



Luminous Sojourns

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Shamanism: Healing of Individuals and the Planet by Sandra Ingerman

Shamanism: A Brief Overview

Shamanism is the most ancient spiritual practice known to humankind. We know from the archaeological evidence the practice dates back at least 40,000 years. Some anthropologists believe that the practice dates back over 100,000 years.

The word “shaman” comes from the Tungus tribe in Siberia and it means spiritual healer or one who sees in the dark. Shamanism has been practiced in Siberia, Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, Greenland, and native North and South America.

A shaman is a man or woman who uses the ability to see “with the strong eye” or “with the heart” to travel into hidden realms. The shaman interacts directly with the spirits to address the spiritual aspect of illness and perform soul retrievals, retrieve lost power, as well as remove spiritual blockages. The shaman also divines information for the community. Shamans have and still act as healers, doctors, priests and priestesses, psychotherapists, mystics, and storytellers.

Shamanism teaches us that everything that exists is alive and has a spirit. Shamans speak of a web of life that connects all of life and the spirit that lives in all things. Everything on earth is interconnected and any belief that we are separate from other life forms including the earth, stars, wind, etc is purely an illusion. And it is the shaman’s role in the community to keep harmony and balance between humankind and the forces of nature.

There are a variety of ceremonies that shamans perform. They lead ceremonies to welcome children into the world, perform marriages, and help people transition to a good place at the time of death. They lead 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 from moving from childhood into being an adult.

One of the major ceremonies a shaman performs is called a shamanic journey. A shaman is a man or woman who goes into an altered state of consciousness and travels outside of time into the hidden realms that many term non-ordinary. I see non-ordinary reality as a parallel universe to ours. The Australian aborigines call non-ordinary the Dreamtime. It is also referred to as the Other World in Celtic traditions.

In these hidden realities there are helping spirits, compassionate spirits who offer their guidance and also their healing help in behalf of all life on earth.

Typically shamans use some form of percussion, especially drumming or rattling, to go into an altered state that allows the free soul of the shaman to journey into the invisible worlds. In Australia you also see shamans use the didgeridoo and/or click sticks. Some traditions use sticks or bells. The Sami people of Lapland and Norway also use monotonous chanting called “joiking”.

When one looks at shamanic traditions around the world there are three common levels that are spoken about and also depicted through different paintings and other forms of artwork. The hidden worlds that the shaman travels to are known as the Under World or Lower World, the Middle World, and the Upper World. There are numerous levels in both the Lower World and also in the Upper World and they are outside of time.

We live in an unlimited universe. Although descriptions of non-ordinary reality are subject to mental limitations I will describe some of the more common shamanic experiences of these worlds.

Shamanism is a system of direct revelation. All shamans might describe experiences differently. And how the different experiences are interpreted and seen by others is how beautiful they all are.

The Lower World is reached by journeying through a tunnel that leads into the earth. This world seems very earthy and tangible to the shaman and is characterized by caves, seas, dense jungles, forests, and deserts. The beings inhabiting the Lower World are the spirits of animals, trees, plants, and rocks as well as human spirits that are connected with the mysteries of the earth.

The Upper World is experienced as more ethereal than the Lower World. The lighting is bright and can go from pastels, to gray, to complete darkness. In the Upper World I might know I am standing on something but what is holding me might seem vague. The landscape here is also very varied. There are crystal cities and cities of clouds. This level also inhabits a variety of spirits.

The Middle World is the hidden reality of the world we live in. In the Middle World the shaman can travel back and forth in time. It is also a place where the shaman can journey in looking for lost and stolen objects.

As I already mentioned to the shaman everything is alive. The Middle World is one place where the shaman can speak to the spirit of the rocks, trees, plants, wind, water, fire, earth, etc. The shaman can speak to the spirit that lives in all things here.

The Middle World is also inhabited by a variety of spirits such as “the hidden folk”. The hidden folk are the fairies, elves, dwarves, trolls, and forest guardians that are present in so many myths and stories. The hidden folk remind us of a magical time in our lives before, through cultural conditioning, we closed the veils between the worlds.

In the Lower World and Upper Worlds there are a variety of helping spirits that can help the shaman with healing individuals, the community, and the planet.

The two most common types of spirits who work in partnership with the shaman are power animals also called guardian spirits as well as there are teachers in human form.

Shamanic cultures believe that when we are born the spirit of at least two power animals volunteer to

remain with us to keep us healthy emotionally and physically and also protect us from harm. These animals are akin to the Christian belief in guardian angels.

The other form of helping spirit that shamans work with is a teacher in human form. These typically were the gods and goddesses of the culture, religious figures, and ancestors who wished to help.

These helping spirits work with the shaman to bring healing to individuals, the community, and the environment. The helping spirits are also consulted with when information is needed.

Soul Retrieval: How Shamans Heal Trauma

Shamans look at the spiritual form of illness which might manifest on an emotional or physical level. When I was doing the research for my book *Soul Retrieval: Mending the Fragmented Self*, I found that most shamanic cultures around the world believe that illness is due to the loss of the soul.

