The Way of the Shaman Study Guide

The Way of the Shaman by Michael Harner

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Way of the Shaman by Michael Harner is an introduction to the basic principles and practices of shamanism. Shamanic methods from all over the world share similar precepts about transcending everyday reality.

This book is a distillation of firsthand research of North and South American Indian spiritual traditions and ethnographic literature from scholars about shamanism in tribes and cultures worldwide. While referencing appropriate scholarship, Harner's treatment is phenomenological rather than explanatory. He does not seek to explain causes. Rather, he describes how shamans work, technically and metaphysically, within their own cosmologies. Harner also shows how Westerners can access the techniques for healing and spiritual enlightenment. Obviously a believer in the substantiated and unsubstantiated powers of shamanism, Harner appropriately labels his unsupported comments as opinion or speculation. When he can support a claim by scholarship or observation, he clearly does so.

Shamanism is a practice conducted within an alternative reality that allows the practitioner to perceive the world and events in "nonordinary" ways. In some cultures, the state that allows for this perception can be reached without drugs. Others use hallucinogenic substances to enter into the different reality. Either way, those entering this altered state of consciousness show different brain functions and patterns. They also report surprisingly similar images and experiences, regardless of where on earth they are or the culture through which they are practicing their shamanic arts.

Healing is the focus of shamanism as presented in this text. While referencing its use in sorcery and other purposes, Harner offers his experiences and scholarship as a guide for shamanism as a technique for healing. It is, the author says, to be used in conjunction with Western medical practices. He acknowledges the links between modern physical and mental health through visualization, psychotherapy, hypnotherapy, stress reduction, and other methods. Harner says, "Shamanism is being reinvented in the West precisely because it is needed" (p.175).

This book is both a description of positive and healing shamanistic practices and a handbook for the beginner who wishes to experience basic shamanic experiences. Accounts of individual and group experiences, scholarly literature, and personal experiences support shamanic work and claims. Although he gives instructions for experimenting with basic shamanic principles, Harner clearly advocates for any real exploration to take place under the tutelage of an experienced shaman.

Chapter 1, Discovering the Way

Chapter 1, Discovering the Way Summary and Analysis

The Way of the Shaman by Michael Harner is an exploration of shamanism from both an academic and a practical perspective. The author repeatedly shows commonalities among the world's shamanic spiritual belief systems. In fact, he shows that religious traditions all share mystical and symbolic similarities. For example, Harner equates the ayahuasca-induced hallucinogenic near-death experience he had with the Conibo with the Bible's descriptions of "the serpent" with water gushing from its mouth and the fight of Michael and his angels against Satan in the Book of Revelations. The fact that traditions are similar all over the world underpins Harner's contention that shamanism transcends any particular culture.

Harner reinforces the points about similarity he makes with scholarship by appealing to his own personal experiences. His reports of the rituals, symbols, and visions of different tribes he observes are quite similar. He also reports explaining his drug-induced vision to another shaman who immediately recognizes Harner's dragon-like creatures that appeared from outer space claiming to be "masters of the world". This, an other examples, show the universality of experiences by shamans regardless of their traditions or locations.

Similarities reported in the literature among shamanic experiences prompt Harner to learn more about shamanism by living among tribal people and learning shamanic ways from within the tribe. In his quest to find spirit helpers with a Jivaro shaman from Ecuador, Harner spiritually goes to a cave beneath a waterfall. He notes that the sound of water in that cave is similar but even stronger than in his previous experiences with the Conibo years earlier when he heard rushing water in an ayahuasca-induced trance. He also experiences calm and a sense of flying inside a mountain. Also, under a maikua-stimulated vision, Harner experiences demons as reptiles against which he is given a balsa stick in ordinary reality to carry into nonordinary reality and use as a weapon. It is effective. The recurrence of demons in reptilian form is pervasive in both literature and experience, as reported by Harner.

Not all tribes use drugs in their shamanic practices. Harner particularly singles out the Lakota Sioux and the Coast Salish tribes as achieving altered states of consciousness without the use of hallucinogenic substances. Harner says he finds that such examples help to show Westerners that they can access shamanism without having to participate in drug-related ceremony that may deter many from attempting the practices. Harner offers direct examples and a "cookbook" approach to accessing some of the basics of shamanism without the use of drugs.

Among the Jivaro, Harner encounters a shaman named Akachu, who helps him acquire spirit helpers known as tsentsak. These are the helpers that cause or cure illness. In

order to activate these helpers, a shaman must swallow them. Each spirit helper has an ordinary aspect without ayahuasca or other hallucinogen, and a nonordinary aspect when under the influence of the drug. In nonordinary reality, the spirits appear as animals like jaguars, butterflies, or monkeys. With the help of appropriate spirit helpers, a shaman can suck negative magical darts from a patient's body, restoring health. In order for the spirit helpers to be effective in this task, however, the shaman must possess two tsentsak in his mouth that are of the type he is trying to extract from the patient. The shaman then vomits out the intruder. It is important that the shaman does not tell the patient's family that he already has the ordinary form of the spirit in his mouth; not only is it unnecessary to give this information, in the native cosmology the physical manifestation is not the thing that has infected the patient, so the symbolic act of expelling the ordinary form is part of the ritual rather than the actual act that removes the intruder spirit. Harner reports that Akachu questions whether or not Harner will be successful in finding tsentsak because he is not a shuar, an Indian. After several days journey, during which time his companions create challenges for Harner, including leaving him alone to find his way in the jungle, his guides take him beneath a waterfall for a mystical experience. Within the cave, he experiences an immense calm and the feeling of flying within the mountain. He is so enamored of the experience that he regrets having to leave. Akachu then prepares maikua, a hallucinogenic substance made from the datura plant, and gives it to Harner to drink. Although frightened because of the stories of death and madness resulting from taking maikua, Harner does drink and has encounters with dangerous creatures. After awakening and being given warm beer and monkey meat, Akachu shows Harner how to access his tsentsak. He has been proven worthy.

Harner tells this story early in the book to reinforce his point that becoming a shaman involves pain, facing one's fears, and a willingness to confront the unknown. He calls Jivaro shamanship dramatic and exciting. Jivaro culture is violent and competitive. In contrast, others, like the Conibo, are more peaceful. Yet each culture requires of the shaman a dedication and willingness to explore the unknown and accept a different sense of reality from that experienced in ordinary life. Whether they call them tsentsak or another name, spirit helpers figure prominently in shamanic work.

After acquiring tsentsak, they must be nurtured and nourished. The shaman feeds his spirit helpers with tobacco water. He may have hundreds of spirits who help with healing. They also prevent malevolent tsntsak sent from a "bewitcher" to infect the shaman.

