

## SHAMANISM: PHENOMENOLOGY OF A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

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The study of the Shamanistic State of Consciousness (SSC) is the focus of much current psychological interest. Harner (1980, 1988a) defines the SSC as a mental condition distinct from the Ordinary State of Consciousness (OSC) which is exclusively focused on external events and experiences. The SSC is synonymous with visualizing or imaging; it is akin to the "lucid" or "waking-dream," a dream in which a person knows that the apparently real world in which he finds himself is actually a dream. It is simultaneous conscious awareness of dream-ego and reality-ego (Watkins, 1976). The SSC is not pathological nor involves a dissociative amnesia. In fact, the person can, to a large extent, exercise conscious control over dream events and dream duration, and the SSC is potentially highly psychotherapeutic (Achterberg, 1985; Noll, 1983, 1985; Peters & Price-Williams, 1980; Tart, 1979; Walsh, 1989a, 1990). In addition to this, shamanism is the first spiritual discipline or path leading to immediate knowledge of the sacred (*gnosis*). As such, it is the root from which other spiritual disciplines have issued. This is why, as will be demonstrated, there are numerous parallels between shamanism and other spiritual disciplines utilizing trance states.

*the  
first, spiritual  
discipline*

The term "trance" comes from the Latin *transitus* (a passage) and *transire* (to pass over), implying a passage to another psychic state. Eliade (1964 [1951]), the great historian of religion, in his book *Shamanism*, indicates that the shaman's trance or "ecstasy" represents a "rupture in plane." From a psychological perspective, this is considered an "alternate" or "altered" state of consciousness (ASe) with qualitatively distinct perceptions of mental functioning, as compared to the

OSC (Ludwig, 1969; Peters & Price-Williams, 1983; Tart, 1975; Zinberg, 1977). For the future shaman, the early experiences of the SSC entail a radical personality transformation, a break in experiential continuity which fundamentally reorganizes the way of being-in-the-world. This is the "calling," the beginning of the shaman's transformative journey, the first to wed transpersonal experiences to a career of compassionate action which is a primary goal of most major spiritual traditions.

*an  
endogenous  
transformation  
process*

The descriptions given by shamans, yogins, meditators, or Western mystics about transpersonal states of mind are equivalent in many ways. The cultural context in which shamanism occurs, its techniques for inducing trance, and the explanations given these experiences are relative. However, this cultural relativity should not obstruct the view of the deep underlying experiential features shamanism has in common with other spiritual disciplines. The basis of these is an *endogenous transformation process* with an identifiable structure that guides the shamans' and other mystics' trances through a psychic death and rebirth.

This is not to say that the SSC and other ASC, or the techniques utilized to induce them, are the same in all traditions. There are numerous induction methods and numerous trance states (Krippner, 1972). Dreams are, of course, distinct from waking-dreams, and these are distinct from psychotic syndromes, all of which are different from *samadhi* and *satori* and other enlightened states of consciousness, which also vary from each other (Fischer, 1972, 1975; Fromm, 1979; Tart, 1969). But there is a demonstrably similar underlying psychotransformational process which is precipitated by traditional spiritual practices that utilize ASC.

It is important to look first at definitions. What is a shaman? Most authors believe that shamanism is a world-wide cultural phenomenon, but this is contingent on how shamanism is defined, specifically as regards what elements the shaman's trance is said to include or exclude and the psychological, cultural and historical basis for making such decisions. Once some of these parameters are understood, a comparison and contrast between the SSC, yoga, and meditative states of consciousness can proceed.

#### CULTURAL HISTORY, DEFINITION, AND DISTRIBUTION OF SHAMANISM

Shamanism is the earliest spiritual practice, dating back 100,000 years or more (Furst, 1972). Humanity's first profes-

sion is said to be the shaman/healer/psychotherapist (Bromberg, 1975; Krippner, 1988; Torrey, 1972) whose duties included other equally important magic-religious responsibilities involving the hunt and realm of the dead. Almost all researchers agree that dominant psychosocial features of shamanism include *control* over the trance and its utilization in ceremonial situations (Eliade, 1964; Halifax, 1979; Peters, 1987; Peters & Price-Williams, Walsh, 1989a, 1989b, 1990). There is disagreement, however, as to whether the SSC includes "possession," mediumship, or other embodiment methods, and as to how, if indeed such experiences are related to the SSE.

Eliade (1964) proposed that the definition of shamanism be limited to one specific technique: ecstasy, a "soul journey" or "magical flight," what Walsh (1990) calls "cosmic traveling." In fact, ecstasy, flight, and shamanism are used interchangeably by these authors and others (Bourguignon, 1973; de'Heusch, 1962; Hultkrantz, (979) to describe a state involving visualization in which the shaman "sees" or has visions of "ascending" and "descending" to other worlds, or "astral projecting" on the earthly plane over long distances. Such typical shamanistic experiences are thought to be analogous to out-of-the-body experiences (Irwin, 198;; Kalweit, 1988).

