that happened in the Askleopian sanctuaries. That holistic milieu is healing in and of itself. But that wasn’t enough. Then came the dreaming.

AT: It sounds like a medical spa with a theatre and a dream house.

Tick: Yes, and all people were welcome there. The sanctuaries were open to everybody from slaves to emperors. You didn’t have to have good insurance or be wealthy to go to an Askleopian sanctuary. And people stayed for as long as they needed. Medicine was everyone’s birthright and as a gift from divine sources, it was practiced that way. The spa environment was meant to remove people from the daily life that stresses and give them deep rest to restore their heath and their balance to the point where the seeker was ready to go on a spiritual quest. When the person was strong enough, they were called.

Our word “psychotherapist” comes from this tradition. Psychotherapist in Greek literally means servant of the soul or attendant of the soul. The attendants in the Askleopian sanctuar-
ies were called psychotherapists. They watched, counseled, and
guided the seeker, especially watching for dreams, visions and
signs of something unusual or extraordinary happening. That
was the sign that the person was called into the sleeping cham-
bers. There they would fast, pray to the god of healing, and offer
appropriate sacrifice before climbing into the sleeping chambers.

The sleeping chambers varied in construction depending on
the era. Originally they were caves in the mountains. People
climbed into small cocoon-like chambers in the rock, just like a
snake climbing into the earth. So they would literally return as
deeply as they could into the womb of Mother Earth to get some
kind of dream or vision to heal them. Later on, as the classical
era took over and the Greeks built their beautiful temples,
Asklepian temples took that form as well, including the sleeping
chambers. Then people slept on couches. Nonetheless, the prac-
tice was the same. They would sleep in sites reserved for nothing
but dream questing. Fasting, praying, sleeping, and waiting,
watched over by the psychotherapist until they had dream or
vision in which they saw Asklepios or one of his helpers come to
them and either heal them or tell them how to heal themselves.

AT: Did anyone ever fail to get a dream?

Tick: We have stories of people being sent away and refused the
vision. That is a kind of vision in itself. For example, one testimo-
yny declares that Asklepios came to a rich man saying, “I banish
you from my temple for a year. During this year I want you to
give away lots of your money and do charity work for the poor
and change your personality because you are too selfish and can’t
be healed until you become generous and kind and open-heart-
ed. If you achieve that in a year, come back and I will heal you.”
The man transformed his life around and returned for a healing.
So sometimes people were refused. The transpersonal wisdom
realized that psychological dimensions could cause illness or
could block healing and would address them.

But again, once a person was finally called into the sleeping
chambers and allowed to sleep, something momentous happened.

AT: How do we know all this?

Tick: We have thousands of recorded testimonies. Many are
carved in stone, literally. There are famous steles that are 6 feet
wide and 12 feet tall from Epidaurus. I believe we have 6 remain-
ing that, from top to bottom, have carved testimonies about the
healings. We have many other fragments, carvings, statue
pedestals and votives.

AT: Do they also talk about the rituals?

Tick: Yes, in several ways. Some of the testimonies are descriptions
for how to do the rituals. Many of them are of what an individual
experienced. Many others are abbreviated case studies. This is my
favorite: Ambrosia of Athens was blind in one eye. She came to the
Asklepion to be healed but scoffed that a God could make a person
who was blind see again just by giving her a dream. She went to
sleep in the sanctuary and Asklepios came to her and said he would
cure her of her blindness if she agreed to set up a silver pig in his
honor in memory of her stupidity. When she agreed to that in
the dream, she saw Asklepios cut open her blind eye, pour some oint-
ment in it, and then seal the eye up again. When she awakened, she
had full sight in both eyes.

We have a pedestal with this testimony carved into it. This is
primary evidence. And as I said, archeologists have uncovered 320
Asklepian sites stretching from Egypt to Spain and Portugal, and
from the Balkans to North Africa. So this was wide spread holistic
healing practiced throughout the entire Mediterranean region. The
earliest evidence is from 1300 BCE in the mountains of Thessaly in
northern Greece where it originated. It spread up through the early
Christian era. Then the Christianized Roman emperors went to war
against all the pagan gods including Asklepios and destroyed all
their sanctuaries. The last testimony we have from Epidaurus dates
from 355 CE. The neo-platonic philosopher Proclus lived right near
the Asklepion of Athens, just below the acropolis, in the late 5th
century CE. He prayed at the Asklepion and brought about a heal-
ing for his neighbor’s daughter and had his own dream healing
from arthritis as well. There is other evidence that the dream heal-
ings went on through this time, after which the early church either
destroyed the sanctuaries or set up dream healing sanctuaries of
their own. They had the same practices but instead of Asklepios,
either Jesus or one of the early saints appeared to people in their
dreams and brought the healings.

Asklepian healing was practiced from 1300 BCE to almost
500 CE, which is almost 2000 years.

AT: When did science enter the medicine picture?

