

# **Cultural Contexts of Healing - An Anthropological Perspective on Indigenous Mental Health Practice, with case study on Sámi Healers in Porsanger, Norway**

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## **Abstract**

This anthropological study examines the enduring potency and continuity of Sámi traditional healing (noaidut), through a case study of two healers, Nanna and Sigvald, in Porsanger, Norway. The research draws on interviews, participant observation, and historical analysis, contrasts colonialist and modern medical discourses, which tend to reduce indigenous practices to identity politics or primitive medicine with the living tradition. The paper posits that Sámi healing, characterized as an extended discourse on imagination, aligns with intellectual movements like C.G. Jung's Analytical Psychology and William James's Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion. The essence of the inherited practice, described by the healers as "bundling and releasing" or ecstasy, is shown to be dependent on participation and imagination. This core healing method is congruent with the Laestadian doctrine of the "Keys to Heaven," suggesting a continuity between Sámi spiritual heritage, Laestadianism, and Jungian imaginal practices. Despite historical erasure and stigmatization, the successful transfer of this knowledge from Nanna to Sigvald, facilitated partly by the researcher's positive assessment, confirms the tradition's ongoing resourcefulness and effectiveness in reestablishing connection and promoting mental health.

**Keywords:** Sámi Traditional Healing, Imagination, Laestadianism

*Before colonization we had tools on how to live side by side. The colonists take away local rules, otherwise they cannot rule. The idea and consequence is to break the communities idea of itself (Sigvald Persen, 18/1/26).*

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## **Introduction**

It can be noted that all people everywhere have a strong motivation to live from out of their identities (collective and individual). Colonialist discourse on indigenous healing has a forced direction towards identity politics. This forced direction does not allow the Jamesian claim to effectively operate, the claim that context renders things knowable (Cribben, 2025 p.17), that is, coherent accounts of a world in which agency is relational, distributed and context dependent, are not included in colonialist discourse. Instead, healing discourse within and over colonized peoples takes on the character of identity politics, and there comes no healing, i.e., rather than healing seen as an active process, discourse is caught in behaviors akin to narcissistic personality disorders.

Sámi traditional healing (*noaidut*) is an extended discourse on imagination. Despite superficial conclusions that there is nothing left and that the tradition has made no further contribution, my conclusions are that the extended discourse on imagination was and is instrumental for movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that were reactions against the 18<sup>th</sup> century Age of Enlightenment's emphasis on science and rationalism as ways of discovering truth. Psychiatrist C.G. Jung's development of Analytical Psychology, pragmatist philosophy of religion following William James and German Transcendentalism (in the footsteps of Platonism, Neoplatonism, Indian and Chinese scriptures, plus Emanuel Swedenborg and Jakob Böhme) is an example of traditional healing being taken further (see Jung, 2009).

I posit C.G. Jung's development to be in line with George Ernst Stahl (1659–1734) professor at the University of Halle, lecturer on the theory of medicine and on chemistry. Stahl was a devout pietist and proposed that the soul and the body are a unity, that life is organic, and that life is the active soul working within the structures and substances of the body (see Miller, 2020 p. 45).

## **Methods**

Research design and data collection methods: I compare conclusions on Sámi traditional healing formed by the colonizing presence in Finnmark, Norway with the living local traditional healer's conclusions. Data was collected from historical secondary literature and interviews with living Sámi traditional healers, as well as, participant observation that included weekly ZOOM conversations.

Translation processes and ethical considerations: My main informant was asked to assign the translator. The translator in the course of translations inherited the main informant's gift. The transcripts of all interviews (healers, patients, religious leaders) were read back by author to the interviewee for

their permission to include in the research write up, as well as, checking each interviewee's comfort in disclosing sensitive personal material.