Those who exclude spirit mediumship from the definition of shamanism *ipso facto* exclude nearly the entire continent of Africa where trance states employed by traditional healers rarely involve soul flight. Mediumistic trances are often unkindly interpreted as "degenerations" of a hypothetically pristine shamanic complex involving a heavenly soul journey to a High God (Eliade, 1964). The changes in this original shamanic complex, especially in North Asia, are attributed to diffusion of embodiment techniques from the South (Lamaism and Indian yoga). Eliade(1964) contends that the North Asian cultural area is the *locus classicus* of shamanism because it represents an archaic set of Old World beliefs regarding soul journey that is culturally continuous in the New World. Anthropologists believe that shamanism, as part of hunting and gathering cultures, spread to the New World during the time glaciers formed a land bridge across the Bering Straits between to 12,000 B.P. (Furst, 1976; LaBarre, 1970).

*definitions  
of  
shamanism*

*Shaman* is a Siberian Tungus term meaning "one who is excited, moved, raised," describing the shaman's shaking during trance (Casanowicz, 1924). It refers to the shaman's body when shaking as being a "placing" for the spirits. Shirokogoroff (1935), the Russian ethnographer, defines the shaman as "master of spirits" because the shaman controls or

"possesses" spirits, even while embodied by them. Etymologically, the word derives from the Vedic, *sram*, meaning "to heat oneself" and *sramana* or "ascetic." In other words, embodiment techniques spread to North Asia, as did the term. Eventually the term was exported to China and Japan, still referring to practitioners who utilize embodiment (see Blacker, 1975; Mironov & Shirokogoroff, 1924).

*embodiment  
distinguished  
from  
possession*

Thus, through curious logic, the Tungus word *shaman* has come to be used by many investigators to apply exclusively to soul journeys in spite of its Tungusic meaning and derivation from a term referring to the practitioners of the embodiment techniques it proposes to exclude. As used in this paper, *embodiment* refers to a controlled and voluntary trance condition, and is distinct from the term *possession* which definitionally may imply that the trancer is a victim of the spirits. Embodiment is very different from demonic possession or multiple personality which are psychopathological, uncontrolled, unwanted, and occur outside of a culturally sanctioned ritual context. Embodiment methods refer to yogic, meditative or other voluntary practices traditionally used for the induction of an ASC involving the interpretation of one's subsequent feelings, thoughts and behavior as the influence of a power not available to the person in the ASC. This power may be conceived of in terms of a deity or spirit (e.g, controlled possession), impersonal power (e.g, *mana*), internal energy (e.g, *chakra*) and more, relative to the cultural context.

Visionary trance is a psychological state, and not on the same level of analysis as possession-trance. Every psyche dreams and potentially hallucinates-it is biological (LaBarre, 1975). Possession is not an ASC *sui generis*; it is a belief regarding ASC and occurs in specific ideological contexts (Bourguignon, 1976). Embodiment is a *wider* concept than voluntary /controlled possession-trance in that it is not restricted to a cultural belief regarding spirits. Furthermore, embodiment often occurs in conjunction with visionary trance. For example, the Azande "witch-doctor" of Central Africa induces trance through "violent ecstatic" dance, reports "visions" and, like other shamans, "extracts objects" from his patients' bodies during his trance. His capacities are said to emanate from a "power inside him." According to the cultural belief, illness does not derive from a spirit but from witchcraft, i.e. from other people. Therefore, combatting illness does not demand manipulation of otherworldly beings (Evans-Pritchard, 1976, pp. 73, 87ft'). In this cultural context, as in others, the onset and duration of the shaman's ceremonial embodiment is controlled.

In the cross-cultural literature, controlled possession-trance is

thought to be psychotherapeutic and analogous to Kris' (1952) "regression in the service of the ego" (Bourguignon, 1965; Peters & Price-Williams, 1980, 1983; Prince, 1980; Yap, 1960). It is therefore called "positive," "voluntary," "mythopoetic," referring to the mastery of sought-after states of consciousness that are part of a sacred tradition and typically involve possession by cultural heroes.

There are many authors who stay closer to the ethnographic literature and recognize that controlled possession is one of the central features of shamanism. LaBarre (1970, p.186) speaks from a cross-cultural perspective about shamanic "ecstatic possession," as does Lewis (1971) and Peters and Price-Williams (1980) who define shamans as ecstasies who employ soul journey and/or embodiment techniques. Firth (1964, 1967), based on his South Pacific work, defines shamanism as controlled mediumship, Underhill (1965) includes controlled possession in her definition of North American Indian shamanism, as does Kakar (1982) from his East Indian research, and Nadel (1965) in Africa.

