

TRADITIONAL HEALERS AND SYNTHETIC ENTHEOGENS

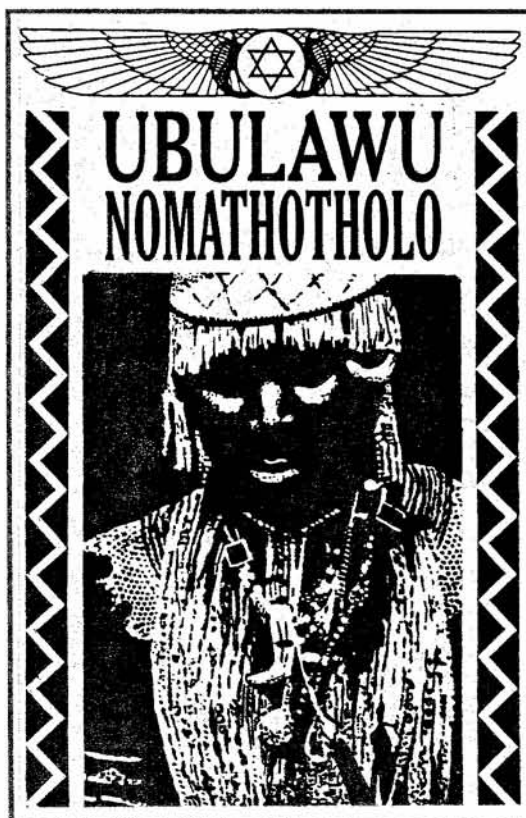
The following is an excerpt from a Sunday Supplement article in a South African newspaper. The subject is "Nexus" (2C-B), a synthetic entheogen invented by Dr. Alexander Shulgin. What is interesting is that this drug is now being used by African shamans in traditional healing ceremonies. There is a certain irony in this for **ER** readers, since we tend to go in the opposite direction: seeking the plant teachers!

One of the most interesting developments on the local scene with regard to Nexus is that it is the active ingredient in a medicine named *Ubulawu Nomathotholo* (a Xhosa phrase that roughly translates as 'medicine of the singing ancestors'). Up until recently, *Ubulawu Nomathotholo* was available at various African herbal shops where it was sold as an aid in traditional healing. According to the written information inside the pack: "*Ubulawu Nomathotholo* opens the mind to messages, visions and dreams from the ancestral spirits. This makes it an excellent medicine for use by African traditional healers during *intlombe*, *xhentsa*, *vumisa*, divining, healing and *thwasa* treatment."

Ubulawu Nomathotholo is marketed by a Lesotho-based company called Inkwazi. According to a spokesman for the company, Mr. Solomon Daba, because of the banning in South Africa of the medicine's active ingredient, it is no longer being sold in the Republic.

"*This is a great pity*," said Mr. Daba. "The problem that many *sangomas* in South Africa are faced with is that, because they live in the townships, they are unable to get hold of many of the plants and herbs used in divining, initiation ceremonies and healing. *Ubulawu Nomathotholo* is a very safe and effective alternative to

some of the traditional plant drugs that affect the mind, but which many *sangomas* in the cities now find impossible to get hold of. We would like to see a reversal of its ban in South Africa, but we have been advised by the Medical Control Council in Pretoria that this would be a long and expensive process with little chance of success."



Another person who would like to see the ban reversed is Dr. Manton Hirst PhD, an anthropologist at the Kaffrarian Museum in King William's Town and a leading authority on traditional forms of *Xhosa* healing. According to Hirst, who has been studying and writing about traditional healing in South Africa for the past 20 years, "*Xhosa* diviners and herbalists, like other shamans worldwide, use psychoactive plants and substances to induce altered states of consciousness in initiates who are being trained and inducted into the profession. Psychoactive plants are highly valued as a means of communicating with the an-

cestors and as a way of gaining insights into the spirit world. "However, nowadays the plant roots traditionally used to induce visionary experiences in novices are very hard to come by. This is due to a combination of several factors, such as the over utilization of wild--

plant resources by herb sellers and healers, and drought and overgrazing. However, even when these plants are available they are quite toxic. Consequently, poisoning, and even death, can occur as a result of taking the wrong dosage -- which even experienced healers sometimes have difficulty estimating." During his field trips, Hirst has met a number of diviners who have used Nexus as a substitute for traditional plants. "At the dosages recommended on packs of *Ubulawu Nomathotholo*, there appears to be no toxicity or physical discomfort and some of the therapeutic results have been quite impressive."

One initiate who was administered five Nexus tablets by her teacher reported afterwards that she found herself transported to a beautiful forest where she met wild antelope and carnivores who revealed that they were the messengers of her tribal ancestors. According to the Hirst, "This transcendent experience had a profoundly beneficial effect on this initiate who, up until this time, had lacked confidence in herself and her calling to be a healer."

Another case history recounted by Hirst was that of a male diviner who became pathologically depressed after the tragic death of one of his children. Even after the conclusion of the traditional period of mourning he continued to be morose and avoided all contact with his patients. The diviner told Hirst that after taking Nexus he had a visionary experience in which he found himself face to face with *uDali* (the Creator) who revealed to him the underlying meaning of the death of his child. "With his faith and confidence restored, he continued his work as a successful traditional healer."

Ancestral spirits in the guise of wild animals, visionary encounters with *uDali* ... these are things that many South Africans will have difficulty getting their mind around. However, for millions of people, especially in the rural areas of the country, these are spiritual issues that are pivotal to their lives.

What if Nexus really is a safe and effective alternative to scarce and often dangerous plant medicines? What if this substance really does put healers

in touch with the magical, mysterious realms of consciousness that have been the cornerstone of African belief for thousands of years? And what if South Africa's tens of thousands of traditional healers were to collectively demand that this medicine be made readily available to them?

What is certain is that Nexus is going to generate plenty of controversy during the months and years ahead. --Victor Peterson, *South Africa*

THOUGHTS ON NEO-SHAMANISM

The idea of what a neo-shamanic path entails is different for each individual. Joseph Campbell said that all religions and mythologies are metaphors for us to learn from: mirrors to see the deepest parts of our psyches reflected. In that sense, shamanism provides a metaphor for individuals to use on their inner journey of self-discovery. The shamanic metaphor is certainly in vogue at the moment. Traditionally, the shaman is an outsider, an oddball, and the rewards of the visionary are seldom obtained without a considerable price. Also, the social functions filled by tribal shamans aren't the same as in post modern America. (McKenna discusses this a bit in *The Invisible Landscape*, pg. 17.) His thought is that artists and other creative people who speak through images to our culture are the shamans of our time. When the New Age shamans have moved on to the next fad, the true explorers will still be here -- no matter what we call ourselves. -- Anonymous

ISO-II

I'm searching for an ISO-II (60's relic) in mint to good condition, with instructions. This is a continuous isomerizer for the extraction of essential oils from a solid, using an integrated light bulb for a heat source. I'm willing to pay any reasonable price. Please send information and your offer to P.C., in care of this newsletter. -- PC, MO

SEPARATORY FUNNELS

See the April, '96 *American Science and Surplus* catalog (3605 Howard St., Skokie, IL 60076), page 14, for a bargain price (\$27.50) on a 500 ml separatory funnel. -- JH, MI