Tick: Western scientific medicine grew directly out of this tradi-
tion. Hippocrates, whom we call the father of modern medicine,
was the son and grandson of Asklepius priests. As a child he
studied in their temples on Kos. But because he was a product of
the Greek enlightenment of the fourth century BCE he rejected
spiritual roots and practices. Before Hippocrates, medicine was a
specialized branch of philosophy. Hippocrates and his immedi-
ate followers caused a split so that medicine broke off and
became a science rather than an application of philosophy. Since
then these disciplines have been traveling separately.

The psychotherapists and Asklepiads before Hippocrates
saw themselves as humble facilitators of, first, a holistic ecology
in which a patient could move and get rebalanced and strength-
ened, and second, a facilitator of an encounter with the divine
who had to get out of the way and stay in the background so the
patient could do his or her own work to meet the divine powers.
Hippocrates threw out that encounter and said, we doctors are
the authorities, we are in the center, we call the shots, we are who
you need to meet, not the powers.

But Hippocrates came along one thousand years after
Asklepios so there was a millennium-long spiritual, mythological
and naturopathic healing tradition before science, as we know it,
ever got involved in the medical enterprise. Today we in holistic medicine are trying to again travel toward that unification of science and spirit. These spiritual practices don’t reject science. But rather, like the twin snakes, they strive to entwine the disciplines together. To help accomplish this, it is profoundly important that modern physicians learn this early history and their own roots in nature, spirit, and mythology.

AT: Can dream healing be practiced anywhere?

Tick: We can do these practices anywhere as long as we follow these holistic principles: we must have 1) an intractable condition that isn’t yielding to any other form of healing; 2) willingness to go on pilgrimage and prepare oneself through psychotherapy, holistic and complementary modalities to get as healthy and strong as possible; 3) prayer and supplication to turn over our affliction to the powers of the divine; 4) going on a retreat and quest during which we declare that we are seeking divine help for our affliction and are not going to leave until we get it; and 5) putting ourselves in a sanctuary of whatever creation.

I have experienced Asklepian healings myself and also have facilitated them for others. I have also heard many stories of such healings occurring spontaneously. But we can facilitate this type of healing just as we can facilitate vision quests. Asklepian healing is a little different because we are traveling into the deep unconscious whereas on vision quests we venture into the wilderness to connect directly with nature and the powers that come through her. But the principles of withdrawal, prayer, appeal through fasting and self-affliction, and turning ourselves over to the spiritual powers are the same.

AT: Can you tell a story about one of the Asklepian healings you have facilitated?

Tick: This is a wonderful story that connects the Asklepian healing work back to our concern about war and violence in healing veterans. One woman who traveled to Viet Nam with me had been a nurse during the war on one of our hospital ships. She was not in combat herself but, as grunts always say about the nurses, had it much worse. All day and night nurses were surrounded by horrible wounds of war. The hospital ship she worked on treated both our wounded and Vietnamese children. She was especially devoted to the children and always tried to help them.

She had severe PTSD. She went into exile in Canada after returning from the war. I first met her when she traveled with my group to Viet Nam in 2001. At that time, she was on five different medications for insomnia, nightmares, anxiety, and depression.

We did a lot of good healing work as we traveled through Viet Nam, including visiting an orphanage where many of the children she had helped lived. We prayed for the dead and processed her memories of wounded and dying Americans. We also went to Da Nang and walked the harbor where her ship had been berthed. That was all helpful, reduced her stress and brought her out of the closet. She is a minister but had never spoken about Viet Nam. After our journey she went home and became an activist. She gives sermons about Viet Nam, past and present. She witnesses to the pain of the Vietnamese, helps raise money for Agent Orange projects in Viet Nam, and has a Vietnamese foster daughter. But she still had severe PTSD.

She came here to Albany for an Asklepian healing. We set up one of my office rooms as a studio apartment and retreat so she could meditate, write and pray in intensive solitude. We created a personal holistic healing sanctuary for her. She arrived on Memorial Day and we marched together in the Veterans for Peace contingent—the first time she ever marched in a parade. A Reiki practitioner gave her Reiki every other day. A yoga therapist did yoga work with her. My wife Kate Dahlstedt, who is a psychotherapist and massage therapist, did massage therapy with her. We did shamantic practices to strengthen her soul and reconnect her to the earth. I organized a veteran’s gathering to welcome her into our community and celebrate her status as an honored veteran and her return to us. So through complementarity and calling a community into service, we created the Asklepian sanctuary for her in modern terms. She was here for three weeks. We watched her dreams closely every day. They changed rapidly, growing very vivid. At the two-week point, she had a series of dreams that let us know it was time to do the dream questing.