While some authors suggest that spirit possession trances are related to the rise of planting and a more sedentary life (Bourguignon, 1968; Walsh, 1989a; Winkleman, 1989), there is evidence indicating that *animal embodiment* is among the oldest religious elements in tribal hunting and gathering cultures (Eliade, 1964; LaBarre, 1970). Such embodiment techniques are at least as old as the paleolithic cave paintings of Southern France which depict shamans impersonating animals (e.g. the dancing "sorcerer" of Trois Freres), LaBarre (1970) says these animal-dressed shamans "possess" the spirit and power of the "master of animals" who has control over the hunted species. By embodying this power in ritual, the shaman magically assures the success of the hunt. No matter whether the shaman dons buffalo skins, reindeer antlers, or a bird's mask and takes flight, he *becomes* a spirit through an ". . . intentional identification with the animal whose occult power is invoked" (Campbell, 1983, pp. 93, 239). Further, it is believed that the shaman-as-master-of-animals theme is the center of Old Stone Age Euroasiatic shamanism (Campbell, 1983; LaBarre, 1970).

*animal  
embodiment*

LaBarre (1972) and Wasson (1968) state that the earliest shamans may have utilized hallucinogenic substances to facilitate trance in ritual contexts. This is significant for embodiment in light of the fact that psychedelic plants were often thought to be spiritual entities. Taking them was a sacrament (an "embodiment") realized in an identification with the spirit. Such "Eucharistic" beliefs and practices are common

in Central and South America (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1975), reported in Africa (Fernandez, 1972), and structurally similar themes involving "deophagia" may be worldwide (Jensen, 1963). Sometimes the deity/plant is "killed" before it is consumed and its mythos identified with, and reenacted in ritual, as among the Huichol Indians of Mexico (Myerhoff, 1974). Myerhoff (1974) briefly mentions the thematic analogies to Freud's (1953, 1964) *Totem and Taboo* scenario in which an id alien introject, the "superego," formed in like manner, is seen to be at the origin of religion.

While Freud's theory is historical conjecture, so is any theory as to whether it is embodiment or flight that is aboriginal to shamanism. Both are primordial spiritual phenomena, belonging to no culture in particular but to humanity as a whole. Grof (1976) reports that animal possession and spirit mediumship develop spontaneously in LSD sessions, as do visions of cosmic traveling.

*memory  
and  
awareness  
in  
shamanism*

Significant for the psychological perspective is that both shamanistic embodiment and magical flight involve controlled visualizations, are lucid and non-amnestic. In more than two-thirds of cultures reporting possession in a cross-cultural study on shamanism, there was memory in the OSC for trance experiences (Peters & Price-Williams, 1980). As set forth in "neo-dissociation" theory (Hilgard, 1980), amnesia between different states of consciousness (dissociation) is determined by "set" and "setting" and suggestion, as are many of the other "demand characteristics of ASC (Orne, 1959). Therefore, memory loss is not a necessary feature of embodiment (nor of "demonic possession" or multiple personality for that matter, Ellenberger, 1970; Oesterreich, 1966; Peters, 1988).

Karpo, a Sherpa shaman, says his consciousness remains in his heart when he is embodied. Bhirendra, a Nepalese Tamang shaman, reports visions of spirit familiars and views his body from overhead while possessed. He says he "sees" the spirits that attack his patients. Both shamans are conscious and aware they are embodied at the time the embodiment is taking place; i.e. there is dual awareness, as in lucid dreams (see Laberge, 1985). Bhirendra is embodied and has consciousness of being disembodied at the same time. During my apprenticeship with him (Peters, 1981a, 1981b), he instructed me to "see" my familiar and ancestral spirits, and report to him what I "saw" in my visions when I played the drum and shook (Which he considered indication of possession). These visualization techniques used in Tamang shamanism are similar to Harner's (1980, 1988b) methods. Both are transformational and often spiritual, although the context of cultural beliefs is quite distinct.

In his discussion of visual imagery, Singer (1977) emphasizes that the ongoing "flow" of the "stream of consciousness" is the "baseline" of all trance states. The flow takes the form of more or less vivid mental imagery depending on the degree of mindful attention. Numerous intrusions of visual imagery in everyday life may be ignored, but a controlled shift to an altered state requires a developed capacity for assigning high priority to concentrating on these private ongoing streams of thought. Because of this nearly ubiquitous nature of imagery, it is possible that amnesic possession states are akin to forgotten acted-out dreams.

The shaman's dreamtime of inner space is a transpersonal visual realm in which the shaman has achieved a high degree of mastery. Memory and mastery of visionary trance seem to be crucial definitional elements. It varies from culture to culture as to whether this experience is interpreted as an "in-dwelling" or an "out-going." There are various traditionally cultivated responses to imagery. The yogin, like the Azande shaman, believes in a power or energy within. The yogin visualizes *chakras* (centers of energy) in the body. There are seven visualized in Hindu *Kundalini*, only five in the Tibetan system (Govinda, 1969).