### **Analytical procedures and interpretive framework**

The author endeavored to follow the analytical procedures and interpretive framework revealed and embodied by the two main healers in this study. The Sámi traditional healer's worldview, is no longer, according to two traditional healers, a cultural heritage in the surrounding villages. According to Sigvald Persen that makes them "weird communities, not natural, by not following one's heart." He concludes that elsewhere in Norway "lives are based on the local culture," but we should note theirs is a Norwegian worldview as fits the Norwegian people. There are Sámi cultural revitalization campaigns in the Sámi area of northern Norway, but for Sigvald these efforts do not touch the heart of the issue, which is a basic "no feeling, no care for or in the lives of one's neighbors," and hence "no active participation, no active imagination, no feeling in your body and heart." The author's own contribution is to use her cultural worldview, which is Jungian psychology, and demonstrate to herself how effective Sámi traditional healing continues to be.

### **Case Study**

My research area is among the Sámi people of far northern Europe (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Kola Peninsula), who were and are rigorously colonized by the Norwegians and Swedes (my personal experience does not extend to Finland and Kola Peninsula). Research was done among the Coastal Sámi in Porsanger Municipality in Finnmark, Norway's northernmost province. I had been visiting the area frequently since 1995, and my taped interviews began in 1998. The timing of my fieldwork was opportune since Nanna, the local healer, was searching for her right successor. During our conversations, it became evident that she had her own reasons for taking part in my research, which was described to Nanna as "documenting all this," that was to identify her legitimate successor and pique his interest. Nanna, who was in her late 80s at the time, consented to the video recorded interviews and even gave me instructions to interview and video record some of her patients, but made it clear that she would select the translator. Sigvald, her son, was her choice. The interviews were conducted in Sámi, and Sigvald and this author worked together to translate them into English. There was plenty of opportunity for debate and clarification when working together to translate the interviews, including the patient interviews. Nanna also had plenty of opportunity to draw-out Sigvald, the successor she had in mind. Sigvald consented to "take care" of her inheritance after two years of interviews (see Miller, 2007).

## **Context**

Possibly contributing to continuity for traditional Sami healing is the esoteric nature of the tradition, which means that it is never common knowledge (see Myrvoll, 2000). Archaeological evidence, the pictorial motifs on the drums, and written sources such as traveler's books, preserved court minutes, information in the missionary archives in Stockholm and Oslo, and missionary testimonies are the primary sources used in investigations of the native Sami religion. The most significant type of accounts are those from missionaries. Manuscripts that, despite significant limits, give information about Sami religion and folklore from the 17th and 18th centuries. The missionaries' opinions of the Sami religion were obviously biased. To be more successful in their purpose, they sought to comprehend the Sami worldview. The scholar Johannes Schefferus, the missionary Thomas von Westen, and the 19th-century priest Lars Levi Laestadius. are significant sources.

Three brief periods comprised the majority of the missionary accounts: the 1670s, the 1715–1731 period, and the 1740s and 1750s. The most significant writings from the 1670s were composed in the Swedish Lappmarks by clergymen at the request of the Chancellor of Sweden. In order to disprove the notion that the Swedish army employed Sami sorcerers during the Thirty-Year's War, the Swedish Chancellor initiated the collection of evidence to the contrary. During the 17th century, malediction (magic that caused bodily injury) and sorcery were considered crimes that might result in death sentences in Sweden and Denmark-Norway. The Chancellor requested that philologist and Uppsala University professor Johannes Schefferus (1621–1679) publish a monograph on the Sami. Schefferus used the collected source material to write his book *Laponia*. Written between 1671 and 1673, *Laponia* is considered today to be the oldest trustworthy book on the history and culture of the Sami. This author has had opportunity to compare Schefferus' findings with living testimony. And it is a remarkably objective monograph when one considers the period in which it was written. It should be noted that in this period, Norway - Sweden were not active colonisers of the Sámi.

The most important descriptions of the Danish-Norwegian missions in the 1720s come from Thomas von Westen (1682–1727). His content was utilised extensively by other clergymen, so that most of the missionary accounts written in connection with the missions in Norway in the 1720's depend on the material collected by Thomas von Westen. Von Westen's writing is only accessible through his copiers, as his original material has been lost.

