

# Shamanism – Part 6

by Dr. John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon

## Dangers and Degradations, continued

### Drug Use

Many authorities note the importance (if not necessity) of drug use for shaman enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> We also find this in the world of the occult generally, and among many Eastern gurus.<sup>2</sup> But with millions of people now exploring shamanism and other kinds of occultism and Eastern paths, one can only hazard a guess as to what degree pagan religion in modern America fosters drug usage and its attendant problems.

### Death Magic and Other Forms of Murder

Michael Harner, Mircea Eliade, and others discuss parallels between shamanism and occult death magic. Harner observes the following practice among the category of the so-called “bewitching” shaman: “Shamans send these spirit helpers into the victims’ bodies to make them ill or kill them.... [T]he urge to kill felt by bewitching shamans came to them with a strength and frequency similar to that of hunger.”<sup>3</sup> According to Eliade, “when the shaman wants to poison someone, he sends a *damagomi* [spirit]: ‘Go find so-and-so. Enter him. Make him sick. Don’t kill him at once. Make him die in a month.’”<sup>4</sup>

However, because there are no absolute moral values exercised by shamans (or their spirit helpers), one discovers allegedly “good” shamans also use their powers for evil, whenever it suits their purposes.<sup>5</sup> This is exactly what we find among so-called “good” witches.<sup>6</sup>

Another illustration of how shamanism is used in killing or murdering others is seen in that the spirits which shamans cavort with enjoy “taking the heads” of tribal enemies, or even of innocent victims. Indeed, primitive shamanistic communities may undergo a crisis when civilization comes and takes hold of their social life and head-hunting becomes outlawed. “Headhunting had been outlawed, and the people feared that the spirits would consume them because they were not able to feed the hungry spirits the heads of slain enemies.”<sup>7</sup>

A television special on the subject was produced by Douchan Gersi, who had

led the first successful expedition in history that crossed central Borneo through uncharted territory. Five previous expeditions had failed, and even in this one Gersi almost lost his life. On the TV special, one of the more understated personal sentiments he gave was, “*Everywhere, invisible dangers.*” At one point of incredible hardship, near death, he recalled, “*Believe me, I started saying all my childhood prayers.*”

Gersi discovered that the head-hunting tribes he encountered, in common with most pagan religion, justify murder on the basis of the spirits’ own interests and perverted religious principles. He encountered some 350 of these shamanistic tribes and spent years living among them as a convert. One such tribe, the “Iban,” gather heads from other tribes and from explorers like Gersi. Why? Because the heads are believed to confer “social status” and occult power. Reminiscent of Western gunslingers, one native had 250 notches proudly carved out on his spear—one notch for each head. Indeed, for every major event (moving, marriage, etc.), a head must be sacrificed and publicly displayed on a pole. Thus, as the ritual ceremony for displaying the severed head approaches, “the people sense the presence of a thousand spirits” hovering around them, ready to relish the gruesome spectacle.

The religious justification for this is that human skulls are believed to be the home of living spirits, hence the supposed reason for the spirits’ interest in the displayed head. Human skulls are further thought to symbolize life, and so the tribe must be kept “healthy” by ritual sacrifice—the human sacrifice itself symbolizing life-giving power for the tribe. In harmony with other occult traditions of human sacrifice, it is also believed the person taking off the head of the victim receives the power from the spirit of the dead man. Gersi himself came close to having his own head removed—even after having been accepted by the tribe. He was spared only by a tortuous shamanistic initiation. Being placed in a deep pit with flesh-eating ants was only one of his many ordeals.

Perhaps the most incredible part was Gersi’s pagan conversion and proud membership in the community. He no longer believes such people are primitive, but now is convinced they are spiritually advanced because of their “harmony with nature.” He concluded his television show by criticizing modern viewpoints and the encroachment of civilization for destroying such important cultures, using the wry phrase, “Progress is beheading Borneo.”

Consider that here are hundreds of tribes that engage in ritual murder—a theme so common in demonic religion—and yet an intelligent, world-renown explorer complains that they are being forced to change their ways by the encroachment of civilization—as if changing the “natural order” of things for such tribes were the real sin! In a similar vein, those who criticize Christian missionaries for “destroying” pagan cultures apparently have little comprehension of how evil and demonic pagan culture can be. Perhaps the more enlightened among them would care to join the local coven and ritually sacrifice a baby—and then see how they feel about preserving paganism. It is right that Christians are financially supporting missions that seek to share Christ with such peoples.

To summarize, there is no such category as a “benevolent” practicing occultist, whether shaman, witch, medium, psychic, or guru. First, because the urge to use power amorally is always present and people sooner or later succumb to it, even when their motives are good. Second, the Bible makes no distinction between “good” and “evil” practices of the occult. God calls all occult practice evil and an abomination to Him (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). That the spirits themselves are evil leads us to conclude that they will influence people in that direction, albeit often in subtle ways. Once people turn to the spirits, the spirits always get their way, sooner or later.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> cf. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 221-223.
- <sup>2</sup> John Weldon, “Eastern Gurus in a Western Milieu: A Critique from the Perspective of Biblical Revelation,” PhD. dissertation (Pacific College of Graduate Studies, Melbourne, Australia, 1988), pp. 71-73.
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Harner, “The Sound of Rushing Water,” in Michael Harner, ed., *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (New York: Oxford, 1973), pp. 17-20.
- <sup>4</sup> Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 106.
- <sup>5</sup> e.g., *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- <sup>6</sup> Dr. Randolph Stone, *The Mystic Bible* (Puhjab, India: Radha Soami Satsang Beas, 1977), pp. 136-137, 298.
- <sup>7</sup> Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), pp. 24-25.