*visual  
imagery  
and  
shamanic  
dreams*

Shamanic waking-dreams and active participation in inner space are analogous to Jung's (1969) "transcendent function." A totally different response to imagery is suggested in Vipassana meditation where involvement is discouraged. When images arise spontaneously, one is to be receptive, nonjudgmental, and mindful of each image, "labeling" it and noticing what happens as it is observed, but remaining unattached to the forms assumed, and then to gently bring attention back to the breath until the process is repeated again (Goldstein & Kornfeld, 1987). The specific state of trance consciousness and many of its experiential and observable manifestations may be distinct from the SSC yet neither advanced meditator nor experienced shaman loses control, and the result of the practice, the mystical experiences and transformations of consciousness described seem analogous in many ways across cultures.

#### SHAMANISM AND YOGA

Shamanism and Buddhist and Hindu Tantric symbolism for trance techniques overlap tremendously. The house, tent, or yurt of tribal shamanic people is considered a replica of the cosmos (equivalence of micro- and macrocosm). Consequently, during rituals, the pillar at the center becomes "cosmicized"

and "world pillars" or "pillars of the sky" connecting earth to sky and heavenly realms. The shaman traverses the center pole ("*axis mundi*") to the heavens and underworlds. The smoke hole at the top is known to some groups as "window of the world" or "orifice of the sky," and the shaman's soul passes through it on flights to the celestial regions (Eliade, 1964).

In Hindu Tantric yoga, the seventh *chakra* is said to be outside the body. It is the plane of transcendence, of the sacred beyond time, space and material existence. Woodroffe (1974) writes about the six *chakras* and "bodiless consciousness." The *kundalini* circled at the base of the spinal column, when awakened, traverses the central column, penetrating the six *chakras* until passing through the *sahasrara chakra* at the fontanelle on top of the head. The experience of arousing the *kundalini* to the crown center is described as yielding to an out-of-the-body experience (Hillman, 1971; Krishna, 1971) similar, as discussed above, to the shaman's flight and other embodiment states of consciousness.

yogin  
and  
shaman  
experience  
the  
transpersonal

Another parallel between shamanic practices and yoga is the so-called "Deity Yoga" of Tibetan Buddhism. Here the yogin first visualizes the Buddha, then becomes one with him, embodying the virtues of compassion and wisdom. After merging, the yogin (like the shaman) moves and acts like the embodied deity (Hopkins, 1974). Yogin and shaman both experience and possess the qualities of the transpersonal,

Walsh (1990) says that the major distinction between Buddhist and shamanic trance is that shamans "see" the deity as being concrete and real whereas the Buddhist understands imagery as ultimately illusory. This should not imply there is nothing to the visualizations, nor that they have no real effects. Trance is the medium for the meditator's control over public or ordinary reality (*samsara*). Beyer (1973, p. 69), in his book. *The Cult of Tara*, says, "The ability to control appearances (mental images) is the affirmation of the practitioner's control over reality itself. The yogin is able to produce real events upon ordinary reality by the projection of a mental event. . . . Divine reality and public reality interpenetrate at every level" (also see David-Neel 1971; Stabelein, 1976). Thus, while the lamas recognize the images as ultimately imaginal, they have real consequences just as in shamanism.

Close inspection reveals that yoga has incorporated and interiorized (embodied) the symbolism and rites of shamanism. This could not have occurred if there was not an essential similarity in the goals and objectives of the disciplines. While the areas of greatest syncretism in shamanistic and yogic beliefs

are in North and South Asia, there are astonishing analogies in other parts of the world where diffusion is an unlikely explanation. Katz (1973) writes of his observations of the Bushmen in the Kalahari desert of South Africa. They say that energy or medicine (*nlum*) resides in the pit of the stomach. When it heats up, it produces vapor that rise sup the spine to the base of the skull at which time the trancer experiences *Ikia*. *Ikia* is described by the Bushmen as "making thoughts nothing in your head." It is a fearful state in which the master healer or mentor helps the neophyte overcome and go through the pain. The initiant first dies to himself, surrendering before a mysterious and tremendous *numinosum*. Katz (1973) says this is an experience of transcendence leading to a developmental maturation and more intense focus on the well-being of others. The initiant's being-in-the-world is transformed into shaman/healer. This is an ecstatic experience of inner healing; the person comes into contact with something beyond himself, a transcendental experience (Smith, 1969). It is also a psychological death, a willingness to go through pain and the unknown, similar to the hero's journey which also involves a dangerous passage (Campbell, 1968). The symbolic death and rebirth of the shaman is, as Larsen (1976, p. 65) writes, the "... doorway to the transpersonal, At this point, the individual enters a mythological archetypal realm (and) finds ... a place in a larger eternal order which transcends his local boundaries of time and space." Larsen further states that these experiences are the prototype of all later mysteries; they are mankind's first expressions of returning to the source of cosmic unity.

*symbolic  
death  
and  
rebirth  
of  
the  
shaman*

Compare the Bushmen's description of the dread of *Ikia* to that of the *kundalini* yogin, Gopi Krishna (1971), who writes of a meditation experience in which he was "terror stricken with ague" before being saved by a "glowing radiance." This is a veritable "dark night" of the soul, so fundamental to Western mystics (James, 1961; Laski, 1961; Underhill, 1955). Interestingly, Meadow & Culligan (1967) argue that Vipassana practices may evoke similar painful but ultimately transformational experiences. Further parallels are described in Jewish mysticism. Rabbi Nachman (quoted in Shapiro, 1989) said "... darkness is the husk which you encounter before the fruit." These are analogous to Ellenberger's (1960) description of the "creative illness" that is also typical of shamans, or Bugental's (1965) therapeutic "existential crisis," all of which are critical "nadir" transformational growth experiences.