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, life force, the part of our vitality that keeps us alive and thriving.

The types of trauma that could cause soul loss in our culture would be any kind of abuse: sexual, physical, or emotional. Other causes could be an accident, being in a war, being a victim of a 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. And what might cause soul loss in one person might not cause soul loss in another. Shamans believe that alarm clocks can cause soul loss. I think we all know what they mean.

It is important to understand that soul loss is a good thing that happens to us. It is how we survive pain. If I were going to be in a head-on car collision the last place I would want to be at the point of impact is in my body. My psyche could not endure that kind of pain. So our psyches have this brilliant self protect mechanism where a part of our essence or soul leaves the body so that we do not feel the full impact of the pain.

In psychology we talk about this as dissociation. But in psychology we don't talk about what disassociates and where that part goes. In shamanism we know that a piece of the soul leaves the body and goes to a territory in what shamans call non ordinary reality where it waits until someone intervenes in the spiritual realms and facilitates its return.

Although soul loss is a survival mechanism the problem from a shamanic point of view is that the soul part that left usually does not come back on its own. The soul might be lost, or stolen by another person, or doesn't know the trauma has passed and it is safe to return.

It has always been the role of the shaman 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, 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 don't mean this in a good way, soul loss has probably occurred.

You can really see how much soul loss there is today as we put money over life. Anytime someone says that we have to kill other life forms for material gain that person must be suffering from soul loss. Anytime someone feels that buying one more car or that gathering material objects will bring happiness that person is suffering from the loss of soul. As you can see we are looking at a great deal of planetary soul loss today as you watch how we behave towards each other and the rest of life.

Coma is also soul loss. But in coma there is more of the soul out of body than in the body. Coma is very complicated to work with today for many reasons. It takes skill on behalf of the shaman to find out which way the soul is trying to go. Does the soul want to re-enter the body? Or does it need help moving on which would lead to the death of the patient? There is a lot to say about this topic and it beyond the scope of this article.

Today there has been a resurgence in the interest of the practice of shamanism. We now have many hundreds of wonderful shamanic practitioners reintroducing the practice of soul retrievals into our culture.

It is interesting to note that as soul loss was so understood in shamanic cultures people who suffered traumas were given a soul retrieval within three days after a trauma occurred. Today as we have not been practicing soul retrieval, modern day practitioners are going back ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years or even more looking for lost soul parts.

Also in a shamanic culture the individuals knew what was out of balance in their lives that might have caused an illness or issue to occur.

In our culture we are unaware of what is out of spiritual harmony that is creating illness. And because often our soul loss happened so young we are unaware of the unconscious patterns we are living out due to our first soul loss. We are always trying to retrieve our soul. And how we do this is by repeating the same trauma over and over again. The names might change of the people involved in our life story, but the story is often the same.

The effects of having a soul retrieval vary from person to person. Some people feel that they are more grounded in their body and feel more solid. Some people feel lighter and a joyful way of being returns to them. For some memories of the past traumas might be triggered bringing up a variety of feelings that must be worked through. And for some people the effects are too subtle to notice a change until further work to integrate the soul is done.

As 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.

I believe that once a person has his or her soul brought back the client now has to do some work. If the person has done a lot of personal work the soul retrieval might be the end of the work. If not the soul retrieval would be the beginning of the work.

Now it is up to the client to look at how to create a healthy life style 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 soul retrieval.

I write about spiritual practices we can bring into our lives to create a positive present and future in my books *Welcome Home: Following Your Soul's Journey Home* and *Medicine for the Earth: How to Transform Personal and Environmental Toxins*.

This is vital work for the times we live in. The earth wants her children home and she wants them home now. It is time to come back home again and take our rightful place on the earth. It is our birthright to fully express our souls and create the world we want to live in. And it is our birthright to shine as brightly as the stars above us. It is time to share our light again in the world.

Medicine for the Earth: Healing Our Planet

I started practicing shamanism in 1980 and my own personal practice led me to explore with the spirits the issue of reversing environmental pollution. One of the most important messages I was to receive over my twenty years of journeying on this was it is who we become that changes the world and our environment not what we do. Harmony within will create harmony without. So the true work is learning how to change our thoughts, attitudes and belief systems. We actually have to work with “the alchemy of the soul” to really be able to change our inner environment as our inner state of being will be reflected in the outer world. The literal definition of alchemy is “working within and through the dense darkness inside.” This is big work and involves committing to spiritual practices that we must engage in daily and throughout the day.

Stories that come from the Bible, from the Kabbalah, and from various Taoist, Hindu, yogic, alchemical, Egyptian, and shamanic works show that miracles were once an everyday occurrence. I researched different spiritual traditions to give me clues to how miracles were performed by ancient cultures, mystics, and saints. As I read about miracles a formula of elements that seem to be part of all miracles started to form. The formula that came to me is a hologram. The elements cannot be taken separately but combined with each other create transmutation. The definition of transmutation I am using is the ability to change the nature of a substance. The work of effecting environmental change is how to change toxic substances into neutral substances.