Swedish minister, botanist, mythologist, and theologian Lars Levi Laestadius lived from 1800 until 1861. He became most well-known for his work as a religious revivalist after 1850. Laestadius wrote a manuscript on the

Sami, titled *Fragmenter i Lapska Mythologien*, a work on mythology using information from Jessen-Schardebøll, other missionary reports, *Lapponia*, and his own fieldwork (folklore gathered from the Swedish portion of the Sámi territory). His manuscript, written between 1839 and 1845, wasn't published until 1959. In addition to being an ethnographer, Lars Levi Laestadius had a significant role in the Sami people's religious transformation. Although he lived during a time when the Sami were thought to be Christian, his research shows that the earlier religious ideas persisted. He set in motion a revival movement that bears his name.

### ***Laestadianism***

Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), Lutheran minister with parishes in northern Sweden, laid the foundation of a religious movement within the Lutheran Church, which bears his name. In the Laestadian movement, the influence of pietism is strongly evident in the preference for conventicles (home meetings) rather than church attendance and in the emphasis on the conversion experience called new birth (see Kleistra 1982).

Repentance and confession of sins to an active member of the congregation - that is promoted during home meetings - are the means by which one becomes a member of the congregation. The keys to heaven, which allow them to extend God's forgiveness, are held by the "regenerated" congregation. Scripture is cited in Matthew 16:18–19, Matthew 18:18, and John 20:22–23 to emphasize the notion that Peter and the congregation are given the ability of the Keys to remit (unbind) and retain (bind) sin. The congregation of the "new born" have the keys to heaven - the gift of God's grace and a unique relationship with God - which can be transmitted/ gifted.

Laestadians relate their conversion experience at special times during a home meeting. The conversion experience told repeatedly, is a story that can elicit the conversion experience in others.

### **Findings**

Eliade (1964) notes the major distinctions that characterize a shaman are, his ability to restore a lost soul and his ability to travel to the other world. The conversion experience can be seen as akin to the gaining of the shaman's spirit helper. Former practices to attain the helping spirit.

Isaac Olsen, a missionary in Finnmark during the 1710s, reported that the *noaidi's* helping spirits, *noaidegáccit*, after the death of the *noaidi* offered their services to a son or close kinsman, and the new profession was learned in secret from the spirit or with some old *noaidi* (Olsen in Bäckman & Hultkrantz, 1978. p.41).

The *gáccit* (followers, comrades) appear in the candidate's vision and offer him knowledge and skills, such as "how to prolong life, how to be a good healer, how to predict coming events, how to transform himself into an animal, how to bring tangible benefits to himself and the members of the group" (Olsen as translated by Bäckman, 1975. p.148).

*Lapponia* written by Johannes Schefferus between 1671 and 1673 relates information supplied by the Sámi, Lundius, studying at that time at Uppsala University: "If a Laplander happens to fall Sick in the Lapmark of Ulma, they send for the next Neighbour, whom they think most expert in the management of the Drum" (Scheffer, 1704. p.148).

Lundius reported to Schefferus an account concerning the method of acquiring a helping spirit. The spirit, in the form of a dragon, bird, fish or pigmy, offered his assistance and taught the adept a certain song. When he later sang the same song, the spirit would come to his assistance (Scheffer, 1704. p.122--23).

Pragmatist philosophy of religion, now called "situated" religious cognition that "emphasizes the situationality, contextuality, and practice-embeddedness of cognition as well as cognitive agents" (Pihlström 2024 p.2) notes that participating in religious forms of life or religiously relevant situations, "would thus be a necessary condition for the possibility of the kind of faith that could ontologically co-create its object (Ibid. p.13)." James called this required activity, "passional willing" (Ibid. p.8).

### ***Sigvald and Nanna***

Sigvald resides on the farm owned by his father's family. In his late 20s, he took over the mortgage and became the farm's owner. At the moment, the farm only produces hay.