My guru, Bhirendra, described his "calling" as a frightening encounter with fiendish ghosts in a cemetery who picked at him with spears and pulled flesh from his body until he was "saved

by a white light" that appeared once he had surrendered to his impending death. "Skeletonization" is typical in shamanism. Such experiences are likened to depersonalization and occur often in the dreams of borderline patients (Peters, 1988; Stone, 1979), but are unlike shamanistic and meditative practices where there is an intellectual foundation linked to traditional methods (see Epstein, 1989). Skeletonization also parallels the Tibetan *gchad* or "cutting off" ritual which refers to cutting off the ego (Evans-Wentz, 1958). Thus early shamanistic practices were integrated into Buddhist philosophy of meditation. The dismemberment or ego death experience is transformative, drastically altering one's mode of being-in-the-world, liberating both shaman and yogin from previously entrenched thoughts and categories.

*the  
phases  
of a  
rite  
of  
passage*

Goleman (1988) maintains that there is an underlying transformational character to all meditation traditions, including Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, *kundalini*, Jewish Kaballah, Sufism, Zen and Theravada Buddhism, etc. He (1988, p. 112) writes, "The goal of all these meditation paths, whatever their ideology, source or method is to transform the meditator's consciousness. In the process, the meditator dies to his past and is reborn to a new level of experience. . . the altered states the meditator gains are dramatic in the discontinuity with his normal state" (also see Naranjo, 1971). It is this "death and rebirth" which is essential to the description of spiritual and shamanic experiences. "Rebirth" may be described in various terms, may become attached to different ideologies and cultural forms, but there is an underlying similarity in the transformational structure-s-an endogenous process that resembles the phases of a rite of passage.

#### SHAMANISM, YOGA, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In both shamanistic and yogic experiences, there is a breakthrough in plane-the modalities of the real are abolished. *Samadhi*, like the Kung Bushmen's *Ikia*, is described as experiential nothingness. In the *Yoga Sutras*, this state of final liberation (*assamprainata samadhi*) is described as "absolute emptiness." It would be wrong, however, to regard this as a mere empty trance state. It is an unconditioned state no longer touched by external experience, but open to revelation: the essential unity and interdependence of everything (Eliade, 1958). In the Zen tradition, *samadhi* is described as a state of tranquility, a reconciliation of opposites and transcendence of dualism. Zen trains one to develop the *samadhi* attitude in everyday activity, see harmony in disharmony, unity in

opposition (Sayama, 1986). To use the terminology of the Western mystics, it is a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a conjunction of all opposites, an identification of subject with object, the dissolution of distinctions into a Oneness containing all opposites, resolving all conflict. This is not an intellectual exercise but a transpersonal experience. Eckhart once expressed, "When man sees AU in All, then a man stands beyond understanding."

The purpose of yoga is to achieve *samadhi* and become *ajiven mukti* (one who is liberated in this life), completely unconditioned. Still, as Goleman (1988) points out, there is the task of integrating this experience within the world. In other words, there is an initiatory structure to both shamanic and yogic experiences. The transpersonal and transformational experience leads to a spiritual identity, and also a return to the world. Campbell (1968) says this structure is archetypally composed of three elements: departure, initiation (or transition), and return (see van Gennep, 1960).

*an  
initiatory  
structure*

Bhirendra's final initiation (*gufa*) has profound symbolic implications. *Gufa* utilizes a hollow shelter made of straw, perched on four stilts. It has an opening at the top, and a ladder of nine heavenly rungs. The open top is like the smoke hole in the tent or yurt discussed earlier. It is often trimmed with red and white cloth symbolizing ascent on a rainbow. *Gufa* is set up in the center of a cemetery and covered with "soul flowers" symbolizing life in Tamang culture. It is a symbol of life in the midst of death. The shaman faces his own death within the *gufa*, where he is attacked by ghosts and ghouls, i.e. the living dead—neither dead nor alive, but both. *Gufa* is womb and tomb. The shaman is isolated and must face death. The "heavenly doors" at the top of his head, at the fontanelle, are open and his soul ready to depart. In this vulnerable state, he confronts the powers of death who will cause illness in his future patients and challenge his shamanic ecstatic skills. This is the point at which all the repressed forces of the unconscious may confront the shaman. As in other visualization techniques, the images win then become alive with these denied and unwanted feelings. The shaman therefore must first confront his dark side. Similarly, in Tantric yoga, the visualized images take on the state of mind of the meditator. The way these unconscious contents ("complexes," "archetypes") are reacted to by consciousness, initially by fear, or later by skillful means depends on the inner accomplishments of the yogin. Tucci (1971) believes the meditative images take on the unconscious repressed and frightening contents of the meditator. I believe this psychologically accounts for the experiences of Gopi Krishna and the Bushmen shamans among others described

above, i.e. the "dark night of the soul" and "creative illness" themes, which are ultimately integrative and materially transformative.