Chapter 2, The Shamanic Journey: Introduction

Chapter 2, The Shamanic Journey: Introduction Summary and Analysis

A shaman may be distinguished from other medicine men by the ability to enter altered states of consciousness at will and by the one or more spirits that aid in guiding the shaman through a hidden or nonordinary reality. This state is a kind of ecstasy through which the soul leaves the body and ascends or descends depending upon the purpose of the journey. In this state, healing occurs by restoring beneficial power or extracting harmful power from the patient. This state is described in more detail by the shamanic scholar Mircea Eliade, whom Harner quotes on the subject.

The shamanic state of consciousness, or SSC, is achieved through a combination of entering a trance state together with learned methods of cosmic geography and nonordinary reality. A shaman enters the SSC for a serious, specific purpose. It is not play or a trivial act. For example, the shaman may enter a shamanic state of consciousness in order to bring back messages to give to a patient in ordinary reality. Entry into the SSC may also be for purposes of healing illnesses, retrieving power animals or exploration.

In order to achieve the most profound visions in the SSC, a shaman works in darkness or with eyes partially covered. Drums, rattles, and singing are used to enter the SSC. Cultures from Jivaro to Australian aborigine report seeing the shaman give off light in a halo effect when in the SSC. This light can only be perceived by another shaman, normally under the influence of ayahuasca or a similar hallucinogen.

The shamanic journey is one of the most important tasks a shaman has. The basic journey is to the Lowerworld through a special hole or tunnel that exists in ordinary reality as well as in extraordinary or nonordinary reality. The hole, often a natural feature, can be a spring, a cave, an animal hole, a hollow tree, or a stump. The Conibo use a giant catahua tree root system to access the Lowerworld. The system of accessing the Lowerworld through special holes and tunnels is followed by Eskimos, Australians, and by North American Indians, from Zunis to Bella Coolas to Hopis. Harner speculates that the mandala, so prevalent in shamanic art, may stand for openings to the sky or to the Lowerworld. Most shamans express incredible joy and awe at the beauty they see in the SSC. Harner describes it as a "new, and yet familiarly ancient universe". He is privy to information about his own life and death, as well as miraculous healing for himself and for others.

While females may be shamans, it is most commonly the males in these cultures who practice shamanistic rituals. Therefore, Harner primarily refers to the shaman as "he" throughout the text. He does not elaborate on the reasons aside from a general

reference to the primarily patriarchal societies he studies and visits. Readers might question whether this premise holds true within more female dominated tribal cultures, something Harner does not explore in this text. He does, however, refer to some female shamans as examples.

Harner guides the reader through the steps of a first journey by giving step-by-step instructions for an experimental exercise. The aspiring shaman is told to eat lightly four or more hours before the ceremony and to refrain from alcohol. Then the exercise calls for having a friend present to drum, or using tapes of drumming while lying relaxed on the floor without pillows, visualizing an opening in the earth that feels acceptable. The instructions call for periods of lying still while going deeper into an altered state, of more rapid drumming to bring the seeker back to ordinary reality, and four sharp strikes to end the experience. The aspiring shaman is told to bring nothing back on this initial journey and to describe the journey aloud upon re-entering the ordinary state of consciousness, or OSC.

Numerous firsthand accounts of experience by middle class Americans from different backgrounds involve tunnels, many of which are constructed of concentric circles. Other similarities in reports include the first part of the tunnel being vertical ellipses, always moving, and positioned at a slight downward angle of about fifteen degrees. It is not uncommon for individuals to report using caves as portals, to smell or hear while in the SSC, or to morph into some other form. All individuals report remaining aware of the OSC while in the SSC. More similarities exist in the participants' reports about how to get out if they feel boxed in, or what to do if one encounters an impenetrable obstacle, encounters real or mythical animals, or if they find themselves flying. One person reports having brought back a beneficial being, but it was by accident. These accounts underscore Harner's claim of the similarity of shamanic experiences and further convince him of the "truth" of these experiences.

Chapter 3, Shamanism and States of Consciousness

Chapter 3, Shamanism and States of Consciousness Summary and Analysis

Shamanism is the oldest mind-body healing system known to humans. It is estimated to be over twenty to thirty thousand years old. Master shamans focus on the triumvirate of knowledge, power, and healing. The traditional methods and assumptions pervade worldwide and have been preserved in the so-called "primitive" cultures, despite attempts by the Christian church to eradicate shamanism, particularly during the Inquisition.

In all systems, shamans pass through different cosmological planes and report surprisingly similar experiences whether they are Venezuelan Warao, Lakota Sioux or Australian Wiradjeri. To the question of why this similarity exists throughout widespread cultures that have had no direct contact, Harner responds, "because it works". He further postulates that it matures in areas that were devoid of technological innovations because of the need for those people to find ways to cope with survival and health issues. Harner believes these people develop shamanism as a method for using the power of the human mind to address critical issues, but he is careful to label these observations as personal and unsubstantiated in the literature.

Shamans use visions and guardian spirits. Everyone has a guardian spirit, whether recognized or not. Individuals need that protection in order to reach adulthood. The difference is that shamans actively use their guardian spirits. Outside of North America, the spirit goes by different names, such as the Siberian "tutelary spirit", the Australian "assistant totem", or the European "familiar". Shamans also have spirit helpers. These help the shaman engage in divination of the past, present, and future. Shamans practice clairvoyance, move between realities at will, act as a power broker to restore health to the sick, help those who have lost their guardian spirits, and often take on the symptoms of the patient. It is the shaman, not the patient, who takes the drugs. Far from fantasy, these are real experiences. Recognizing and honoring experience is vital to good shamanic practices. Shamans are empiricists. Importantly, they do not challenge the validity of anyone else's authentic first-hand experiences or allow religious or political dogma to taint their explorations. The humility of shamanism lies in the reverence shamans hold for nature and the realization that only a small portion of knowledge will be revealed to them in this lifetime. Harner points to a similarity between shamanism and science in that both are in "awe of complexity" and of nature's magnificence. Both pursue research into the universe's systems and find that causal processes of the universe are hidden.

Shamans' actions are appropriate in both the ordinary reality (OSC) and the shamanic consciousness (SCC). Their rituals rarely involve amnesia and can be deep or light as

the situation requires. Since the work involves moving back and forth between realities, a shaman must remain lightly connected to the material environment. Tools help shamans achieve and maintain the necessary states in which to do their work. Drumming assists the shaman in moving between realities. Research shows that drums have been shown to alter the central nervous system's electrical connections to sensory areas of the brain. Rattles reinforce drumming for a more extensive sonic effect. Rattles also serve the function of regulating the drummer's tempo so that the shaman may get the optimum effect from drumming. While stating that there is no known research on the subject, Harner suggests that songs also amplify the shaman's altered state. These songs tend to be monotonous, but increase in tempo as the shaman enters the SSC.