In contrast to his parents and brothers, Sigvald continued his study in engineering, and worked for the municipality for many years. He took a risk in following his heart, left civil engineering and became manager of a newly formed Sámi community center.

Earlier, fishing, hunting, hay cultivation, logging, berry picking, sheep, and a few cows were all part of the subsistence-level farm's operations. Sigvald's mother, Nanna, was a skilled weaver, and his father worked as a blacksmith. Nanna (1910 - 2002) engaged in healing practices throughout her life. Cupping is one of Nanna's healing techniques. To collect the blood, small surface incisions are created and covered with a plastic cup that has a rubber suction lid. According to Nanna, her mother taught her the art of cupping, and her father used it on farm animals. Many residents of the small towns surrounding the Porsanger Fjord practiced cupping prior to World War II. Only Nanna kept up her cupping after the war. She claimed that,

except for a few people in her neighborhood who thought her practice was archaic, she had most likely cupped the majority of her neighbors.

### *Problems for the inheritance*

I was fortunate in the timing of my presence in the Norwegian province of Finnmark: I was accepted by the elderly *noaide* (shaman) Nanna, to film and interview her due to her plan to interest her son, Sigvald, to take over her practice. And through this avenue I had first-hand experience on the problem's Nanna had in interesting her son to take over her practice. The problems had the character of identity politics. The first hurdle was taken by Sigvald when he resigned his civil engineering position with the municipality, and accepted to be manager of a newly formed Sámi cultural center. He immediately encountered identity politics. The shop keeper in the village (himself Sámi but identifying as Norwegian) on the occasion of Sigvald's next visit, said: "You! an educated man; I have no words." The labeling of Sámi healing practices as demonic was encountered by Sigvald even recently. After Sigvald retired as manager of the Sami cultural centre, but still engaged with the project on place names, the new manager remarked to Sigvald's announcement to visit sacrificial sites: "You dare!"

Sigvald did finally agree to "take care of Nanna's heritage" and there followed initiation and two years of teaching from Nanna. Currently Sigvald is regularly consulted, but not by his neighbors who are Coastal Sámi, but by the inland Sámi, reindeer herders who still identify with being Sámi. Sigvald experiences his neighbors as thoroughly estranged from the Sámi spiritual heritage. Our recent conversation contains all these ingredients.

*Sigvald Persen (Sámi shaman/noaide) 10 August 2025 via ZOOM: Last week, I was asked to speak at a family gathering taking place on my farm; asked to talk on the spiritual landscape. I cut my talk short, few people are spiritual. Only one in attendance asked for more afterwards. So, for her and her husband I showed mountain-with-Gani (female noaide). Influences by someone is there [Gani mountain]. [Thoughts come] don't know just wonder "what is wrong with me?" Gani is a strong influence on what happens on my farm. [I told this] during my talk: "I think she is here now." It was Gani's idea what we talked about: the importance that we bring light into our landscape. Talk about it - spirit and place-names.*

You can wonder, what is *the importance that we bring light into our landscape*. This is healing and in the following I endeavor to shed light.

A follow-up conversation on 26 October 2025, went as follows. Barbara: *I am coming to speak about my psychoanalytic practice as that of listening and process.* Sigvald: *With process comes new experiences with worldview, with connections: landscape around you is talking to you. You get this by being present there. With participation landscape is personalized, more personalities in the landscape [lights];*

*with individuals/personalities in landscape you get a good feeling, that is free; when you know the story we can have peace. This is not haunting that needs to be cleared up, but good listening that says "We hear you!" [I am coming to see that] Gani is influencing all. And I think I will decline to use "spirit." A woman in the cafe yesterday asked me in reference to my talk on spiritual landscape, "Did you mean that you are/were possessed?" I explained, "No, not about possession, not something trying to go in you and do harm." So for me I won't use "spirit" anymore, it gets things messed up. Gani is happy when you listen and comes with more, as in more dreams. Gani is free thought and maintains choice.*

