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Shamanism: A Practice for Healing and Guidance

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Shamanism is a universal spiritual practice that was gifted to humans over 100,000 years ago by helping, compassionate spirits who volunteered to help the human race and all of life.

The word “shaman” comes from the Tungus tribe in Siberia. Shamanism has been practiced in Siberia, Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, Greenland and native North and South America.

A shaman is a man or woman — “one who knows,” “healer” or “one who sees the dark.” Shamans have acted, and still act, as healers, doctors, priests and priestesses, psychotherapists, mystics and storytellers. They perform healing ceremonies and bring back spiritual guidance for individuals or the community at large.

Shamanism embraces the teaching of unity. We are not just connected to nature — we are nature. Every living being on this planet has a spirit and we are interdependent on every life form. We refer to the web of life that encompasses all the species of life that we share Earth with. It has been the shaman’s role to keep harmony and balance in the community by communicating with and learning from other species.

There are a variety of ceremonies that shamans perform. They lead ceremonies to welcome the birth of a

child, perform sacred marriages, help people transition to a good place at the time of death and perform ceremonies to mourn the death of loved ones. There are important initiation ceremonies performed to mark certain transitions in a person’s life such as moving from puberty into adulthood. People in shamanic cultures perform ceremonies to mark the sacred passages of time; for example — during the change in seasons and lunar phases. They also perform ceremonies to heal environmental issues.

Today there is a remarkable resurgence in the practice of shamanism. One of the shamanic ceremonies thousands of people all over the world are engaging in is called a “shamanic journey.”

A shaman can move into an altered state of consciousness and travel outside of time into the hidden realms that many term “non-ordinary” or “unseen realms.” The transcendent unseen realms are called “The Dreamtime” by the indigenous people of Australia and “The Other Worlds” in the ancient Celtic tradition.

In these unseen realms all shamanic cultures recognize that there are helping, compassionate spirits who volunteer themselves to humans to help them grow, evolve, heal and be a person who contributes strength to their community. They also can provide a broader perspective to planetary issues as they



are looking down on life on Earth while we are so engaged in the game of life and cannot always see around us. The helping spirits help us to build the “spiritual muscles” necessary to ride the times of turbulent change.

Some shamans travel into the invisible unseen realms by using some form of percussion such as drumming, rattling, playing click sticks, bells, Tibetan bowls or the didgeridoo. In Lapland and Norway the Sami people were persecuted for practicing shamanism. This is true in many places throughout the world. The Sami shamans buried their drums and started using

shaman to bring healing to individuals, the community and the environment. They are also consulted with when guidance is needed.

Becoming a shaman is not a role or profession you choose for yourself. Your community members might call you a shaman if you get great results with your healing work. Becoming a shaman is part of one's destiny and shamans are chosen by the spirits. At the same time, we can all practice shamanism and journey to receive our own guidance, help to heal others and perform powerful healing ceremonies alone or in our communities. Watching the remarkable resur-

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monotonous chanting called “joiking” to enter a shamanic state of consciousness.

In many cultures, such as among the shamans of South American and Central America, they use plant medicines to enter a shamanic state of consciousness.

Shamanic art from all around the world depicts a variety of non-ordinary territories that the shaman can journey to. These worlds are referred to the Lower, Middle and Upper Worlds where the shaman has access to a wealth of compassionate spirits such as power animals like Bear, Hawk and Octopus who volunteer to help. Other nature beings such as Bee, Snake, Spider, Dragonfly or even Tree might volunteer to be a guardian spirit. There are teachers in human form who appear as religious figures, ancestors, mystical figures, gods and goddesses, and so on. These helping spirits, that include power animals, nature spirits and teachers in human form, are seen as intermediaries of the divine who volunteer their protective help to us. We call these helping spirits guardian angels in our culture.

Shamanism is a system of direct revelation. This is actually what attracted me to the practice of shamanism. We all have the birthright to meet and speak with our helping spirits without any authorities being involved. These helping spirits work directly with the

gence of shamanism in the modern world and how tens of thousands of people around the world are embracing the work is such a clear statement about how the power of shamanism is helping people to heal and grow.