A shaman's connection with nature is evident throughout all types of rituals. Shamans honor and employ nature in their physical and spiritual work. Harner describes the Lakota practice of "rock-seeing" as an example. In rock-seeing, the shaman will consider a problem while walking in a wild area. He examines the ground as he walks until he finds and picks up two fist-sized stones. He sits with the stones, posing questions, and examining the stone for living creatures in its crevices or features to figure out what the stone has to say. The shaman then turns the stone over and repeats the process, on all sides if possible, before thanking and returning the stone to its place on the earth. Nature is at once the source and manifestation of shamanic learning and experiences. Harner compares the process of rock-seeing to the Rorschach test and to psychoanalytic free association. But unlike those Western techniques, the shaman sees actual animals in the stones, not symbols or representations of animals there. This is an important difference that illustrates the direct links between ordinary and nonordinary reality in shamanic experiences.

Chapter 4, Power Animals

Chapter 4, Power Animals Summary and Analysis

The link between a shaman and animals is a basic tenet of shamanism. Most traditions tell of the mythical past in which animals and humans could talk. Creation myths involve explanations of how species differentiated until only shamans could regularly communicate with animals, and then only in the SSC. For the Australian aborigines, the "dreamtime" embodies a parallel mythological past and present-day ordinary reality that can be accessed by dreams and visions. These myths refer to an animal group rather than an individual animal. In signifying "Coyote" or "Raven" instead of a coyote or a raven, the myths indicate that the shaman's connection with the guardian spirit is with the entire species rather than through a representative individual of that species. The guardian animal aids the shaman in particular ways through special talents associated with that species.

Some variation exists among cultures regarding who gets and keeps a guardian spirit. In some Northwest American tribes, all adults possess the spirits. For some Plains Indian tribes, those who don't have a guardian animal spirit lack power and success in life. Methods for acquiring one also vary. The most famous method is the vision quest, a solo wilderness journey to see one's guardian animal. As in other areas of shamanism, these animal guardians are commonly considered less important for females than for males. The Jivaro journey to the waterfall that Harner experiences is an example of a vision quest. But even among the Jivaro, there are instances in which a guardian spirit can be acquired without a vision quest. Newborn infants are given a light hallucinogen to help them see their guardian. Children, at between ages six and eight, are again given a stronger form of the drug while awaiting their ability to be full vested with their spirits at the waterfall. It is believed that children would not grow up without the protection from their guardian spirits. Jivaro girls are given a less extreme initiation in a forest near their homes. Other tribes such as the Okanagon of Washington State also give their children involuntary introductions to their guardian spirit animals.

Power animals show themselves and their power by speaking or by appearing in an abnormal way, such as terrestrial animals flying or swimming underwater. They may even become human in a magical transformation in order to communicate with the shaman. In this way, the animal becomes the alter ego for the shaman through which he can transform into the guardian spirit form and back into human form. In the Coastal Salish and other North American native traditions, animals that become human are referred to as "the Indian". The Jivaro report animals appearing in human form in visions and dreams. Australian Aruntas often become eagle-hawks in what these shamans call "dreamtime". Scandinavian Laps become wolves, reindeer, bears, and fish.

The transformation of shamans into animals was considered sorcery by many leaders of the Christian church. The Inquisition's persecution of witches and sorcerers did not, however, expunge the knowledge of shamanic transformative methods. Galileo's

colleague, a scientists and alchemist named Giovanni Battista Porta, encapsulates the knowledge of this metamorphosis in his now famous 1562 work, Natural Magick. Porta's reports resemble Castaneda's descriptions of hallucinogenic-induced states in which shamans take on the characteristics of the animal spirits in order to access their power.

Harner repeatedly interjects that not all shamanic experiences involve the use of drugs. Some rely on drumming, singing, chanting, and symbolism to call forth the guardian spirits. In some traditions, non-shamans can participate in these rituals. One example given is the Coastal Salish's practice of wearing of masks while "dancing" their spirit guardians. Harner calls this "Calling the Beasts". Dancing an animal is a powerful way to draw it to the seeker. As an exercise that can be practiced by the reader, Harner gives explicit instructions on how to dance one's animal guardian spirit without the use of drugs. Again in a half-darkened room and with eyes mostly closed, the participant takes a rattle in each hand and shakes it four times in each of the six directions: east, north, west, south, up, and down. Then the seeker or shaman moves as if in a dance with the animal, entering the SSC as the drumming and rattling tempos increase until the animal appears. Animals may be bears or dolphins. No mythical animals exist in the SSC. This ritual is about the almost universal connection of humans with wild animals. It does not matter if the animal is fierce or gentle. Guardians are sources of power and bring no harm to the possessor.

Dancing is one way to keep one's animal nearby; it exercises and honors the animal because it enjoys material form. Another way to nurture one's animal is to take it to wilderness areas for exercise. Lacking such an area, Harner suggests a public park. He gives the example of a Westerner who works in a bookstore during the week but exercises his cougar in a wilderness area on Sunday. However, an animal does not stay forever even with care, so an individual has many guardian animals during a lifetime.

Another important aspect is the differentiation of the nagual from the tonal animal. Harner attributes confusion on this matter to a combination of faulty scholarship and a merging of Mexican and Guatemalan cosmologies. A tonal animal is linked to a person's fate in ordinary reality, while the nagual animal is a guardian in the SSC.

Shamans understand that people may have guardian spirits and not consciously know it. Just a children sometimes forget their spirits in native cultures, so Westerners are deemed ignorant of their sources of power. If a person is healthy, prosperous, and in good health, a shaman knows that person possesses a guardian spirit. They view is as tragic that Westerners are ignorant and do not acknowledge this fact. Further, shamans know that the lethargic, sick, and dispirited adult can be made whole by regaining that spirit, a fact that they regret Westerners do not understand.

Chapter 5, The Journey to Restore Power

Chapter 5, The Journey to Restore Power Summary and Analysis

Harner writes that power helps one resist or dispel disease and even makes it difficult for one to be untruthful. Health depends upon power and power on having a power animal. Therefore, restoring power depends upon restoring or acquiring a power animal. It is important to be able to see into a person to know if that individual is missing a guardian animal spirit. For the Jivaro, guardian spirits reside primarily in the chest. Jivaro see inverted rainbows in the chest of one possessing a guardian, so individuals without an inverted rainbow require that a shaman retrieve their animal or get them a new one in order to restore their power. Most cultures believe that a shaman can have two guardian animals at any one time. A shaman can descend into the Lowerworld to retrieve a lost power animal, or a new power animal can be acquired. Other journeys such as explorations allow shamans to gain spirit helpers. These journeys are guided by the shaman's guardian spirit and go to places of particular types of spirits that aid in the work the shaman is trying to accomplish. Journeys are sometimes conducted by boat, either by a single shaman as in the Conibo tribe, or with many shamans as with the Coastal Salish tradition.

