

Shamanism – Part 8

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Dangers and Degradations, continued

Demonism and Health

Any individual who decides to practice shamanism soon realizes he has contacted genuine spirit beings who exist entirely apart from his own personality, at least initially.¹

Of course, modern Western scientists who employ shamanistic techniques may scoff at the idea of personal, independent spirits or demons. Many psychologists and shaman initiates may redefine spirit manifestations in more “neutral” categories, such as “archetypal consciousness,” “higher self,” and “cosmic consciousness.” But such interpretations only underscore an anti-supernatural bias, which does nothing to protect one from the spirits themselves, who easily hide behind such “naturalistic” designations.

As is true for much Eastern religion in general,² the end result of the shamanistic path, whether it is used for spiritual or health purposes, is almost always the spirit possession of the seeker (or patient). As Harner explains,

When a power animal is restored to a person, he usually feels better immediately, and then gradually experiences a power flowing into his body over the next few days.... You should begin a weekly routine to retain the power by keeping your power animal content, for the spirit has entered your body, not only to help you, but also to help itself. You gain its power: it gains the joy of again experiencing life in a material form.³

For almost all shamans, the entrance point to spirit possession is altered states of consciousness. Indeed, this is precisely how many professional anthropologists and other social scientists become shamans. By personally engaging in the rituals and practices they are seeking to study academically, they use drugs or other means to “test drive” altered states of consciousness, trance, and spirit contact. Then they become shamans. This was true for Carlos Castaneda,⁴ Michael Harner,⁵ and others.⁶ Harner admits, “What *is* definite is that *some* degree of alteration of consciousness is necessary to shamanic practice.”⁷

Shamans find that even a light trance is effective for their spiritistic work. Harner refers to “the light trance in which most shamanic work is done.”⁸ This would seem

to have implications for a good deal of modern experimentation, popular and scientific, with hypnosis and related methods of altering consciousness.⁹ In fact, as Drs. Villoldo and Krippner note, “Spirit-incorporation according to Peters and Price-Williams... resembles ‘deep hypnosis’...”¹⁰ In addition, use of sweat lodges, sacred pipes, and even ritual alone may lead to spirit contact and possession.¹¹ Because the intent of the ritual is to deliberately contact the spirits, it is hardly surprising that the spirits who desire such contact will respond.

Sadly, advocates do not recognize that the supposedly “good” spirits contacted in shamanism are really demons imitating good spirits for purposes of influence and control.¹² This indicates a gross contradiction within a shamanistic worldview, for shamanism freely admits that it *employs* “demon helpers” in its work.¹³ American shamans may prefer to term their spiritual possession as the more polite “divine companionship,”¹⁴ but this hardly changes the facts. Indeed, some of the perceptual problems inherent in contemporary America’s fascination with shamanism are illustrated by Harner’s work *The Way of the Shaman*. Harner makes shamanism sound like the best thing since modern electricity. He calls it “a great mental and emotional adventure”¹⁵ and emphasizes its physical and spiritual benefits. Displaying an inexcusable ignorance of his own field, not to mention the history of spiritism itself, he claims that spirit guides *never* harm those they possess.¹⁶ “Remember, guardian spirits are *always* beneficial. They never harm their possessors. And you possess the guardian spirit; it never possesses you. In other words, the power animal is a purely beneficial spirit no matter how fierce it may appear. It is a spirit to be exercised, not exorcised.”¹⁷

Why, then, does Harner devote an entire chapter to the shamanistic practice of exorcising *demons* from patients!¹⁸ As Eliade correctly observes, “In order to extract the evil spirits from the patient, the shaman is often obliged to take them into his own body; in doing so, he struggles and suffers more than the patient himself.”¹⁹

Clearly, the spiritual naiveté of our culture is aptly demonstrated in the subject of shamanism. As a result, what is so demonic and dangerous is frequently accepted, uncritically and without question, as a method for securing physical health and healing, psychological adjustment, and spiritual advancement.

Harner points out the depth at which Americans want to get into shamanism: “I have been continually surprised to discover how many Westerners who are ill or injured immediately accept the possibility of their power animal [spirit guide] and happily enter into contact with it.”²⁰ Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the spirits who work through shamans want their hosts to establish training centers so that more and more people can be instructed in the ways of spirit possession through shamanism. Don Edwards Calderon was told by his spirits in a vision that “it was important to reveal this knowledge of healing and shamanism to outsiders.”²¹ The same was true for shamaness Skyhawk, founder of the Church of Loving Hands.²² Sun Bear, the founder and medicine chief of the Bear Tribe Medicine Society, recalls, “I have established an apprenticeship training because the spirits told me to do it.”²³ He also notes, “If the spirits accept you, then you become a medicine man.... They are the ones who determine whether you actually have the power to practice.”²⁴