Illness from A Shamanic Perspective

When a client visits a shaman, he or she will perform a ceremony to journey into the unseen realms to look for a spiritual imbalance. An illness might manifest on an emotional or physical level, but the shaman is looking for spiritual imbalance or disharmony.

From a shamanic perspective there are four classic causes of illness: 1) power loss, 2) soul loss, 3) a spiritual intrusion or 4) a possessing spirit. (Each are discussed below.) Typically, a client has combination of causes. The helping spirits of the shaman diagnose the cause and then help to perform the required treatment for healing. The helping spirits can see what is truly happening for a client where the shaman's vision might be clouded by the rational mind. These helping spirits are allies with and partners to the shaman and help bring through healing energies from the unseen realms. There are unlimited healing ceremonies that can be performed to create a cure. The shaman acts as a “hollow bone” where he or she merges with a helping spirit and the power of the



universe to be a channel for healing energies.

Power Loss

One cause of illness is power loss, where a helping spirit leaves a person. Typical symptoms of power loss are chronic depression, chronic suicidal tendencies, chronic illness and chronic misfortune.

When a shaman is shown that power loss has occurred, a variety of ceremonies might be performed to retrieve a former power animal or guardian spirit to help restore power and protection for the client. It is the role of the helping spirits to let the shaman know what kind of healing ceremony needs to be performed. The unique ceremonies used around the world are awe-inspiring and have quite the impact on a client who is suffering from power loss.

Soul Retrieval: How Shamans Heal Trauma

A classic shamanic healing ceremony is called a “soul retrieval.” It is believed that whenever we suffer an emotional or physical trauma, a piece of our soul flees the body in order to survive the experience. The definition of soul that I am using is: soul is our essence or life force — the part of our vitality that keeps us alive and thriving.

Soul loss is caused by any kind of abuse: sexual, physical or emotional. Other causes could be an accident, war, terrorist act, acting against our morals, being in a natural disaster (a fire, hurricane, earthquake, tornado, etc.), surgery, addictions, divorce or death of a loved one. Any event that causes shock could cause soul loss within an individual, and what might cause soul loss in one person might not cause soul loss in another.

It is important to understand that soul loss is how we survive pain. During a head-on car collision, the last place I would want to be at the point of impact is in my body. When we suffer a trauma a part of our soul escapes to a safe territory in the non-ordinary realms.

The role of the shaman is to go into an altered state

of consciousness and track down where the soul fled to in the alternate realities and return it to the body of the client.

There are many common symptoms of soul loss. Some of the more common ones would be dissociation, where a person does not feel fully in his or her body, alive and fully engaged in life. Other symptoms include chronic depression, suicidal tendencies, post traumatic stress syndrome, immune deficiency problems, coma and grief that just does not heal. Addictions are also a sign of soul loss as we seek external sources to fill up the empty spaces inside of us whether through substances, food, relationships, work or buying material objects. Anytime someone says, “I have never been the same since” a certain event (and they do not mean this in a good way), soul loss has probably occurred.

We are also seeing symptoms of global soul loss today. So many people feel empty and life holds no meaning they try to compensate with gathering more money and material possessions. And to witness how people dishonor each other and nature is a sure sign of people “not being home,” for a person who is whole and fully in their body would have more consciousness about respecting life.

Now, with the resurgence of shamanism, we have a wealth of wonderful shamanic practitioners reintroducing the practice of soul retrievals into our culture with amazing, life-changing and transformative results.

After a soul retrieval people feel more present in their bodies and in the world, they become more conscious of behavior that might be out of balance and disharmonious. When we are numb we might be aware that things in the world are not right, but we can easily distract ourselves from feeling a need to change. When we are fully “inspired” there is no place to retreat to and we are more inspired to change our lives.

Spiritual Intrusions and Possessing Spirits

When a person is missing a guardian spirit or his vital



soul essence there is an opening in the body. Since the universe cannot stand a void, something might come in to fill up that space and sometimes this might be a foreign spirit. Shamans might perceive a spiritual intrusion that has entered a client who is missing power and vital soul essence.

Spiritual intrusions come from negative thought forms. In indigenous cultures people understand the difference between expressing energy and sending energy. We often do not understand the difference in the West.