### ***History of negative factors***

The following negative factors can be cited for their influence on the reception of Sámi traditional healing. The 1936 Norwegian law, *Medical Quackery Act (Kvaksalverloven)* prohibited the treatment of health problems by any other than medical doctors and dentists. The law was replaced in 2003 to include alternative treatment, but still gives the public health sector exclusive right to treat serious diseases and illnesses (see Hætta, 2015). Colonization must be sited for its thorough erasure of Sámi thought forms. The erasure starts with the colonizers definition of what it is to be Sámi. The most well-known "Lappologist" of the era, Just Knud Qvigstad (1853–1957) stigmatized traditional Sámi medicine as being archaic and primitive. Qvigstad (1932) provides a brief overview of shamanic and magical healing practices among the Sámi in *Lappische Heilkunde*. The remainder of the book, organized by various medical diagnoses, is devoted to brief accounts of illnesses and remedies from the vast Sámi region that has been documented. Despite spending his entire life gathering and writing volumes on Sámi folklore, Qvigstad declared his belief that Sámi culture and language will quickly disappear. He insisted that the Sámi information he had collected was acquired from the nearby peoples rather than being authentically Sámi. In his conclusion, he wrote:

When the folk medicine of the neighboring people of the Lapps is examined, one can have no doubt about the answer: most of it is borrowed. As with their superstitions and their heathen religion, their language and their culture, the Lapps are the pupils and their neighbors are the teachers (Qvigstad ,1932. p. 227; translation from German & Stein, 2015. p.11).

Although Qvigstad's findings have been rejected, locals are nevertheless aware of these unfavorable assessments. Locals have differing opinions about Sámi traditional healing, with some Sámi viewing it favorably and others viewing it negatively and labeling it as "primitive" (see Mathisen, 2015).

The Sámi Parliament was established in Norway in 1989 to support the Sámi people's right to self-determination as a result of changes made by the Norwegian government in response to Sámi revitalization initiatives during the 1960s and 1970s. Projects involving Sámi traditional healing are not funded by the Sámi Parliament. The Sámi health component of epidemiology is handled by the Sámi Competence Centre for Psychiatric Health Care (SANKS), which serves all of mid-Finnmark and is in charge of the national development of health care for Sámi people. That is, the "Sámi individual's health issue is defined using the modern medical model and then considered in terms of its prevalence and possible social components. Sámi within SANKS does not address health as defined by the Sámi worldview" (Andersen 2015: 85)

### ***Participation as Methodology***

My exploration on Sámi traditional healing - to shed light - combines Analytical Psychology and Anthropology, and highlights the *noaide's* spiritual heritage that employs imagination.

In 1932, Wolfgang Pauli (Nobel Prize winning physicist) began a therapy with Carl Gustav Jung for problems with the body. Their dialogue was to foster an understanding for the common underpinning of the physical sphere and the psychic sphere (body and spirit). In doing so they refer to certain Far Eastern bodily practices where the body is not something to be mastered, but the body can testify to an original spontaneity inscribing the subject in his environment, which happens below the will and conscious perception (see Traversi 2019). Jung posited that the I Ching (Chinese Book of Changes) is working with "what likes to happen at the same time." In Anthropology such participation mystic is seen as "embodiment." In Analytical Psychology and Chinese inner alchemy it is a practice whereby the archetypal patterns are relived and help to heal the lack of complementarity in the present moment.

Professor André Droogers (2006) formulated his research methodology as Methodological Ludens, which is to play and participate *for* experiences where the desire for wholeness is expressed and that can be read as signs that God is active in each individual life. Through such methodology one can recognize correspondences and note the proposition of a hermeneutics as found in Heidegger. Hermeneutics requires, not getting outside of an understanding to understand better, but getting more fully within our understanding in order to fully occupy our hermeneutic situation. Jean Gebser, Swiss philosopher, linguist, and poet described the structures of human consciousness, and saw consciousness *to be* "presence" or "being present". He eschewed terms like evolution, progression, or development to describe the changes in structures of consciousness he described. This resembles Heidegger's *Dasein* (being there); consciousness is then not just a mirror, but an active presence.

