

ABOUT SHAMANISM

Shamanism is the earliest spiritual practice known to mankind, dating back at least 30,000 years. *Shaman* is a Tungus word from Siberia referring to a person who goes into an altered, trance-like state for the purpose of contacting the compassionate spirits who help them in healing the spiritual aspect of illness. Throughout the centuries in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe, these traditional healers have interacted directly with the spirits to divine information, perform soul retrievals, assist souls in crossing over, and perform various rituals and ceremonies within the community.

From a shamanic perspective there is usually a spiritual issue at the core of illness. A person may have lost his or her power, resulting in depression, chronic illness or misfortune. Due to emotional or physical trauma, a person can experience soul loss. The shaman journeys into the Other World, or non-ordinary reality, to retrieve the soul essence and bring it back to restore the person's lost power.

Another cause of illness can be a spiritual blockage or negative energies a client has taken on due to the loss of his or her power or soul. Extraction is the shamanic process of removing the negative energies which can manifest within the body as localized illness and pain. The practitioner's compassionate spirit helpers assist in displacing these energies for the purpose of restoring health and well-being.

It is the responsibility of the shamanic practitioner to heal both the living and the deceased. In healing those who have died, a psychopomp ceremony is performed. The shaman assists souls who are at unrest or afraid to cross over to a place of peace and light.

Traditional healing, *shamanism*, continues to be the predominate healing mode in African culture. In Africa traditional practitioners are recognized by the medical profession as part of official health care. With approximately 200,000 healers in South Africa alone, consulting to 80% of the general population, the traditional healers continue to practice as they have for thousands of years.

African traditional beliefs rest on three main themes: 1) sacred images such as gods and ancestors regulate the traditional universe; 2) rituals and ceremonies are the means by which these sacred images communicate moral patterns into the culture; 3) the earthly representatives of the spiritual realm -- sangomas/diviners/prophets/priests/sacred kings - are the servants of the community and serve as mediators between the spirits and the people through divination and rituals.

Today the practice of shamanism is growing in the Western world. As Westerners begin to seek alternative methods to health and well-being, more and more people are turning to these ancient practices. There are different ways that practitioners can work. One way is for the shamanic practitioner to provide spiritual healing and follow-up treatments as necessary. Another option is to do ongoing work with a practitioner. The purpose of continuing to do shamanic work is to restore balance and harmony and to create a positive present and future for yourself through the use of spiritual practices and ceremonies.