As human beings who were born to have a full experience of what it is like to be human, we have an entire range of emotions that come up throughout the day from joy to sadness to frustration, bliss to hate and so on. From a shamanic point of view, unless we transform the energy behind our emotions, negative thoughts flood our collective and can even impact our health as our negative thought forms can act as psychic arrows.

In shamanism it is understood that thoughts are things. Emotions are to be expressed fully. If we repress or deny them they can act as psychic darts that we send to ourselves.

These psychic arrows cause spiritual illness or spiritual blocks. The shaman's helping spirits assist the shaman in diagnosing the nature of the spiritual blockage in the body; they also help determine the ceremony

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needed to remove the intrusion from the body. This powerful healing ceremony, called a shamanic extraction, has helped to heal thousands of people who are suffering from a host of illnesses.

Psychopomp Work and Possessing Spirits

Shamans heal both the living and deceased. They heal the deceased by performing psychopomp work. This word comes from the Greek word "psychopompous," which literally means "leader of souls." When we die there is usually a graceful transition into a transcendent reality. In shamanism it is understood that when someone suffers a tragic or unexpected death such as murder, accident, war, drug overdose, suicide or death in a terrorist attack, there is a possibility that the soul might need assistance in crossing over into the transcendent realms.

Typically, when someone dies they transcend out of what we call the "Middle World." The Middle World is "Earth School" where we have the opportunity to create, be in relationships, experience the beauty of the senses and all that comes with being human.

With an unexpected or traumatic death, a soul might not know that he or she died. This is sometimes witnessed with major accidents that happened long ago where souls are still waiting for the ambulance to arrive as they do not know they died. This is just one example. Sometimes a soul does not want to leave the Middle World because they are attached to their lives or a loved one.

A spirit stuck in the Middle World might just wander this world or it might enter a person who is missing his vital soul essence or power. Thus, this might cause a possession. From a shamanic point of view, this is one cause of schizophrenia and multiple personality.

In this case it is the role of the shaman to perform a de-possession where he or she guides the spirit out of the Middle World to a transcendent reality.



Curing Versus Healing

Once any kind of shamanic healing work is performed it is up to the client to look at how to create a healthy lifestyle and attract healthy relationships that will support wholeness and a life filled with healing. How do we want to use the energy that was returned from the soul retrieval and our returned vitality to create a positive present and future for ourselves? And how do we bring passion and meaning back into our lives again so that we thrive instead of just survive? All these issues I call “life after healing” and are crucial to create long-term healing after a shamanic healing session.

In shamanic cultures children are taught from birth about the gifts, talents and strengths they were born with that will help them contribute to the survival of their community. They are taught about the energetic power of words and how they can be used to bless or curse oneself, the community or the planet. All community members are taught healthy ways to express their feelings. At the same time, they are taught about how words, thoughts and daydreams create the world we live in.

In some ways, in our modern-day Western World, we are entering the path of shamanism backwards. These life skills that were taught in shamanic cultures to children are life skills that we need before stepping deeply onto a shamanic path.

In Conclusion

Shamanism is still being practiced today. That is amazing to say about a practice that is universal and dates back tens of thousands of years. Shamanism has always been a result-oriented practice. If the shaman could not heal the people, offer divine food sources and medicines as well as keep harmony between nature and the community, people would have died.

There are ancient forces we can communicate with when we practice shamanic ceremonial work. Earth is 4.6 billion years old; Wind is the first life form to inhabit the Earth and the Primal Sea is billions of

years old. Think about how ancient the sun, moon and stars are. Our ancestors support and love us and always have our backs; they are potent allies for us. There are also compassionate ancestral spirits who have lived through turbulent times as we are now. They are singing songs of encouragement and waiting for us to meet them so that they can guide us forward to a new time.

The key to our shamanic ceremonial work is letting go of the outcome and letting go of our expectations about when we should see change from our work. We are only here for a short time. From a shamanic point of view, it is our destiny to share our gifts and strengths with our community and to honor ourselves and all of life. The helping spirits are always waiting to provide healing help, guidance and encouragement so we can create a good life for ourselves and for all that exists in the web of life. €



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