I participated in Prof. Droogers' colloquium at Vrij University, Amsterdam, for a period of five years. Our group discussed the experiences of local indigenous populations from around the globe coming into contact with Pentecostalism, and, Sámi Christianity, called Laestadianism, was deemed pre-Pentecostal. Under Prof. Droogers' methodological guidance, I attended Laestadian services together with Sigvald; which were helpful for me to recognize the shamanic repertoire that was possibly being taken into Laestadianism and the Christian repertoire possibly being taken into Sigvald-and-Nanna's healing practice. Droogers looked for rupture and continuity in practice. My findings for continuity of Laestadian practice with Pietism was as follows: 1) As one came to sit, the hand was placed on the shoulder of those already sitting, while saying "God's peace." 2) The Lay preacher expounded on a Bible passage, providing personal experiential examples, while receiving support by his fellow lay preacher sitting next to him. On one Sunday morning, in a very emotional moment the lay preacher lay his head on the other's shoulder. Sigvald could add that the meeting we attended did not include the conversion experience as he had witnessed within Nanna's home. This conversion experience was called in Sami "lihkadus;" English "emotional movement" (Miller 2007). Radical Pietist conventicles did include "heartfelt" piety that surged to such an extent that they received the derogatory epithet "Enthusiasts," which was seen by its critics as ecstasy. Positively defined, conventicle pietists are those who translate the Bible's teaching into actions.

William James's philosophy of science and religion, pragmatism, emphasized "how actionability, rather than fallibility, underwrites both scientific and religious practices" (Crippen 2025 p.2). James' methodology resonates with non-Western traditions, particularly Indigenous American and Asian epistemologies. "James may have indirectly absorbed Asian religious and philosophical teachings from American Transcendentalists" (Ibid), such as James' godfather Ralph Waldo Emerson and Herman Melville. Asian traditions emphasize contextual, embodied experience. Threads within these global Indigenous traditions align with the weight James' work gives to the contextual, to the agent-relative forms of knowing that are inseparable from action. "James' ideas also support an account of animism that integrates the extended mind thesis" (Ibid). An example can be found in the Great Treatise (Da Zhuan) on the I Ching it says:

The superior man abides in his room. If his words are well spoken he meets with assent at a distance of more than 1,000 miles. How much more then from nearby! ...if his words are not well spoken, he meets with contradiction at a distance of more than 1,000 miles. How much more then from nearby! Words go forth from one's own person and exert influence on men. Deeds are born close at hand and become visible faraway. Words and deeds are the hinge and bow-spring of the superior man. As hinge and bow-spring move they bring honor or disgrace. Through words and deeds the superior man

moves heaven and earth. Must one then not be cautious? (Wilhelm, 1951. p.305)

Here we can observe that meditations describing interiority have personal resonance without being reduced to matters of personal mind. The vicissitudes of “soul” play a role in Analytical Psychology and religious narratives. James Hillman (1975/1997) in *Revisioning Psychology*, formulated a working definition of soul without concretizing the abstract concept, and made it useful for discourses on healing: the soul is what gives meaning to life; turns events into experiences; is given in love and has a religious concern. When I am asked what I mean by soul, I say something like: it is that quality of experience that subtends our lives, granting depth, resonance, vitality, and a capacity for intimacy. Again I share that for me this is in line with George Ernst Stahl (1659–1734) professor at the University of Halle lecturing on the theory of medicine and on chemistry. Stahl was a devout pietist and proposed that the soul and the body are a unity, that life is organic, and that life is the active soul working within the structures and substances of the body (see Miller 2020 p. 45).

