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Shamanism

A Journey of Discovery

Ruth Harris

Shamanism, as a method of Native American healing, has lasted within native cultures because it works well and is often much faster than other healing modalities. The modern definition of shaman is “a person regarded as having access to, and influence in, the world of good and evil spirits, especially among some peoples of northern Asia and North America. Typically, such people enter a trance state during a ritual, and practice healing.”¹

The Shamanic Journey

The shamanic journey is a core practice in shamanism, which uses intention and rhythmic sound to achieve an altered state of consciousness and enter non-ordinary reality. Most beginning students use drumming music during the journey — I use Sandra Ingerman's CD from *Awakening to the Spirit World: The Shamanic Path of Direct Revelation*.²

There are three non-ordinary realities (NOR) in the shamanic practitioner's work — Upper World, Middle World and Lower World. The Lower and Upper Worlds are solely spiritual in nature and are the recommended starting points when a student is first learning how to journey. Let me begin by explaining the Lower World.

You journey into the Lower World by visualizing

yourself going down through a tunnel, the base of a tree trunk or a hole in the ground, like a rabbit hole or a plant's root. I sometimes use a river or go under a lake. Once you journey down, visualize walking out of your destination point into a beautiful forest. Begin your journey here.

1. The first time you journey to the Lower World, it is recommended you find your power animal. This spirit helper will assist you with healing, answer questions, guide you and protect you.
2. It is very important to only have one goal and one thought during the journey. Keep repeating the goal or question as you travel along your path. If you have trouble visualizing, repeat the question or repeat the phrase “nothing is happening yet.” This will help to keep your mind focused. If you wander in thought or dreaming, bring your focus back by repeating your goal.
3. Look for animals and when you ‘see’ or sense one, ask if they are your power animal. They may indicate a yes or no in some fashion with a word, nod or wander off. An animal must say yes four times to confirm it is your power animal. If they do not show themselves four times during the journey, you may see a picture of your animal later that week, you might have a dream of the animal or



you may meet them in another journey. The first time you discover a power animal, you may feel a very strong connection.

4. Once you find your power animal, invite their spirit to travel back with you into ordinary reality. Get a picture or a small statue to remind you of your helper. If you forget about your spirit animal or do not use their assistance, they will move on.

There are many ways your animal may help and guide you. You can ask them for advice, for an answer to a question or for protection. I dance like my power animal to feel their spirit, essence and a deep connection to such an amazing guide and protector.

My Personal Journey

My personal journey into the healing arts has been a lifelong interest in paranormal phenomena and clearing. Since my teen years I have been reading about the Duke University extra sensory perception (ESP) research and other paranormal occurrences. As a child, I would wake up before the rest of the family and put my ear to the floor to hear the noises in the basement. There was movement and a clicking noise, but no one was down there. I never liked going into the basement, as it had a “strange feeling”. I eventually forgot about my basement discomfort and only remembered many years later, after beginning shamanic training.

It was not until my 40s that I was introduced to a school called Delphi University. I was having breakfast

in a small café in Copperhill, Tennessee with a few friends. I made a comment that caught the attention of a couple who had joined the table and suddenly found myself being asked if I talked to the dead! For some reason, I was not surprised and responded, “No, but I would like to.” It was during this conversation I learned that Delphi University was teaching a singular course on psychic investigation and clearing. My friends took me to the school and I signed up that day.

Little did I know, breakfast in a small café would become the official start of studying, and later practicing, shamanic healing. With passion, I launched into learning healing methods and philosophies of other cultures, traveling to India 10 times in 10 years to immerse myself in eastern thought.

In addition to attending Delphi University, I participated in both classroom and mentorship training. I currently live in the mountains of North Carolina and have had the wonderful opportunity to meet and talk with the Cherokee Indians living here and on the nearby reservation. I also attended a local class, hosted by a visiting Cherokee from the Oklahoma Reservation. After participating in these meetings, sweat lodges and other events, I took a workshop with the Foundation of Shamanic Studies. The Foundation of Shamanic Studies was founded by Michael Harner in 1979 and is the world’s foremost training program in shamanism and shamanic healing. Michael Harner is best known for his book *The Way of the Shaman*, which offers an excellent introduction to shamanic journeying.

As I advanced my learnings and experienced personal gains and insights, I was asked to perform a soul retrieval. This concept was new to me and again, I headed out to learn more. I read, participated in workshops and sought out others who were versed in soul retrieval. I learned that soul retrieval is formulated around the idea that when an individual experiences trauma, part of their vital essence separates for their soul to survive the experience.³ When I felt confident enough to offer soul retrieval as a healing modality, I was amazed at the profound results! In

There are three non-ordinary realities (NOR) in the shaman’s work — upper earth, middle earth and lower earth.



my opinion, soul retrieval is still the most powerful method for healing and transforming lives. During a workshop I was giving in Texas, several attendees shared that I had performed a soul retrieval for them years ago, helping firmly shift their lives toward realizing their dreams. One participant reported that post-soul retrieval all his relationships turned to the positive, especially with his mother. All these years later, the feedback I receive continues to astonish me!

I begin the soul retrieval by assessing the client's past life, DNA and ancestors to identify energetic patterns. I also help them understand blocks or negative issues that might be stopping them in their path. Finally, I look at early childhood experiences that may continue to impact them into adulthood.

A healing then takes place and I help bring back any parts of the soul that have been lost.

Some common symptoms of soul loss

- A feeling of emptiness — like something is missing
- History of depression or loss that you cannot understand (clinical)
- Not feeling connected to yourself or others — cannot remember much about your childhood
- Grief that just does not heal
- Past or current trauma or unknown dread and fears
- Feeling like something is wrong or you are just not good enough
- Nothing seems to work out for you

Before performing a soul retrieval, I first teach my client the process of shamanic journeying. Then I journey into non-ordinary reality to find the parts that have been left behind. I find them in caves and in landscapes. Sometimes the soul parts are in the Upper World and other times I find them in the Lower World. I work with each soul part and invite them to come back to the client, healed. I do not have my client 're-live' the events that caused the soul loss; instead, I heal what is needed through Native American ceremony. A full report and discussion follows, along with post-session expectations.

I have added other Native American healing methods into my practitioner toolbox since learning how to journey and perform soul retrieval, including general healing and extraction of negative energies or entities. In the past, I did not believe negative energies could be attached to an individual. After working with several clients who just could not move forward, who felt something outside of them was stopping their progress and who did not have significant underlying mental health issues, I began to also understand and work with extraction. Extraction is not required for most clients, but when it is needed, it is very affective.

With all Native American healings, there are ceremonies, drumming and procedures that are time tested. I have discovered rituals and ceremonies are important for supporting healing. It is a quick way to direct intentions to the task on hand. Similar to stepping into a church or temple or like the Sanskrit chants, meditation and prayers, there is a long history of peace, healing and positive vibration.

It is important to listen to your client and determine their individual needs, as each client is walking a unique journey. Healing practices and modalities can easily be modified to fit the client you are working with. Your job is to alter your work to best support the healing of others. I have found shamanic and Native American practices to be both powerful and uplifting to those who try it. I also believe integrating these modalities into your energy healing practice will be very rewarding. And if you choose to do so, it just might change your life. €



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