

## Shamanism- Healing Beyond the Boundaries: Taking a Trip- Shamanically, That Is!

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SHAMANISM IS THE OLDEST spiritual practice known to humankind. Estimates place it from 40,000 to 100,000 years old. Shamanic healing techniques are still practiced world wide by both indigenous peoples and others who are called to this work. Sometimes known as spirit doctors or medicine men, shamans view illness as disharmony in a person's life on the spiritual level. This disharmony can lead to mental, emotional, and/or physical illness if left unresolved.

A shaman addresses the spiritual aspect of illness by making journeys outside of time and space into what is called "non-ordinary reality" or a universe parallel to our own. There the shaman meets spirit helpers in the form of animals or human teachers. It is these compassionate spirits who perform the healing work with the shaman only acting as a conduit or "hollow bone."

Shamanism continues to survive and evolve because its practitioners constantly adapt to the needs of their people and culture. Our modern times are no exception. Michael Harner is a brilliant anthropologist who is considered to be a pioneer in bringing shamanism to the West. In his classic book, *The Way of the Shaman*, published in 1980, he outlines the anthropological studies that led to discovering his own calling as a master shaman. It is, in part, through his subsequent world wide shamanic studies and creation of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies ([www.shamanicstudies.com](http://www.shamanicstudies.com) [5]) that many shamanic workshops were created and shamanism as both a healing practice and a personal spiritual practice was able to break more fully into the United States and Europe. Fortunately it is possible to learn how to journey and incorporate it into a personal spiritual practice without necessarily being called to become a full fledged shamanic healer.

Just what is involved in taking a shamanic trip or journey and how do lay people learn how to do this? Can anyone learn how to journey? Does a person have to be good at yoga or meditation to be a successful journeyer? These are the most common questions people have when first introduced to shamanism as a spiritual practice. Interestingly enough, people in the West typically have no problem with learning the basics of shamanic journeying and are usually successful in their initial attempts. There are no prerequisites such as skill in yoga or meditation, and often with as little as a few hours training people experience journeys rich in metaphor, symbol, and stunning visual effects. The following describes shamanic journeying in broad terms from the view point of "core shamanism," a term coined by Michael Harner to describe the universal traits of all shamanic cultures in the world. Of course, each culture's shamanic traditions vary widely within that broader construct.

In core shamanism beginning journeying students are introduced first to the lower world and then to the upper world and meet their own compassionate helping spirits. A portal or entryway is chosen as an entry point into a tunnel to the lower world through which the soul goes to begin the journey. This is most often something in nature that the student has either seen in the past or uses as a special power spot currently. An upper world journey begins by setting the intention to go up and transition into that

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world by using smoke, a rainbow, a climbing vine or anything else in nature that helps the soul go up.

A shamanic journey always begins with the setting of an intention. The intention can be quite general as in asking a helping spirit, "Please take me on a tour of your favorite places," or very specific as in, "Tell me what I need to know about a possible move to California." The actual journey is achieved by listening to or playing a repetitive beat that helps the brain go into the Theta state. This can be drumming, rattling, clapping, or hitting two rocks or sticks together; anything that creates the constant beat.

Perhaps the most attractive aspect of the shamanic journey as a personal spiritual practice is its essence as a true method for direct revelation from the spirits. A person is able to receive guidance and direction from the best source of all; the spirits themselves. This process is one of the most empowering I have ever experienced. So if you are concerned about gas prices but still want to travel why not learn to take a shamanic trip and go places you have never seen or imagined even existed?

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