## Discussion

*The inheritance I propose -- for noaide gaccit-spirit helper; shamanism-dual soul; Christianity-Holy Ghost; Analytical Psychology-presence of therapist; Chinese Alchemy-entry of the spirit -- gains activity with participation and imagination. Sigvald can clarify the deciding factor for attaining the helping spirit (noaide gaccit):*

(Zoom conversation, 31 August 2025) *When asked for help, you participate. [This is] more important than you come up with a drum.[...] Most people [Sigvald's neighbors] are taught that sacrificial sites are connected with Demons and they believe it! [Remember, the Sami Cultural Centre's new manager said when I was going to visit a sacrificial site] "How do you dare!" [...] In shamanism we have different contacts with ourself. [We are] not putting yourself outside nor not participating. With listening you can fall back on .... very delicate, not put finger on. Nanna: "Find out - your thoughts are coming from somewhere" Not easy.*

Nanna is clear that “bundling thoughts” is her inheritance. But what about her practice of cupping? Nanna told Sigvald: “Cupping is a front.” Sigvald in answer to my puzzlement explained that Nanna works with physical presence, cupping brings the patient to her physically. Sigvald compares in the above the cups to the drum; they are comparable in that both are not essential for the imagination of holding, essential is participation.

### *Discussion on comparisons*

In Laestadian practice, prior to asking forgiveness the person is penitent and is “bundling” his/her thoughts. Sigvald used “cleared up” for the moment in a Laestadian meeting when forgiveness is asked and received. Sigvald said,

“It should be all ‘cleared up’ before departing, meaning you were asking forgiveness of sin.” Sigvald told me: “Sharing/telling your dream releases (every-time) something new, which is following what we do not know.” In Sigvald’s understanding, and I would say also Jung’s, dreams happen spontaneously, conscious-will playing no role. In Analytical Psychology, dreams can reveal that the dreamer is in process of inscribing experience into their lived environment - an environment that is the own and social body.

In her healing profession, Nanna stressed that she was a “Christian helper” and was an active member of the local Laestadian congregation. According to the healing tradition passed down from Nanna to Sigvald, (a) peace results from reestablishing a connection with God. Parts that are not fully connected might torment and lead to illness. They require being connected. A healer is able to bundle and release because they received the gift. Laestadianism follows a similar logic of connections, according to which persons who have the gift (keys to heaven) either hold - bundle sin or release it. Nanna placed a strong emphasis on trust when instructing Sigvald (b). The gifted relationship would end when there was not “belief enough”. The Laestadian decree of total faith in God’s grace for forgiveness is evoked by the need for conviction and confidence. The fact that (c) the Laestadian conversion tale is frequently recounted and serves as a testimonial and source of inspiration for others to follow-suit is also significant. The next in line, Sigvald, heard Nanna’s account of her gift. The inheritance appears to be guided by this story, which explains its origins and emotions. The narrative of the healer’s transfer experience is a testament, to be utilized as a guide for the appropriate successor, much like the Laestadian’s conversion story. C. G. Jung employing Chinese inner alchemy, indicates that the process (comparable to the conversion experience) proceeds from the motifs of the center and is-as a re-enactment of the cosmogony, i.e., a retelling of the creation myth which establishes the identity of the community (Eliade, 1962).

Nanna herself never made a comparison between Laestadian philosophy and her healing method, even though I see parallels between it and the Laestadian practice of forgiving sins. Despite her reputation as a healer, the congregation seemed to see her as an ordinary member of the regenerated congregation. However when evaluating Nanna’s position, it should be kept in mind that Christian missions that come into contact with indigenous healing traditions are eager to identify and attribute the devil’s activity rather than the effectiveness of the Christian God, particularly when there are strikingly comparable ceremonies. “God’s children are the people around here,” said Bergsen, a Laestadian lay-preacher I spoke with; skillfully resolving this difficult dilemma. According to him, the Sámi people were already or had always been Christians. Therefore, the Christian

Holy Ghost/Spirit would have inspired Sámi traditional healers even before being converted to Christianity.