We set up my office as a dream chamber for the weekend. Kate and I served as her attendants, watching over her through the night as, in the Asklepian tradition; she fasted while we performed the ritual of praying to the healing powers. She did some very deep and sincere praying, and then we shrouded her lightly and put her to bed. One of us always kept watch, praying and meditating over her while she slept for 12 hours. That night she had a long series of very interesting and complex dreams. The core of her dream experience consisted of two themes. One was reunification with the community. She saw Vietnamese children coming to her healed.
She knew that their bodies were not healed yet she saw the old distorted beings with blown-up bodies return as beautiful, smiling children who thanked her. She had always felt like she hadn’t done enough for the children because, even though she had tried to heal them, she had been part of the war machine and was therefore guilty. But in the dreams, these souls said, “You are our mother. You tried to give us life.” So she achieved reconciliation. She also experienced a dream surgery that was similar to the ancient testimonies where she felt a divine physician reaching into her brain and rearranging images, impressions and patterns.

It wasn’t only the dream but the whole sanctuary we created that was healing. Sitting with her through sleep while she knew we were praying and meditating was also a form of bringing the divine powers to her. It was this combination of the extraordinary lengths we went to as human beings working together plus the greater wisdom of the transpersonal powers intervening that affected an enormous healing. She awakened happy, grateful, and feeling different although she couldn’t explain how.

Over time, she got off all meds. She stopped having nightmares and started sleeping peacefully through the entire night. Her anxiety reduced 80%, and she became more integrated into the community and a much more active witness. Because of her war experiences—and this is very common among veterans—she had had a hard time with intimate relations and had taken a vow to live alone the rest of her life. But she gave up that vow as a result of her healing and opened her heart to the search for love.

She doesn’t say, nor would I, that she doesn’t have PTSD anymore but rather that her body/mind system was so profoundly affected by the Asklepian healing that the PTSD is in abeyance. She is still prone to stress disorder, but she has achieved such a profound reintegration and healing that she is grateful, happy, healthy, searching for love, and an activist for peace rather than closed down, suffering, isolated and dependent on meds.

**AT:** So what actually happens? Is Asklepios a real spirit that awaits our call?

**Tick:** Yes.

**AT:** Tell me how you perceive of or visualize the universe in that way.

**Tick:** I have found, as many spiritual and depth psychology traditions teach, that the archetypes are really there. The gods and goddesses, the powers, the spirits, the archetypes—they are there. Jung revived the word archetype so we now have a quasi-scientific word for gods and spirits. But no matter what we call it, there are patterns, images, figures, and stories that appear to be built into the universe and recur throughout human history. They recur in the imagery of all cultures from all times and places, and have recurring themes and motifs.

One of the eternally recurring figures is of the healer, the divine physician. Asklepios is the ancient Greek version. Jesus is the Christian healer. The medicine spirits in Native American traditions embody or carry the healer archetype. Shamans are embodiments of the healer archetype who travel to the spirit world to connect with transpersonal powers and learn from them how to carry healing back to their people.

There are only a few books on the Asklepian tradition. The three most important ones came out right after World War II, which is very interesting. The world had been through such trauma. Then, after literally a millennium of neglect, the archetypal healer reappeared in the west. We needed it. One of these books is Asklepios: Archetypal Image of the Physician’s Existence, by Carl Kerenyi. The subtitle of his book underscores our point that the mortal physician embodies an archetypal figure. It is built into the Logos, the spiritual order of the universe. The divine energies of healing coalesce in a particular figure of the healer that looks like the ideal physician and will present to us that way.

In the Greek tradition, he looked like a combination of the family doctor and Jesus—walking in robes and sandals with students and disciples following, content with poverty and just the resources to spread the healing, possessing great kindness and wisdom, endless practice, faith, a battery of naturopathic and complementary techniques, and profoundly devoted to relieving the suffering of the human race.

My interpretation is that there is an archetype of the healer or the physician, and that it has certain spiritual, moral and practical characteristics such as kindness, generosity, devotion, practice, nature wisdom. It presents in all cultures. As healers, we must model and evoke this archetype. Our medical system is either aligned or misaligned, either helpful or harmful to the degree that we stay true to this archetypal imagery.

When in modern America we destroyed the tradition of the family doctor, we not only hurt our communities by depriving them of service. Further, we actually betrayed the archetype because the archetypal physician does travel to where people are afflicted regardless of the time or the cost involved. When we reserve the best healthcare for the wealthy, we betray the tradition and the archetype because in all spiritual traditions the archetypal physician appears to everybody in the culture regardless of their social status or their financial resources. And when we make decisions about life and death based on people's ability to pay, we spiritually betray the archetype of the physician and therefore block his ability to come through to us.

**AT:** Is this archetype manifesting more now?

**Tick:** Perhaps. It seems like it. The archetype was lost until the 1940s, until the world was so traumatized by WWII that it spontaneously came back. Both ordinary people and scholars and practitioners in the Jungian tradition rediscovered it and brought it back to work toward balance for the planet. All of our efforts in the holistic health field are also attempting to bring back various forms of spiritual and archetypal healing to help contribute to a rebalancing. So I think for all of us in health and medicine, the message is this: God created doctors.