Prior to attempting to retrieve a power animal, a power song is needed. Getting a power song requires going to a remote wilderness and wandering until an animal's presence is felt. This may not be the animal previously danced. Melodies and songs emerge. A California Pomo Indian, the late Essie Parrish, tells of acquiring her first song in a dream as a child. A vision of a man up above singing the song was part of the dream. When she awakened, the song was in her voice box and it came out of her of its own will. It then became her power song. Often the songs are related to landscape features. Regardless of how it is acquired, a shaman can use a power song to retrieve a power animal for a patient to restore the patient's power and therefore health.

Harner offers an exercise to ready readers to journey to restore power. This exercise is to be done with a partner. He again begins with honoring the six directions. Using the drum beat as the spiritual canoe within which to travel, the shaman enters the SSC and begins decent through the tunnel. Usually the shaman lies down as it is difficult to stand when in deep SSC. Those on such a journey are told to "avoid any ominously voracious non-mammals you may encounter in your journey", especially spiders, swarming insects, fanged serpents, fanged reptiles, and fish with teeth. If one cannot avoid them, they are cautioned to return up the tunnel and try another time. Harner offers drawings of one shaman's representations of aspects of the Tunnel to Lowerworld, showing concentric circles with crystals and humans falling through from the ground into a hole. Once the shaman emerges from the tunnel into the Lowerworld, a power animal will be

recognized by seeing it four times from different angles or aspects. It can be a normal animal with or without teeth, a serpent or fish without teeth, but never an insect. The animal's form can be living, stone, wood, or some other substance, and it will show if it is ready to accompany the seeker. After four showings, the seeker is to clasp it to the chest with one hand and rattle fast with the other hand to facilitate the return back up the tunnel. Sometimes the shaman will lose the animal and can suffer blackouts from unsuccessful attempts. When successful in retrieving the power animal, the shaman places it upon the patient's chest through cupped hands and blows the spirit into the patient through the chest and through the fontanelle, or soft spot in the back of the head. The shaman further tells the patient what the animal is, and helps to dance it. This beginning exercise gives Westerners the feel of a deep shamanistic state of consciousness for the benefit of someone else as well as for the seeker. It points out some of the dangers, and provides a framework for deeper shamanic study.

Synchronicity is an often-reported element of many successful guardian spirit journeys. When an animal is returned, it is often one with which the patient already has an unusual connection. In such instances, the event is considered to be a synchronicity. Often the connection is one from childhood. Another element signaling synchronicity is if the patient expresses details of the shaman's journey without their having discussed those details. Positive synchronicities signal effects beyond normal probability and are signs of doing the work correctly. This may include what is commonly considered as good luck, such as patients seeing their power animals as they are being blown into them. Harner writes that synchronicities are reported surprisingly frequently and in different cultures, again attesting to the validity of this type of shamanic practice. He compares the frequency of positive synchronicities to radio directional signals. As in other comparisons Harner makes, this one alludes to the electrical components of shamanic thought and experience.

Chapter 6, Power Practices

Chapter 6, Power Practices Summary and Analysis

Power practices frequently involve consulting with one's power animal. The identities of power animals may be strictly hidden from others, as in the Jivaro tradition, or shared as they are in the traditions of North American Plains tribes. Harner leaves the decision of secrecy or disclosure up to the individual person and makes no judgment on the matter.

In either case, the shaman travels to consult with his animal or animals in order to access the guardian's power for help with a personal problem or a non-ordinary cause of an illness. This consultation is referred to by anthropologists as a divination. In order to retain the power from a guardian spirit, the shaman must seek out the guardian and allow it to enter the shaman at least every two weeks, according to Jivaro and other traditions. Otherwise the animal's power dissipates and the shaman's effectiveness weakens. The guardian moves around at will and can leave or stay of its own accord. It is important that when a shaman feels dis-spirited he does not attempt to do any healing. At such times his guardian is not present, and the shaman is open to attack as well as operating with diminished capacity as a healer. He suggests that one not wait until they are in need of a power animal to acquire one. Synchronicities begin to occur simply through the act of journeying to the Lowerworld and finding a power animal. Under these circumstances, it is not required that the seeker ask the animal anything.

When the shaman encounters the guardian spirit animal, the animal often answers the shaman's question through moving its body in an unusual way, or by leading the shaman on a journey of experiences that answer the question. Since consulting a power animal requires learning new communication techniques, it is recommended that novices begin by asking simple "yes" or "no" questions before becoming involved in complicated dialogues. Harner also advises that seekers write down the answers as soon as possible. One of the purposes for this journey is often to see into future events or events that have happen at a distance. Harner recounts examples from a number of individuals' experiences, for which in most cases he does not know the outcome in ordinary reality. This is one of the least substantiated parts of Harner's thesis; his examples and analyses are less convincing than other areas of his research and scholarship. Much of the remaining portions of this chapter involve further explanations and exercises related to the relationship between shaman and guardian spirit.

Why is having a power animal important? People feel better when they have power. Harner suggests that it is important to nurture one's power animal by dancing it weekly. A restless power animal may develop an increasingly weak connection with a person. By dancing it regularly, the power of the animal is slowly awakened and shock is avoided. A shocked animal may leave the person permanently, requiring a replacement animal to "lock in" lingering power from the animal that left. A tenuous connection with a power animal leaves a person open to sudden illness and disease. Power animals become restless over time and will travel great distances at night while the person

sleeps. For this reason, many tribes believe it is critical to awaken a person slowly so the animal has a chance to return and protect the individual in OSC. Harner suggests that the phrase "being frightened to death" may originate from this aspect of early European shamanism. Some believe shamans should not be awakened at all. Even the violent Jivaro believe in awakening a person gently, often to soft flute music. Alarm clocks are considered quite unhealthy.

One vehicle for receiving power and information is through certain dreams known as "big dreams". These, in contrast to ordinary dreams, are either recurring or are extremely vivid. They come from one's guardian spirit, whether or not the animal actually appears in the dream. These dreams are literal, not symbolic. A good big dream is something that the guardian wants you to experience. The experience may be one for ordinary reality or one to undertake within the SSC. Negative big dreams carry important messages. It is recommended that a person not ignore these dreams. Enactments may lighten the effects of negative big dreams on ordinary reality. These enactments can be either real or symbolic, but should be undertaken as soon as possible to counteract any negative occurrences in ordinary reality.

Since healing is a prime purpose for the type of shamanism dealt with in this book, the ability to restore power to someone from a distance is an important talent. It takes care and experience. Great concentration and expert sight is required in order to visualize the person while visiting the Lowerworld on their behalf to retrieve a power animal and sending it to them. The shaman must enjoin his own power animal to assist in the task while at the same time be sending some power to the patient's animal to "activate it into dancing" until the animal is dancing around the patient. Only then can the shaman send power from his animal to the patient's animal. It is very important that the shaman refrain from sending power directly to the patient because it will exhaust the shaman's energy. The animals serve as conduits for the power from shaman to patient. No other animal except the guardian can perform this task for the shaman.