*the  
glue  
that  
holds  
society  
together*

This initiatory or transitional phase of a shamanic (like other) rite of passage is characterized by Turner (1967) as "liminality," a "betwixt and between" of social categories, roles and lines separating everything and everyone. In Jungian (1966) terms, it is the dynamic collective unconscious which gives rise to everything and contains all polarities. It is everything and nothing. As said in the *Upanishads*, "NeW Nett!" (not this, not this). The most noticeable effect of liminality on the transformation of consciousness is *communitas* which gives recognition to our essential human bond. That is an experience in which all the grids of us/them, subject/ object are negated and the interdependence of people, culture and nature comes into view. Turner (1969) indicates that this experience supplies the glue that holds society together, and what makes us care about one another. *Communitas* is an existential experience and, more than this, it is transpersonal, transformational, and worldly oriented.

Ring (1989) shows how shamanic initiations resemble near-death experiences, as well as modern UFO abduction reports. Typically, in such encounters, one meets a luminous figure. Similarly, during his initiation, Bhirendra encountered his *mukhiya guru*, his internal guide into the transcendental realm. Jung, during his "creative illness" encountered an inner guide he called Phileman (Ellenberger, 1960). Ring (1989) calls such luminous beings "archetypes of the cosmic shaman." On a return from the near-death experience or UFO abduction experience, a person is transformed, given a new agenda for life, and commonly develops more concern for the welfare of others. In other words, there is a calling or abduction, a near-death, and the recovery and learning of something crucial from the other realm (the transitional space) which becomes the basis for a reintegration (in Campbell's words, a "worldly return"). This is again a union of opposites, bringing into the impermanent world something gained from the transcendental.

It is the union of opposites that Lama Govinda (1969) maintains is the symbol of the goal of Tibetan mysticism. The *Mahamudra* meditator is instructed to raise his energies (*lung*) up the central channel to the uppermost *chakra* and experience the *Dharmakaya* (emptiness). But this experience is to be brought back into the world. This is symbolized by bringing the energy back to the heart *chakra*. Govinda (1969, pp. 179-83) says that the heart *chakra* represents the *Nirmanakaya*, the

realm of "human realization" of the *Dharmakaya*, and the "ultimate integration" uniting *nirvana* and *samsara* (*shunyata*). This integration again is the unity of opposites, iconographically depicted as a syzygy (male and female in sexual embrace) termed *Yab- Yum* (Father-Mother) in Tibetan. I am reminded of the Eastern spiritual goal of being "in" but not "of" the world. Likewise, the "psychopornpic" shaman is a mediator, a messenger between heavenly and earthly realms, making one known to the other while influencing the heavenly worlds for the benefit of the group (Lowie, 1965). In other words, the shaman functions as a uniting symbol of *communitas par excellence*. This is not to say that Buddhist, shamanic, near death, and UFO encounter experiences are the same. They are vastly different in their philosophies and intellectual/ideological underpinnings. Yet they are transpersonal, transcendental, transformational and directed toward the level of human *communitas*. In this sense, they are psychologically prototypal, paradigmatic, and archetypal.

The conjunction of opposites is the Jungian (1969) symbol for wholeness, the unity of God and man (*unio mystica*). It is a break in plane, a transcendence of worldly conditioning in which all conflicts are resolved because everything is seen as One. When Buddhists speak of "non-duality," saying all things interpenetrate, it means the world is seamless. This "no boundary" awareness is called "unity consciousness" by Wilber (1979), and is comparable to the above-mentioned as well as other such transpersonal experiences.

The important underlying psychological fact is that these are all transformations of consciousness. When ego boundaries melt, terror may ensue until one surrenders to annihilation. Grof (1976, 1988) describes such experiences with LSD as well as his more recent holotropic therapy. He maintains that, at a certain pivotal point, ego death and feelings of pain and emptiness are followed by rebirth. Typical symbols include Christ's death on the cross and resurrection, escape from a strangling embrace, clashing rocks, and other analogies to the shaman initiate's dangerous passage. Bhirendra's description of his calling, particularly his skeletonization, can be understood as an ego death. Death, or hitting bottom, is immediately followed by visions of gold and white lights which flood the consciousness with positive feelings (Grof, 1976). The shaman returns from death with new meaning and purpose. In order to be saved, one must have something to be saved from. The shaman's future trances are not for himself, but for his disciples, patients, and community. This caring for and helping others is highly reminiscent of the *bodhisattva* path (Halifax, 1989).

