

Shamanism & Connecting with Helping Spirits

Gogo Gretchen Crilly McKay

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 shamanic practitioner 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.

In modern shamanism we refer to ourselves as shamanic practitioners. We can journey into three worlds for knowledge, power, and understanding: lower world, upper world, middle world. The lower world is the realm of Earth energies, animal spirits and some ancestors. Knowledge gained here is useful for earthly life. The upper world is the realm of the ascended master angels. Knowledge gained here can assist us in healing the physical and spiritual bodies. The middle world is the realm we live in daily. This is where we connect with nature spirits.

Modern shamanism, or core shamanism, is based on the core shamanic principles and practices found in indigenous cultures all over the world. Since the 1960's, teachers of core shamanic practices have introduced shamanism to people whose lifestyles are quite alien to our ancestors. Many practitioners of core shamanism are eclectic, adapting universal practices from the world's shamanic lore. Some may lean more to traditional North or South American Indian ways, others toward Celtic or African. Many are comfortable with a combination of traditional cultural practices. The important part is to follow the path that the spirits lead the shamanic practitioner to.

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.

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Books about shamanism:

- *Awakening to the Spirit World: The Shamanic Path of Direct Revelation* by Sandra Ingerman & Hank Wesselman
- *Cave & Cosmos: Shamanic Encounters with Another Reality* by Michael Harner
- *Shamanic Journeying: A Beginner's Guide* by Sandra Ingerman
- *Shamanism as a Spiritual Practice for Daily Life* by Tom Cowan
- *Way of the Shaman* by Michael Harner
- *Woman Who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health* by Elena Avila & Joy Parker

Websites about shamanism:

Sandra Ingerman: www.sandraingerman.com

Gretchen Crilly McKay: ancestralwisdom.com

Shamanic Teachers: www.shamanicteachers.com

Foundation of Shamanic Studies: www.shamanism.org

Society for Shamanic Practice: www.shamanicpractice.org