Part of power practice involves the use of power objects. These are almost always objects found in nature. Significant power objects are kept in a shaman's medicine bundle, which is usually constructed of wild animal skins. When power objects no longer move a person emotionally or bring on a powerful memory, they are to be returned to nature. Power objects aid a shaman in reconnecting with power, so they must hold a special meaning for the shaman in order to be useful.

Quartz crystals are one type of power objects often found in a shaman's medicine bundle. They are considered to be the most powerful objects for tribes ranging from the Jivaro in Ecuador to tribes in Australia. These "king rocks" have been used for thousands of years. Harner substantiates this claim by pointing to quartz crystals from excavated burial sites that date to over eight thousand years ago. One reason that quartz is special is that it appears the same to a shaman in ordinary reality and shamanic reality. This means that for shamans, its material matter and its spiritual matter are the same. It is associated with the sky, celestial bodies, and light. These crystals are used in special ritual ceremonies, put in rattles, and pressed into the skin for healing light. They are kept concealed and away from the sun's rays. According to

some traditions, these important objects are to be cleansed in an ocean or spring and put in the sun for eight days over the solstice for recharging. Another method is to recharge the crystal by hitting it on a rock protruding from the ocean or spring, but this can cause a shaman to lose power if the crystal cracks or shatters. Therefore, cleansing the crystal is a serious matter.

In contrast to the earlier instance of subjective discussion of communicating with a power animal, the use of quartz and the case made for its use in spiritual mind-body work is well documented and substantiated. The connection to light and the sun is extremely significant. In showing why quartz crystals among transparent materials are so important, Harner discusses the early use of these crystals in radio transmitters and in computers and clocks due to the electronic properties of quartz. Shamans chose well in selecting this material to serve as the transmitter of energy for health. Or perhaps modern man chose well in selecting a material that transfers energy for technology. Either way, it is a great synchronicity. Beyond the shamanic, scientific, and technological uses, quartz crystals hold a fascination among many cultures for their divination properties. They are the stuff of crystal balls, Australian crystal gazing to see visions of the past, present, and future, and to retrieve images of particular people for Northwest Coastal tribes. They are also employed by shamans for long distance healing and can function as spirit helpers.

Harner's exercise for this chapter is a version of the Bone Game, also known as the stick game, or the hand game. This game hones skills in seeing and is popular among western North American Indian tribes. Whether simple or elaborate, the game involves a significant wager and a cessation of human words, although sounds and animal aspects are used for communication. The goal is to pit the hiding power against the seeing power with agreed-upon consequences that are enforced by a referee. The hider is successful if the object remains shielded from detection, while the see-er wins if they are able to detect the location of hidden objects. Practice such as the bone game is considered important in attracting and retaining power.

Chapter 7, Extracting Harmful Intrusions

Chapter 7, Extracting Harmful Intrusions Summary and Analysis

One of the major purposes for shamanic healing is extracting harmful intrusions. Intrusions are similar to Western medicine's infections. Seeing the two approaches as symbiotic rather than conflicting, Harner suggests that treatment should be both ordinary and nonordinary. These intrusions most often occur in areas of dense population where "radiated hostility" harms people. People need to be shielded from these intrusions as well as have them extracted when they enter a person. Again, the parallels with Western medical inoculations and treatment are apparent. The author recommends only serious shamans who have mastered the shamanic journey and guardian work undertake the extraction of intrusions.

Wild, undomesticated plants acts as spirit helpers in extracting intrusions. Normally only shamans possess these plants. The physical ritual involves selecting specimens; first visiting with them until the spiritual and ordinary forms agree, and then taking part of the plant, apologizing to it in advance. Two pieces of that plant are tied together and put in the medicine bundle. They are then taken into the SSC and to the Lowerworld where they are paired with pieces retrieved from the Lowerworld. The shaman visits with the two or more pieces retrieved from the SSC until they morph into non-plant forms, at which point the shaman eats the entirety of each piece. It is recommended that a shaman obtain at least twelve plants that represent helpers. These might include Spider, Bee, Snake, Yellow Jacket, and Hornet. These beings have power too, but it is evil power. By taking these into his body, the shaman attracts the evil spirits away from the patient.

During this process, the shaman works in two realities. The intrusive power he seeks to extract has the appearance of the particular creatures, which is the hidden nature of a particular plant. Putting pieces of the physical plane in the mouth to expel in ordinary reality is appropriate after extracting the spirit from the shamanic reality. In this way, the shaman links the OSC and the SSC to effect healing in both realities. Harner notes that Westerners seem to do better without the physical manifestations, whereas indigenous people find that the manifestation in ordinary reality reinforces spiritual purgation. Instead of, or in addition to these plants as spirit helpers, a shaman uses other spirit helpers and songs. As the shaman descends into the tunnel, he sees a voracious insect, or a fanged serpent, or a fish with teeth. This is the power with which the shaman must deal. If he possesses two spirit helpers that are identical to the intruder, he sucks it out after locating the evil power with his hand by passing his hand over the patient until he detects the location of the intruder. After the drumming ceases, the shaman immediately expels the intruder into a basket of sand or water, taking care not to ingest the evil spirit. It usually takes a series of sucking events followed by dry vomiting to effect the healing. This description shows how the shaman entwines the two

realities in healing practice. It is the basis of the Essie Parrish film, Sucking Doctor. Essie could hear as well as see intruders.

Other specific methods of extracting intrusions include tobacco traps and becoming the patient. The first method, used by Lakota Sioux, is to encircle a patient with tobacco, which draws the spirit. This is consistent with the Jivaro method of luring spirits with tobacco water. Then the bundles of tobacco are unrolled over a tree, far from humans whom they might harm. Harner has an adaptation of this method which he uses for group work. Each person can put pain into an individual bag of tobacco. When the shaman removes the bags and takes them for disposal, he must be careful not to take in the illness-inducing spirits. A related technique is found in the Coastal Salish Indian method of becoming the patient. This involves the shaman and patient exchanging clothing to fool the spirit after learning all possible about the illness and the patient. They dance together in the wilderness and the shaman takes on the patient's pain, but expels it into the wilderness instead of becoming ill. Ritual power songs and dances accompany this work until the patient is relieved of symptoms. Harner draws an analogy with Western psychoanalysis in terms of transference, but the shamanic process is much shorter in duration. Harner suggests that this may be an example of how shamanic healing foreshadows traditional Western medicine. He sees the two forms of healing as complimentary and symbiotic if both are used with reverence for both form and spirit.

Characters

Harner

Michael Harner is an anthropologist and expert in shamanic cultures. He academically investigates the concepts of shamanism, and personally immerses himself in shamanic cultures in North America, South America, and Mexico. Through living with the Jivaro Conibo and other tribes, Harner gains first-hand knowledge of practices that are similar among shamans, and nuances that separate shamanic practices. As a scholar practitioner, Harner faithfully reports his academic and practical research findings while making the information accessible to Western audiences.