*transformations  
of  
consciousness*

Ackerknecht (1943), an early observer, stated that the shaman is a "healed madman," having experienced a critical confrontation with illness or death. The calling leads through death to personal transformation and spiritual awakening—the development of compassion and wisdom with which to serve as a trusted sacred healer (Achterberg, 1988; Halifax, 1982). As Hyemeyohosts Storm, a Cheyenne shaman, said, "AUShamans know that Death furnishes all with Life" (in Halifax, 1982).

Bhirendra, the Nepalese Tamang shaman, before his *gufa* ceremony ended, envisioned his ascension to the throne of Ghesar Gyalpo, the Tamang God whose throne is white and covered with white soul/life flowers. Everything was bathed in white light, including Bhirendra and his internal guru, who accompanied him into Ghesar Gyalpo's presence. Ghesar Gyalpo is the principle of life. Bhirendra was given milk to drink and nourished by its pure "whiteness," the essence of life infusing his body. During my year's apprenticeship, Bhirendra discussed this experience twice. Both times, it was emotionally charged and tearful, although the experience had occurred more than 40 years earlier. He related how he came to possess Ghesar Gyalpo's *shakti*, an energy that penetrates his being when he shamanize. For difficult cases, Bhirendra revisualizes this experience in order to embody the life force required for the healing. Such healing is not mere "magic;" it is pervaded by a *sense of sacredness and timelessness*. This indicates that shamans have access to genuine mystical experiences and meet these and other of the universal qualities outlined by Vaughan (1989).

*access  
to  
genuine  
mystical  
experiences*

Other shamanic examples of the transpersonal experience are the mystical weddings which are part of many shamanic traditions. The shaman's relationship to a spiritual spouse varies culturally, but usually the spirit supplies the necessary paranormal knowledge to aid the shaman. Shamans may have dreams of sexual relations, and spirit wives may give birth to spirit children. There are sacred marriage dream ceremonies which may be highly elaborate with syzygy-type unitive symbolism. Kalweit (1988, p, 143) says, "All mystical traditions describe the *unio mystico* as a sexual union because—as Indian mystics would put it—someone embraced by the primordial Self can neither be within nor without. . . . The concept of the sexual transmateral union with God is found throughout the history of religions. It is indeed a universal symbol of mankind."

#### CONCLUSION

It is impossible to judge a shamanic oral tradition by the standards of a written tradition. It is less complex than the

religions of "civilization." Its rituals, like those discussed above, are its means of communicating, a kind of symbolic "writing" conveying the conjunctive and no-boundary experiences of tribal people while simultaneously catalyzing these same moments. Shamanism is humankind's first mystical tradition. Yoga interiorized and elaborated upon it, but the imaginal experience as a means of entry into the transcendental and ultimately transformative realm remained of central importance. On the other hand, some meditative traditions, like Zen and Theravada, consider mental images as illusions only to be consciously witnessed. Yet others, more like shamanism, utilize imagery in complex meditation exercises (e.g. Tibetan Buddhism). Meditators and yogins use breathing techniques while shamans use percussion instruments as means of concentration. Shamans also use drugs, sweat lodges, and go on "vision quests" to facilitate mystical experiences (Foster & Little, 1976; Weil, 1977). Zen meditators go to the *zenda*; shamans go into the wilderness or to a cemetery (like the Buddhist *gchod* initiate) to find "isolation," as in the first stage of a rite of passage, in order to experience transcendence and transformation (see Halifax, 1988).

As Walsh (1990) and others claim, it is true that there are numerous states of consciousness and many types of trance, and that the many states of consciousness involve different brain /mind processes. Yet it seems that most cultivated trances of traditional disciplines aim at similar mystical states. I believe this is what Doore (1988) has in mind when he writes that yogins, mystics and Buddhists, like shamans, access identical transcendental states of consciousness. In shamanism, the key to the trans personal is through visualization. But the goal of each tradition is a change in the practitioner's mode-of-being through an ASe method. The cross-cultural symbolism that conveys the mystical goal is a uniting of opposites, an experience of no boundaries, the' ultimate transformational experience.

*in  
shamanism  
visualization  
is the  
key*

In shamanism, as in many other traditions, the insights gained from mystical experience are invested in this world. There is always a cultural filter applied, but beyond this the trans-personal reveals a deeper reverence for life and a feeling of interconnectedness with everything. Whether this is called theistic, monotheistic, pantheistic, Buddhist, or shamanic is less important than its transformative and integrative qualities, the deep underlying structure of the mystical experience.

Shamans were the first to articulate this, to recognize their spiritual nature, to break-through in plane. Death and rebirth, chaos to cosmos, is the essential scenario of the shaman and

other mystics. Shamanism was limited to a few individuals, but meditation, yoga and the mystery religions (among other spiritual disciplines) made the shamanic methods available to many more during the rise of civilization. Shamanism did not die with the advent of civilization; it was embodied and, moreover, it was developed in a myriad of directions.

