


Itzhak Beery: ad man, shaman

an advertising exec who's equally at home among the sacred and profane

by Dara Colwell

 DURING THE WEEK, Itzhak Beery's small Greenwich Village office is a boutique ad agency that produces clever, in-your-face promotions. A pro-neutering "Cats sleep around" poster he developed for the ASPCA adorns a filing cabinet. From another corner, an ad for a high-end jeweler advises, "Don't beg her forgiveness. Buy it." And a wall-size billboard for the gourmet supermarket chain Garden of Eden promises "Temptation in every aisle."

But on weekends, consumerism gives way to spirit, and the frantic office transforms into an intimate candlelit space, alive with sacred objects and the pungent smoke of healing herbs.

The 54-year-old Beery straddles two seemingly incompatible worlds: As president of Bleecker & Sullivan Advertising, he churns out smart, aggressive ad campaigns, and as a shamanic practitioner—a traditional healer using ancient spiritual methods—he helps people reconnect to their souls. But Beery says ad-making and shamanism are more similar than they appear. "An advertising man is a master of perception, just like a shaman," he says. "Both create magic and illusions to motivate people to change."

Beery has been in the advertising industry for 25 years, and a shamanic practitioner for 10. He was first inspired to delve into the ancient South American tradition when he read *Spiritwalker*, a memoir by anthropologist Hank Wesselman, which mesmerized him. Israeli-born Beery attended workshops in New York, and later studied in Ecuador with shamans from the Quechua and Shuar tribes.

Beery says that in South America, shamanic work is a regular event, like an annual physical, and that many of his clients—mostly urban pro-

fessionals—are in desperate need of a checkup. "Most people who visit are living in a fog, unable to concentrate. My role is to bring them to that place of truth inside themselves."

On a recent Saturday evening, Beery went through his customary ritual to morph from ad man to shaman: He changed into white Ecuadorian pants and shirt, burned sage, unfolded a small table and covered the table with a red cloth, and carefully laid out eggs, carnations, leafy branches, and Boca Chica rum (it's for purifying). When his client—a female, thirtysomething violinist in a rock band—arrived at the agency-cum-temple, Beery handed her a slim candle to sweep over her body. After he lit the wick and studied the flame, he began to whistle and chant, rolling two eggs slowly along her sides. Eggs, Beery explained later, absorb blocked energy. (During one session with a woman who had cancer, an egg spontaneously exploded, he says.) He then moved other objects—stones, flowers, and bells—around her body to remove remaining blockages and bestow protection. To seal the healing, Beery lit a cigarette (tobacco is considered sacred in this tradition) and exhaled the smoke on her forehead.

After the session, Beery and the violinist sat and discussed her experience of the treatment; often a client will "go on a journey," complete with vivid, nature-inspired visions. It's the practitioner's job to help interpret them. "I think everyone on this earth has a reason for being here," says Beery. "Shamans help people get in touch with that—we connect with entities and relay the message. And, oddly, that's where shamanism and advertising overlap." ○○○○