The ways in which anthropologists explain cultures to other cultures is, for Harner, similar to how shamans interpret non-ordinary reality to those who have not experienced it. Both have educational value and can dispel prejudices. He equates shamanic work with an athlete's altered state of consciousness that contributes to high achievement. He also shows the similarities between shamanism and science.

Harner's work stresses the use of shamanism for healing rather than for sorcery or dark arts. Advocating the use of shamanism to augment rather than replace Western medicine, Harner makes it easier for Westerners to accept shamanism as a valid practice that could aid in alleviating spiritual or physical malaise.

Castaneda

Carlos Castaneda is a writer who introduces Westerners to shamanism and its principles. Castaneda is most famous for his books on the teachings of Don Juan and for his candid accounts of using hallucinogenic substances to reach altered states of consciousness. His contribution is in making a clear differentiation between ordinary reality and "nonordinary" reality. Acting as a bridge between traditional shamanic traditions and Western thought, he describes aspects of the shamanic journey he experiences, including drug-induced altered states, and experiences that are labeled "hallucinogenic" in ordinary reality but "real" in those altered states.

He expands the normal use of the Mexican and Guatemalan term nagual to include not only those shamans who make the transformation between animal and human, but also to those who are capable of the act. Another contribution is Castaneda's linking of nagual experiences with the SSC and tonal ones with ordinary reality. Castaneda shows how these linkages between the realities are made in shamanic practices and how that affects divination in ordinary reality as derived from the Aztec understanding of the concept. Castaneda delves into the darker side of shamanism. Rather than applying most of his work to healing, he more heavily emphasizes sorcery. However, his accounts are used as a basis for anthropological studies, including Harner's, into shamanism.

Conibo Indians

The Conibo are peaceful Peruvian Amazonians with whom Harner experiences SSC using Ayahuasca, seeing the origin of human life through a near-death experience. Through this experience he learns about methods for journeying to the Lowerworld and retrieving spirits.

Jivaro Indians

The Jivaro are an Ecuadorian Andes tribe with whom Harner lives while studying their shamanic traditions. Jivaro tend to be violent and use psychedelics to achieve altered states of consciousness.

Akachy

Akachy is a Jivaro shaman who guides Harner in acquiring spirit helpers, taking him to a remote waterfall in the Peruvian Andes.

Eliade

Eliade is a scholar of shamanism quoted extensively by Harner in this text on matters relating to ecstasy experiences in shamanic experiences. Of particular note is Eliade's documentation of the similarities in methods and beliefs of shamanism in different tribes worldwide.

Neher

Neher is a scientist who discovers that drumming affects the brain's electrical connections. In particular, he finds that drumming affects the sensory areas.

Coastal Salish Indians

Coastal Salish are a collection of Northwest coastal Indians tribes that Harner references frequently in this work for some of their special shamanic traditions, including the "spirit boat" used to take shamans to the Lowerworld to retrieve a patient's lost animal guardian spirit.

Parrish

Essie Parrish is a North American Indian shaman who uses "sucking" techniques in healing rituals. She hears as well as sees power intrusions; she reports hearing a disease that sounds like insects. She has a vision that she will share her knowledge of

shamanic methods with non-Indians and made the film "Sucking Doctor". She is also known for integrating Christian concepts into traditional shamanic work.

Simonton

Dr. Carl Simonton is a physician who unknowingly uses shamanic methods in support of chemotherapy. He achieves good results in alleviating pain through visualization, employing an inner guide who helps his patients get well by drawing their pain from the body. He also uses the technique to help patients visualize training white blood cell to ingest cancer cells.

Objects/Places

Power Animals

Power animals are Native North American guardian spirits. Often a power animal is a basic power source used to connect the shaman with nonordinary powers.

Ayahuasca

Sometimes called the "soul vine," ayahuasca is a plant yielding a hallucinogen that aids in shamanic visions. It is used by various tribes, including the Conibo.

Maikua

Maikua is a species of datura used for visions by tribes such as the Jivaro. It is hallucinogenic.

Tsentsak

Tsentsak are magical darts, or spirit helpers, used by the Jivaro to cause and cure illness in daily life. These darts must be swallowed to be effective.

Shamanic Enlightenment

This is the literal and metaphysical ability to lighten the darkness. It may be the ancient meaning of enlightenment. An important component is the power of giving off light.

Spirit Helpers

Spirit helpers are minor powers compared to guardian spirits. They normally have specialized functions and bring strength of power in numbers. Therefore, it is advised that a shaman acquire a large number of spirit helpers.

Lowerworld

The Lowerworld is an area visited by shamans that lies beneath the earth in nonordinary reality. A shaman may visit the Lowerworld for purposes like having conversations with or retrieving power animals, or to locate and bring back the soul of a comatose person.

Power Song

A power song is used by shamans to wake the guardians and helpers. It is found by going alone to a wild place and seeking one's power song.

Dancing the Guardian Spirit

This act of dancing summons the animal that is one's guardian spirit. It is sometimes performed with a mask and with movements and sounds of the animal one is seeking.

Nagual

A nagual is a guardian spirit in Mexico or Guatemala. The term is derived from the Aztec tradition.

Vision Quest

Shamans take a vision quest to obtain their guardian spirits. This quest is a solitary vigil in the wilderness.

Ordinary State of Consciousness (OSC)

The ordinary state of consciousness is the normal waking state of humans.

Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC)

The shamanic state of consciousness is an ecstatic altered state of consciousness through which a shaman can access an alternate reality.

Themes

Making Shamanism Accessible to Westerners

Harner clearly has as a priority the goal of making shamanism accessible to Westerners. Many of his sources are individuals who also have that goal, including Castaneda and Eliade. Even if these sources choose to employ shamanism for different purposes than Harner does, these sources also strive to dispel the mysteries that shroud shamanism. Harner clearly believes in the benefits of shamanism for all people. Throughout the book, he builds the case for using shamanic techniques in Western cultures.

Showing similarities among the various worldwide shamanic practices is one way in which Harner supports his case. This logical appeal to Western scientific processes of discerning truth by comparing multiple occurring incidences is presented in an attempt to show that shamanism and Western thought are compatible.

Another method Harner uses to make shamanism acceptable and accessible to those who are in Western philosophical traditions is scholarly research. He is a member of the Graduate Faculty of the New School in New York and holds other academic titles. In this book, Harner carefully substantiates claims with references to scholarly texts that appear in his substantial bibliography. Building claims upon prior substantiated claims, he draws not only from anthropological and ethnographic studies, but also references scientific works about the brain, psychology, and electricity to further bridge the gap between the body-mind work of shamans and modern scientific knowledge and methods.