The formula I arrived at is intention + union + love + focus + concentration + harmony + imagination = transmutation. Although we cannot use these elements as separate entities I would like to explain them separately.

For all miracles to happen we must hold a strong intention of what we want to see happen. Intention creates action. This involves concentration. We know that a key to the success of spiritual practice is the ability to concentrate. We must also be able to maintain a focus on our short term and long term goals.

All miracles involve union with a divine force. In the bible when Jesus says to heal in my name the true Aramaic translation of this is to know God and heal as God does. This means having union with the creative force of life is essential for true healing to take place. Sai Baba, a guru in India, is known for his

miraculous acts and healing abilities. He says: “The only difference between me and you is I know who I am and you don’t” (meaning he knows he is divine). These are just a couple of examples of what different mystics say about union.

Love is an essential ingredient in all miracles as it is only love that heals. Techniques don’t heal. Where there is an open heart there is the energy to bring through miraculous and magical energy. Love is the great transformer.

I have already mentioned harmony as it is known in the practice of alchemy that harmony within will create harmony without. Disharmony creates disease; harmony creates beauty and health.

Imagination is another key in performing the miracle of transmutation in that we must be able to envision an environment that is pure and clean and which supports all of life. Caroline Casey, an American astrologer, says: “Imagination lays the tracks for the reality train to drive down.” With our imagination we have the ability to sculpt our world.

To add to this formula there are more principles to remember. As we change our perception we change our reality. To change our perception to create a reality of a clean environment we must be able to see the beauty in all things. To see the beauty in all things, we must live in a state of appreciation and gratefulness.

There are two phases of the work. One phase of the work is to learn how to recognize that we are more than a body, our thoughts, and our past experiences. We are spiritual light and we are divine at all times.

We are not separate rather we are connected to one source and to a web of life. Imagine a hand where one of the fingers drops to the floor and thinks it can have an independent life without being connected to the body. That is what is happening today. Humankind is acting like separate fingers that have forgotten the connection to the original source of life.

In our egoic states we perceive ourselves as separate from each other and the rest of life. Life circumstances and our relationships with others trigger negative thoughts and feelings. As human beings it is important to acknowledge our thoughts and feelings. It is also important to acknowledge that there is energy behind our thoughts and feelings that we can send out to others and into the environment. In shamanic cultures it is understood that there is a difference between expressing anger and sending anger.

It is healthy to have a range of thoughts and emotions. The work we must do is to learn how to transmute or transform the energy behind our thoughts and emotions into love and light. In this way we can feel the depth of our feelings but not create any harm by doing so.

We must again recognize as all ancient cultures did that words are vibration. And when we speak out loud we send a vibration out into the universe that will manifest back down on others and us.

You might remember when you were a child saying the phrase abracadabra. This is actually an Aramaic phrase “abra q ad habra” and it literally translates to “I will create as I speak”.

I write about how to transmute the energy of our negative thoughts into an energy embracing love and light and how to work with the power of words in my book *How to Heal Toxic Thoughts: Simple Tools for*

The second phase of the work is gathering together in community to do ceremonies to reverse the pollution that we have created.

My book, *Medicine for the Earth: How to Transform Personal and Environmental Toxins* goes into detail about this material. After I wrote the book I started some scientific experiments to check out if the practices I wrote about will truly transmute toxins. I have been working with intentionally polluting de-ionized water (pure water with no minerals in it) with ammonium hydroxide, a common and dangerous pollutant in our environment. As ammonium hydroxide is a strong base it is easy to check its presence with the use of pH strips. I have worked with many groups of students at this point. With every group I have worked with using the principles I wrote about, the water has changed a pH of 1-3 points toward neutral. We have prepared for days but once we begin the ceremony work it has only taken approximately 15-20 minutes before the water changes. From a scientific point of view this would be seen as impossible.

Since these initial experiments I started using a gas discharge visualization camera which is based on the Kirlian effect. We can now take pictures of the change in energy of the substances present in our circle. Besides water we have put in the circle a peach, some soil from a road that has a lot of cars driving on it, and some cheddar cheese crackers. To see some of the pictures we have gotten you can visit www.medicinefortheearth.com and click on "Results".

It is important to note that in our ceremonies we have not tried to manipulate the environment. We have not focused on the substances on the altar of our circle. We change ourselves with the understanding that our outer world will reflect back to us the inner changes that we make. This way of perception goes back to the ancient and esoteric principle of "as above, so below; as within, so without".

Alchemists did not actually change lead into gold. The practice of alchemy was about changing lead consciousness into gold light consciousness. As we begin to change our consciousness and get in touch with the light inside of us we can effect great changes in our outer world. It is who we become that changes the world not what we do. The world changes by how we change.

All life is made of light. We are all light. Everything is light. In remembering this we can transmute everything in our outer environment and what we take in to pure healing light.

All spiritual traditions teach that everything manifests on a spiritual level before manifesting on the physical. Where we have power right now to create change on the planet is by incorporating spiritual practices into our lives.