The irony of using shamanism as medicine is magnified when we consider what is involved in “healing” according to shamanism. It is not just the shaman who becomes demon-possessed. Why? Because shamanism assumes that most or all people already have a guardian spirit within them. That spirit has come and gone as it wished throughout the person’s life.²⁵ Illness and psychological or emotional problems are merely indications that, for various reasons, one’s spirit guide has left one’s body, and the illness or other condition is the final result. Eliade observes that “it is often the case that the illness is due to a neglect or an omission in respect to the infernal powers....”²⁶

To retain one’s spirit guide or power animal one must keep it “happy.” This illustrates another form of bondage to the spirits:

If one wishes to maintain shamanic practice, one has to change into one’s animal regularly to keep the animal contented enough to stay. This involves exercising the animal through dance, singing songs of the animal, and recognizing “big” dreams as messages from the guardian, the power animal. Dancing your animal is an important method for keeping it content and thus making it reluctant to leave you. The guardian animal spirit resident in the mind-body of the person wants to have the enjoyment of once again existing in material form.... [A]s I learned from the Jivaro years ago, guardian spirits usually stay with you only a few years and then depart. So, in the course of a long, powerful life [as a shaman], you will have a number of them one after another, whether you know it or not.²⁷

According to shamanism, when a spirit leaves a person, physical, psychological, or spiritual illness results:

Thus possession of guardian spirit power [i.e., retaining the spirit within you] is fundamental to health. Serious illness is usually only possible when a person is dis-spirited, and has lost this energizing force, the guardian spirit. When a person becomes depressed, weak, prone to illness, it is a symptom that he has lost his power animal and thus can no longer resist, or ward off the unwanted power “infections” or intrusions.²⁸

In other words, shamans wish us to alter our perception to harmonize it with their spiritistic philosophy, to believe that the mere presence of illness, physical or psychological, or being in a serious accident, or even certain mundane problems, mean that one has *automatically* been “dis-spirited” and therefore, by definition, a spirit must be *reintroduced* into the body. Harner states, “The specific treatment, if the victim is not in a coma, is to recover or obtain his guardian spirit to re-energize him.”²⁹ And “if your power animal’s messages are ignored, or if it is not exercised through dancing, it may become discomfited, discouraged, and want to leave your body. Its discomfort may unintentionally flow into your own consciousness causing tension and anxiety. If you do nothing to remedy the situation, it will shortly leave you and you will again be dis-spirited.”³⁰

Again, *any* illness is evidence a person has been “dis-spirited.” So the only possible way to recover “health,” is for the spirit to be “reintroduced” into the mind/body. Of course, if the diagnosis is wrong, and illness is *not* related to a loss of

one's pre-existing spirit guide, then shamanistic methods serve as a cover for the demonization of persons previously *not* demonized. This vital importance of the spirit guide to the health of the patient is why modern books about using shamanism for health purposes instruct people to meet or to be reintroduced to their spirit guides.³¹

Because hundreds or thousands of practitioners are now adopting shamanism to varying degrees in their health and therapy work, it is hardly inconceivable that patients may become demon-influenced or demonized in the process:

The urgent healing work of the shaman... is to restore one of the person's lost guardian spirits as soon as possible. Since ours is not a shamanic society, it is usually not possible to do the necessary work in the same room as a hospitalized person. Exceptions are sometimes tolerated in this country if both shaman and the patients are American Indians.... In some hospitals, such as on the Navajo reservation, visits by native healers are being increasingly encouraged as the Western medical staff becomes more aware of the benefits produced.... Meanwhile, you can use the following long distance technique to restore guardian power.³²

Harner discusses how a spirit may be "restored" to a person at great distance through shaman ritual. The shaman merely calls upon his power animal, transfers its power to the patient's guardian spirit, and then visually and mentally sends the spirit "to the patient as visualized in the hospital room."³³

As our American society increasingly turns to the occult, we can expect many more such "health" procedures in the future. An important point to remember is that even shamans (like other mediums and spiritists), are not always aware of the presence of their spirit guides. Their spirit guides may be right next to them, or even inside of them, and yet they may have no conscious awareness of that. And this means that people can become demonized unaware.

In summary, the essence of shamanic "health" is possession by one or more spirits: "A power animal or guardian spirit... not only increases one's physical energy and ability to resist contagious disease, but also increases one's mental alertness and self-confidence.... Being powerful [spirit possessed] is like having a force field in and around you.... Thus, possession of guardian spirit power is fundamental to health."³⁴

Once a person adopts shamanism, then by definition any illness, mental or physical, requires the following diagnosis: The person has lost his power animal (or spirit guide) and the only solution is to "restore" that person's spirit guide into his mind and body.

Even children can become novice shamans and spirit-possessed.³⁵ Some of the modern practices in "transpersonal education" are useful for shamanistic instruction here.³⁶ Shamans themselves may help introduce power animals and other spirits to their children.³⁷ As shamanism increases within our culture, the children of American shamans will become as demonized as their parents. As Harner explains of his own experience among the Jivaro, "Parents of a newly born infant, in fact, typically gave it a mild hallucinogen so that it could 'see' and hopefully thus acquire an *arutam*

wakani or guardian spirit. The parents, of course, wanted the baby to have as much protection as possible in order to survive into adult life."³⁸

And shamanistic practice in America has many other fruits.