He also adds credibility to his claims for Westerners by faithfully describing his personal experiences, altering between reports as the participant, as in his accounts of visions using ayahuasca, and as an observer in his recounting of spirit boat ceremonies among the Coastal Salish tribes. In analyzing both types of data obtained as a participant observer, he carefully distinguishes between conclusions that can be substantiated by academic scientific methods and those which are subjective. This differentiation makes his thesis more acceptable to the Western mind. The reader can choose to dismiss or discount subjective conclusions without rejecting the substantiated data with the result that even the skeptic can remain engaged with his work.

Although stating that most Westerners will never have the chance to study with a shaman, Harner gives a guide to aids, props, and training. Appendix A is devoted to these issues. Drums, rattles, recordings, and classes can be accessed by students of shamanism at all levels, whether or not they have direct access to a shaman.

Acquiring and Maintaining Personal Power

One of the primary aspects of shamanism is the acquisition, maintenance, and transference of power. Acquiring power requires discipline, discomfort, and a willingness to suspend belief in only what one can perceive using the normal senses. Sometimes it requires the use of mind-altering drugs, stressful conditions that challenge the precepts of normal reality, or solitude.

The main source of help in acquiring power is one's guardian spirit or power animal. Understanding the hierarchy of helpers and specific methods to acquire and keep those helpers is of the utmost importance in becoming a working shaman. For example, only one's guardian can transmit power to another person's power animal. Yet certain helpers that are not one's guardian can be useful in addressing specific issues and numbers of these additional helpers should be obtained by the shaman. Certain rituals such as honoring the six directions precede most shamanic work. These are not optional as alterations disrupt the natural order of the spirit world and the human communication with it.

Harner stresses that even after power is obtained it can be lost though stress, trauma, or neglect. Any of these can cause illness. Since power is a function of one's guardian or power animal, reductions or losses in power require that the individual or someone like a shaman acting on behalf of the individual descend to the Lowerworld to retrieve one's power animal or find a new one. These guardians will leave a person for a variety of reasons, including stress or boredom. Keeping the power animal happy requires dancing it regularly and focusing on the aspects of the animal in real and spiritual ways. Throughout the book, Harner shows how losing power contributes to illness and how courting and keeping power gives the shaman, among all people, the ability to heal others. Recounting first-hand accounts from a number of people in different parts of the world, he points to this universal need to maintain power. Weakness and lack of success or poor luck are ordinary reality manifestations of failing to maintain power. Leaders know how to attract and keep the right kinds of power at precisely the right times. Games such as the Bone Game are played to hone the skills of keeping power.

Keeping power requires risk. One must be willing to try new things to court the right guardians. While the basics of dancing an animal, for example, remain the same, different animals require different movement or vocalizations in order to manifest for the shaman. It may push the physical and mental comfort zones of a shaman to maintain certain guardians that are essential for their work. Remaining appropriate in both OSC and SSC is required. This seeming dichotomy can be challenging for Westerners, a fact that

Harner does not lose sight of throughout the text.

Shamanism in Healing Illnesses in Others

As a supplement to Western medicine, shamanism contributes a direct way to access the body-mind connection for healing. A shaman is a type of medicine man who is a keeper of healing technique involving altered states of consciousness, self-sacrifice, and an ability to move at will between types of conscious states. Not all medicine men are shamans.

The special gift of shamans in healing is that they maintain awareness and abilities simultaneously in ordinary and in nonordinary reality. Therefore, they can effect healing in both realities and reinforce the efforts in one plane by those on the other plane. Harner focuses throughout the book on shamanism's role in healing, building the case that shamanic methods may foreshadow modern medical techniques. The electric property of quartz crystals is one example. Quartz conducts electricity in ordinary reality and it conducts spiritual movement and transference in the SSC. Evidence of this is that its properties remain the same for a shaman, regardless of the state in which he uses the quartz.

Another example is in obtaining the negative spirits through plants that embody an illness. Harner's explanations of the requirements that these plants contain the exact essence of an intruder is analogous to the chemical principle that like dissolves like, and that it takes a form of a pathogen or cause of an illness as an antidote to disease.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of this work is that of a participant observer. In anthropology and other social sciences, this involves a person making formal and informal observations of a group's culture and workings while also participating in the group and the activities being observed. Participant observation is a respected qualitative method for engaging in anthropological and other human dimensions research. In most scholarly studies, the findings from the participant observation are placed within the scholarly literature of the discipline. Harner states that this is his perspective when he describes the book as a combination of his review of scholarly works on shamanism and his personal observations obtained from his time living with and visiting tribes in North and South America.

Harner's credibility is reinforced by his academic status, transparency of methods, and his references to the accepted works of others. The reader is led to accept his expert status through his use of examples from a variety of disciplines, and his refutations of specific logical tenants held by other philosophers across different time periods. Yet Harner goes beyond standard ethnographical methods by reporting the intensely personal aspects of his own shamanic journeys and explorations. By leaving in experiences he cannot explain, he opens himself to academic criticism. The tradeoff is that the unexplained experiences show the mystery and humanity inherent in his subject matter.

Harner repeats his themes throughout the book, building each chapter by more fully explaining the process from general shamanic states to more specific purposes. Beginning from explaining how to acquire and use power animals, he moves through restoring power to others and finally culminates his work through applying shamanistic techniques to the healing of others. His arguments are developed logically and sequentially. By building a case for universal applicability and similarity of various shamanic traditions, he appeals to deductive reasoning processes by applying general principles to the specific instances. When he argues from the basis of his observations, he is employing inductive reasoning, which is his primary basis for argument. By expressing his inductive arguments deductively, Harner is using a technique designed to expand the strength of his perspective as an observer.

Tone

Harner uses third person accounts for an objective and academic distance when substantiating points by references to other scholarship. He takes on the role of a teacher in giving explicit instructions on how to perform a shamanic journey and in his cautionary tone about attempting to dispel and intruder without advanced shaman training. He shifts to first person stories when describing his personal experiences.

While adhering to a certain amount of objectivity, it is apparent that Harner is obviously a proponent of the value of shamanism. This position infiltrates the work and changes the tone from a more objective academic ethnographic study to a passionate belief and attempt to engage others in that belief. At times this leads to weaker positions, such as chapter six's discussion of power practices. Here Harner's subjectivity becomes more transparent and weakens the argument from a Western, objective point of view.

His repeated changes from impersonal to more intimate communications help to bridge the gap between his goals of presenting both scholarly work and personal experience. The quotations from shamans and non-shamans alike about their experiences help the uninitiated to glimpse inside the processes of shamanic explorations. He appreciates the work of others who have tried to make shamanism accessible. In instances in which those authors rely on methods like drugs, Harner is careful to give alternative pathways while in no way indicting those who use hallucinogenic substances. He even describes in a positive way his own drug-induced experiences.