In shamanism there is a concept of a dual soul; consider in Sigvald's account of Gani (above), that Gani is the separate soul that has influence on his farm. However, Sigvald does not employ "soul", he rather follows the Chinese description "entry of the spirit." Therefore, we can appreciate Sigvald's concern for the lights in the landscape that Gani wants him to talk about. He facilitates spiritual presence in the land around his farm. He commented that when he talks about what Gani suggests, he feels Gani getting happy.

Additionally, appreciate that Sigvald speaks in terms of context, i.e., he started his sharing (above) by situating the event via time, location and relationship. Sigvald, as James, was encouraged to "act". James' claim that a belief and its strength are defined by a person's willingness to act, resonates with Nanna's teaching. She said to Sigvald: "Do! you may not have results with your doing, but do!" This ties in with Nanna's "gift." She said to Sigvald, it is with the gift that you can believe enough: "without enough belief we are stopping ourself." Nanna in reply to my question over her practice said, "It can be given." After further questioning, Sigvald gave the following doxastic attitude for the gift. The gift is that which Jesus gave to Peter, in the Bible called the Keys to Heaven; found in Mathew and John. Further I was told by the lay-minister in the local Laestadian congregation, Alfred (b. 1913) the doctrine: "What is bound in heaven is bound on earth" (Miller 2007 p.69). This is the doctrine that Nanna and Sigvald use for healing and diagnosis, by believing-enough Sigvald bundles his thoughts, thoughts/images which may be changed when he returns to the bundled image the next time.

An example can be helpful. Sigvald (who I continue to consult weekly over Zoom) had the following conversation while I was in his kitchen. The patient (reindeer herder) telephoned Sigvald with the complaint that his herd was not manageable. Sigvald listened for a very long time with hardly a word, only an expression showing that he was listening. At the end, Sigvald said: "Let us bundle our thoughts and see what happens." The next morning the herder telephoned Sigvald thanking him that his herd was now manageable. When Sigvald suggests "bundle our thoughts" he is using the Keys to Heaven. St. Matthew chapter 16, verse 18: *And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* 16:19: *And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* Chapter 18 verse 18: *Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* Nanna and Sigvald say simply "To bundle and release."

Alfred answered my question on “Who has the gift?” with “God’s children” and “The people around here.” Alfred is referring to the Laestadian doctrine on the regenerated congregation (that is also noted for pietist conventicles). People who have had their conversion experience are baptized “God’s children” and comprise the regenerated congregation, which is not “the four wall church” nor “Sunday Christians.” Alfred is additionally indicating that the Sámi have *always* been God’s children.

The doctrine on the regenerated congregation comes from Halle Pietists (±1700 – 1740) travels via the Copenhagen College of Missions to Lars Levi Laestadius (1800 – 1861). The influence on William James of philosophical teachings from American Transcendentalists has possibly taken a similar route: Jacob Böhme (1575 – 1624) to Halle Pietist to American descendants relocating to New England.

## **Closing remarks**

The local transfer of healing knowledge, Nanna to Sigvald, was influenced by the assessment of the relative worth of Sámi healing, having been negatively influenced by colonization. It should be noted in the above record of the transfer that the fulfillment of this transfer was partly due to the researcher’s, assessed, positive evaluation of traditional Sámi healing. Sigvald draws a comparison between his healing practice and previous shamanic traditions by comparing the cups to the drum. However, he defines the essence of his practice as *ecstasy* requiring neither cups or drums, because the healer has the gift/inheritance (keys to heaven) that facilitate “holding.” Holding/bundling and releasing can be viewed as conversion/ecstasy. Given that healing knowledge may be consistent with the conversion experience within Laestadianism, Laestadianism and Sámi healing may be the continuation of the tradition. My own experience of being greatly helped by Sigvald for my psychoanalytic (C. G. Jung) practice, testifies to the ongoing potency and resourcefulness that Nanna’s and Sigvald’s practice “holds.” Testifying to the strength of the imaginal practice of holding and participation.

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