- Because it encourages demon contact, shamanism leads to occult bondage; that is, subjection to and dependence upon the world of demons.
- Because it is a form of spiritual warfare, shamanism brings powerful personal experiences that insulate a person against biblical teaching and the gospel message.
- Because it is irrational, shamanism produces a denial of cause and effect in the realm of medicine, leading to a rejection of scientific methods and an acceptance of occult methods. In that the spirits have subtle powers and persuasions, even "scientific" harmonizers may end up abandoning orthodox medicine.
- Because it stresses magical ability, shamanism exalts and glorifies the one with occult powers.
- Because it is animistic, shamanism breaks down three vital distinctions of the created order: 1) material; 2) plant/animal; 5) human. Rocks, trees, and animals become just as "alive" and therefore as important as man; in the process, humanity is reduced to the lower or lowest levels of the creation.

The result of all this keeps the shamanistic practitioner in a primitive state spiritually and often morally, with little hope of escape. The ritual and practices of shamanism reinforce its belief system and vice versa through powerful supernatural manifestations that are difficult if not impossible to counter.

Only the power of Jesus Christ can break into the dark world of shamanism and deliver those held in its bondage. Shamans and shaman apprentices who desire deliverance must turn to the living Jesus Christ, for He and He alone can save them.

Notes

- ¹ E.g., David Quigley, "Spirits of the Wilderness," *Shaman's Drum*, Fall 1985, pp. 38-39; Timothy White, "An Interview with Luisah Teish, Daughter of Oshun," *Shaman's Drum*, Spring 1986, pp. 41-45.
- ² Tal Brooke, *Riders of the Cosmic Circuit: Rajneesh, Sai Baba, Muktananda... Gods of the New Age* (Batavia, IL: Lion, 1986), pp. 165-208; John Weldon, "Eastern Gurus in a Western Milieu: A Critique from the Perspective of Biblical Revelation," Ph.D. dissertation, Pacific College of Graduate Studies, Melbourne, Australia, 1988.
- ³ Michael Harner, *The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power and Healing* (New York: Bantam, 1986), p. 124.
- ⁴ Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1974), pp. 13-99.
- ⁵ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. 63.
- ⁶ Larry G. Peters, "An Experiential Study of Nepalese Shamanism," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1981.
- ⁷ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. 62.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- ¹⁰ Alberto Villoldo and Stanley Krippner, *Healing States: A Journey into the World of Spiritual Healing and Shamanism* (New York: Fireside/Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1987), p. 197.
- ¹¹ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, pp. 84-86; Alan Morvay, "An Interview with Sun Bear," Winter 1985,

pp. 21-22.

- ¹² See John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Coming Darkness: Confronting Occult Deception* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993); Doreen Irvine, *Freed from Witchcraft* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1973); Raphael Gasson, *The Challenging Counterfeit* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1970); Johanna Michaelsen, *The Beautiful Side of Evil* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1975); Victor H. Ernest, *I Talked with Spirits* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971); John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on Spirit Guides* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1988); Ben Alexander, *Out from Darkness: The True Story of a Medium Who Escapes the Occult* (Joplin, MO: Collee Press Publishing, 1986); Tal Brooke, *Riders of the Cosmic Circuit*.
- ¹³ see Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. 30.
- ¹⁴ White, "Interview with Luisah Tesh," p. 42.
- ¹⁵ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. xiii.
- ¹⁶ To the contrary, see Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Coming Darkness*; Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on Spirit Guides*; Irvine, *Freed from Witchcraft*; Gasson, *The Challenging Counterfeit*; Michaelsen, *The Beautiful Side of Evil*; Ernest, *I Talked with Spirits*.
- ¹⁷ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. 88.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-152.
- ¹⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 229; cf. Knud Rasmussen, "Horqarnaq and Kiguina Subdue the Storm-Child: An Account of a Copper Eskimo Drum Séance," *Shaman's Drum*, Winter 1985, pp. 17-19.
- ²⁰ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. 132.
- ²¹ Albert Villoldo, "A Journey of Initiation with Don Edwardo Calderon," *Shaman's Drum*, Fall 1986, p. 19.
- ²² Skyhawk, "Receiving the Sacred Pipe," *Shaman's Drum*, Winter 1985, p. 45.
- ²³ Morvay, "An Interview with Sun Bear," p. 22.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ²⁵ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, pp. 54-55, 87, 90.
- ²⁶ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 216.
- ²⁷ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. 87
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.
- ³⁶ Johanna Michaelsen, *Like Lambs to the Slaughter: Your Child and the Occult* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1989), pp. 109-146.
- ³⁷ Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 22.
- ³⁸ Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, p. 82.