Harner's suspension of judgment about drugs, keeping one's power animal secret, and other specific rules or premises of particular practices is believable and adds to the potential for a wider acceptance of his work. Neither accusing nor accepting, he chooses to leave much to the reader while remaining clear that there are issues, like honoring nature, that are non-negotiable if one is to follow the shamanic path.

Structure

This work is comprised of seven sequential chapters, an afterword, and two appendices. Chapters are of approximately the same length, about twenty-five pages long. The consecutively numbered chapters logically progress from simple discovery of shamanism as a practice through description, key elements peppered with exercises to try, and ending with how shamanism can be used by advanced practitioners to heal illnesses. Each chapter builds on previous information but is complete in its treatment of the particular issue addressed within it. The final chapter, therefore, is an in-depth treatment of extracting harmful intrusions, not a summation or completion of the entire text.

Endnotes are used rather than footnotes to further explain or illuminate Harner's points. However, more often these endnotes point to specific pages of works cited in support of his point. In this way, he maintains the academic rigor of using citations without interrupting the flow for the more casual reader by inserted citations and extensive footnotes.

The Afterword brings the book to a logical conclusion. In it, Harner reiterates the lack of conflict between shamanism and traditional medicine. Further, he lets the reader know that while the world is more accepting of these practices than in times past, Western practitioners of shamanism are not likely to receive full societal acceptance. In keeping with his general theme of helping Westerners access shamanism, he gives advice about the value of developing support systems for learning and practicing shamanism.

Reminding readers that, in the new ways of thinking, there is no difference between helping one's self and helping others, he gently reminds readers that if they begin this path their own cosmology will change.

Appendix A is devoted to helping the reader obtain aids needed to pursue the work. This includes drums, rattles, access to societies for shamanic studies, and other tools. Harner offers logical alternatives to the highest-quality recommended products and suggests experimentation in finding the most useful tools for each practitioner. Appendix B is a description of the Hand Game used by the Flathead Indians. Similar to the Bone Game, the Hand Game is here described in much greater detail, such that any aspiring reader can try the game with a group of people to get a sense of the process and value of honing shamanic seeing and hiding skills.

Throughout the book, Harner interweaves his themes of accessibility to Westerners, finding and retaining power, and healing. In each chapter, information from previous chapters is used as groundwork for learning new methods and deepening the reader's understanding. For example, it is necessary to have a full understanding of power animals before one can fully appreciate the chapter on restoring power, which requires one to go in search of those guardian spirits. Cookbook-like descriptions of techniques given as exercises similarly build on exercises offered earlier in the text.

Overall, the author's points are logically developed. Yet there is a sense of mystery and an honor given to the unexplainable. Harner does not attempt to over-justify or explain those points. Using the ethnographic method of letting others tell the story is often the most potent way to make his point. He uses this technique liberally. Each chapter contains first-hand accounts of others as well as poems and songs others use in journeys and quests.

In the end, Harner offers no apologies for his promotion of shamanism. He allows his work to stand on its own merits while offering proper attribution to both scholars and practitioners who have come before him.

Quotes

"Caring and curing go hand in hand." Introduction, p. xiv

"If you see something frightening, you must not flee. You must run up and touch it." Chap. 1, p. 19

"One of the remarkable things about shamanic assumptions is that they are very similar in widely separated and remote parts of the planet, including such regions as aboriginal Australia, native North and South America, Siberia and central Asia, eastern and northernmost Europe, and southern Africa." Chap. 3, p. 52

"A shaman may be called up to help someone who is dis-spirited, that is, who has lost his personal guardian spirit or even his soul." Chap. 3, p. 56

"'Nagual' refers to both a guardian animal spirit and to the shaman who changes into that power animal." Chap. 4, p. 80

"The theory to be developed in the following pages stands directly opposed to all attempts to operate with the ideas of inductive logic. It might be described as the theory of the deductive method of testing, or as the view that a hypothesis can only be empirically tested - and only after it has been advanced." Chap. 1, pp. 6-7

"In shamanism it can truly be said that you dance to raise our spirits." Chap. 4, p. 85

"It is a spirit to be exercised, not exorcised." Chap. 4, p. 88

"From a shamanic point of view, illnesses usually are power intrusions. They are not natural to the body, but are brought in." Chap. 5, p. 89

"Do not strain yourself to find the animal. If it is going to make itself available to you to take back for your partner, it will do so." Chap. 5, p. 104

"If I do not lead you to see (the spirits), how could you make magic for the insane?. . .You must be shown all the ways of diseases." Chap. 5, p.120

"In modern physics the quartz crystal is also involved in the manipulation of power. Its remarkable electronic properties early made it a basic component in radio transmitters and receivers (remember the crystal set?)." Chap. 6, p. 141

"It is hard to explain, but the sight of one of these creatures in the Tunnel involves a complete certainty by the shaman that it is eating away or destroying a portion of the patient's body." Chap. 7, p. 152

"Particularly exciting, and implicitly supportive of the shamanic approach to health and healing, is the new medical evidence that in an altered state of consciousness the mind may be able to will the body's immune system into action through the hypothalamus." Afterword, p. 175

"The Simontons found that they could train their patients to visualize the sending of their white blood cells to ingest the cancerous cells and expel them from the body much as a shaman visualizes and commands his spirit helpers to suck up and remove harmful power intrusions from the body of his patient." Afterword, p. 177

Topics for Discussion

Discuss ordinary states of consciousness (OSC) and shamanic states of consciousness (SSC). Does Harner make a convincing case for their interrelationship? Does his case break down at any points and become less convincing?

Under what conditions should a journey to the SSC be attempted? What are the dangers to a shaman of altered states of consciousness?

Are the results heightened or diminished under the influence of hallucinogenic substances? Can as deep a state be obtained without them?

Discuss Harner's contention that Westerners do better without the ordinary reality manifestation of sucking out an illness. Why do you think this might be so, or why do you disagree with Harner?

Why does Harner concentrate on journeys to the Lowerworld instead of journeys skyward in this book?

Explain why Harner emphasizes the worldwide similarities of shamanic experiences. Does that similarity make the experiences and his reports more credible? What might make his arguments even stronger?

Discuss the values and pitfalls of the concept of simplicity as used by Popper and under the argument made by conventionalists.

What are the benefits of taking shamanic journeys with the aid of others as drummers or rattlers? Are there times in which a journey is best taken alone? When might that be?

If one undertakes a journey to retrieve their power animal and is uncomfortable with the animal's identity, what steps might the seeker take? Is the goal to be comfortable with the animal, to restore equilibrium, to confront uncomfortable aspects of one's self, or something else?

What is the role of community in shamanic practice? How can the power of community support be accessed in a society that largely views the practice as pagan and therefore suspect? What is the most productive way to integrate one's shamanic quest within the norms of Western society?

Discuss using shamanism for healing. What are the properties that make it work? How can a shaman increase the likelihood that he or she can help the condition of a patient in ordinary reality?