The shaman is a visualizer, and this may be obvious in some cases but subtle in others, especially to a non-participant. Such is the case with embodiment. The shaman flies, experiences a voluntary embodiment, divines the future, has mastery over fire, the hunt, and more. But these are clearly shamanic only if they involve visions during ceremonies and are lucid and non-amnesic. Whether the shaman is a Cosmic Traveler or "horizontal visualizer" is less significant than the breakthrough in plane emphasized in both practices. These experiences are theophanies, whether the gods descend or the shaman ascends. Shamanism is a spiritual discipline in which these states of consciousness are cultivated.

*the  
inner  
dream  
space  
and  
the  
external  
world*

The shaman lives in two simultaneous realities: the inner dream space in which spiritual encounters transform the perception of the external world, and the external world which becomes a stage on which the shaman differentially reenacts an internal drama, the mythos of his dream, his divine purpose as healer. Each time the shaman enters trance for patients and confronts the perceived agents of affliction, there is psychological integration for the shaman. He confronts himself for the betterment of the patient and/or community. The shaman mediates between the realms as a psychopomp, bringing heaven and earth, spirit and humankind, together.

On one level, yoga, Vipassana, Tantric and other meditation traditions seem quite different from one another and from shamanism, with irreconcilable belief systems and specific trance states. They vary, for example, from the shaman having dialogue with patients and others while in trance to complete absorption and invulnerability to external stimuli (*enstasis*), and as to degree of psychophysical arousal and content or description of the experience (Walsh, 1990). However, at another level, the experience of ego death and no-boundaries, a transformation of consciousness and reintegration into the world with the purpose of compassionate action (understood in various ways among different spiritual disciplines) indicates that all mystical traditions have something essential in common. The different spiritual methods represent different practices to achieve the same state of unity consciousness.

There is an equifinality in which the different techniques affect

completely different physical and mental processes and still result in the same mystical state. There is, for example, evidence to suggest that psychedelic drugs may produce mystical experiences of extraordinary beauty and depth, analogous in many ways to those utilizing non-drug trance induction methods (Grinspoon & Bakalar, 1979; McKenna, 1988). As Walsh (1989b, p. 38) writes, "In philosophical terms, drug and natural mystical experiences are phenomenologically (experientially or descriptively) identical."

There is cross-cultural validation of personality similarities between Vipassana meditation masters and Apache shamans. Brown and Engler (1986a, 1986b) point out that the Rorschach card protocols of the "masters group" of meditators, like the protocols of Apache shamans studied by Boyer *et al.* (1964) and Klopfer and Boyer (1961), use Rorschach cards as teaching devices and demonstrate an "integrative style." That is, the associations are integrated and consistent across the Rorschach cards, rather than being loosely related from card to card. Similarly, Shweder (1972), who administered projective tests to Zinacanteco Indian shamans of Mexico, underscored their ability to "avoid battlement and impose form on unstructured stimuli." In Brown and Engler's (1986b) study, *samadhi* subjects, like Boyer's Apache shamans, also relied heavily on shaded and amorphous areas for their interpretive style. Brown and Engler (1986b, p. 214) suggest that one possible implication of such cross-cultural similarities is that this style may be suggestive of a " . . . Master's Rorschach regardless of the spiritual tradition." They maintain the master is not as interested in expressing the content of his own mind as to teaching others to "see" reality; that is, they utilize the test as a device to explore the transpersonal level of the mind/universe. One of the most important themes of the Masters Group, just as in shamanism, is the desire to help relieve the suffering of others.

*shamanism  
as a  
cross-cultural  
phenomenon*

Thus shamanism is a cross-cultural phenomenon, Shamans were the first to explore inner space in a disciplined way, They utilized "embodiment" as well as "soul journey" techniques. Fundamental, however, is the controlled nature of the SSE visions. These imaginal trance induction methods are utilized by shamans and are different from those in historically later cultures, albeit every type of spiritual practice requires awareness of mental imagery and the development of a relationship towards it (rather than being overwhelmed by it) in order to advance. Shamanism has its own animistic world view and so the content of the experience is thereby influenced, as the world view of each culture influences its mystics. Yet the mystical or spiritual transformation experience, leading

from a no-boundaries awareness to a world reintegration (a death and rebirth) with more care and concern, and identity with others and all forms of life (*communitas*); is transcultural and belongs instead to the realm of the human spirit. It is this transformational sense, which is so essential, that qualifies shamanism as a spiritual discipline. Shamanism overlaps with, and is at the origin of other younger, spiritual traditions which had continued the development of disciplines of spiritual transformation.

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The phenomenology of shamanism has been the focus of much contemporary psychological interest. However, it is arguable that the concept of "shamanic states of consciousness" is neither well defined nor sufficiently understood. We critically examine the term "shamanic states of consciousness" and argue that affixing the qualifier "shamanic states" to consciousness results in a theoretical confusion of consciousness and its content, that is, consciousness is mistaken for the content of consciousness. We refer to this fallacy as the "consciousness/content fallacy." Shamanism: Phenomenology of a spiritual discipline. *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 21, 115-37. Peters, L., & Price-Williams, D. (1980). Towards an experiential analysis of shamanism.