

narrower senses of neo-shamanism. For the latter, Carlos Castaneda's books served for many as a primary reference tool. Another major figure is Michael Harner who coined the term *core shamanism* and initiated the "Foundation for Shamanic Studies."

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- See also: Castaneda, Carlos; Entheogens; Harner, Michael – and the Foundation for Shamanic Studies; Huxley, Aldous; Nature Religion; New Age; Peyote; Shamanism (various); Paganism – Contemporary; Wicca.

### Shamanism – Neo (Eastern Europe)

Neo-shamanism has emerged since the early 1970s following the publication of Mircea Eliade's book on shamanism, a milestone that received either full anthropological and historical support or, on the contrary, outright rejection. Coupled with Carlos Castaneda's vision quest, the "archaic technique of ecstasy" has become the solid ground based on which many seekers and supporters all over the world have begun to rejoice and celebrate their newly found spirituality. Thus, it has much to do with New Spirituality and New Age religious phenomena connected to Eliade and Castaneda and a host of anthropological studies on the subject (P. Furst, A. Wallace, I.M. Lewis, and A. Hultkranz), but especially the work and activity of Michael Harner. The latter has been more influential than others by introducing the possibility of the collage of neo-shamanic practices to Eastern Europe – often emphasizing South American tribal worldviews and their close relationship to Eurasia – and initiating several individuals and small groups into the secrets of shamanic power.

Shamanism, however, is different from neo-shamanism, for the latter term is reserved here for only those religious and psychic practices that are part of the New Age phenomena and may or may not trace their roots

to classical shamanism. However, as many neo-shamanic practitioners argue, Eurasian tribal shamanism, its culturally diverse definitions notwithstanding, is a precursor of their art, a practice of syncretism revitalized by poets, painters, musicians and even scientists. This may be one of the reasons why the following terms are often evoked for neo-shamanism: urban shamanism or shamanizing, shamanic trancing, crosscultural shamanism, shamanic spirituality, world shamanism, and even techno or cyber-shamanism. It also freely combines regional or cultural aspects such as Celtic, Norse, Berserk, Siberian, Amazonian, and European. (Berserk is a regional form of present-day shamanism that utilizes archaic Nordic techniques, especially trancing, that is connected to nature and wildlife preservation.) Interestingly, the scholarly world has also responded to this challenge: European witches (Carlo Ginzburg's *benandanti* for instance), ancient Greek magicians, werewolves and positive vampires are also known to possess shamanic attributes.

#### Neo-shamanism in Eastern Europe

In Eastern Europe, neo-shamanistic phenomena may be connected to the collapse of the Iron Curtain, and with it, the dismantling of Soviet domination throughout the former East bloc. This was followed by an instant reemergence of religiosity along with new forms of spirituality. It should be mentioned, however, that in certain instances rural practices, with some shamanistic elements, managed to survive Soviet atheistic ideology. Soviet atheistic Marxist-Leninist ideology, aside from a few state religions, did not tolerate overt religiosity or communitarian church affairs. In the vacuum created by the dismantled state institutions, religions emerged with vehemence. From North Asia and Siberia, to East Central Europe, from the Baltic republics, to the Balkan Peninsula, traditional folkways have been utilized to establish cultural continuity and national preeminence. Coupled with the neo-shamanic world are national myths of Pan-Slavic unity, the pagan-Slavdom, the remembrance of prehistoric empires and ruling dynasties (Dacians for Romanians, Scythians for Hungarians), and homogeneous peasant traditions that bespeak of cultural longevity and the existence of an ancestral terrain that are all coupled with elements from nationalist imagery.

Although neo-shamanism varies from country to country – and Siberia and parts of Russia are especially unique in that there is a conscious attempt to rely on previous (i.e., traditional tribal, shamanic practices – there is a fairly homogeneous ideology and symbolism. In Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, for instance, historical and folkloric sources serve as sources of inspiration. More often than not, neo-shamanic séances are not so much recreated as imagined and created by the practitioners. Often, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century folkloric elements (songs, dance steps, pieces of clothing, etc.)

are utilized as substitutes to create “authentic” versions of native shamanistic performances. Yet, the core doctrine holds that nature is sacred and that shamanism must create harmony with nature, people and the universe. Moreover, neo-shamanic believers do not negate other religions and gods, but seek to find common elements for unity. In their practices they often use the water from natural springs, ignite sacred fires, and drink libations made of herbs and medicinal plants; they also locate sacred groves and previously utilized religious sites for their shamanizing rituals.

In Lithuania, for instance, the remaking of Lithuanian identity is oriented toward neo-paganism – *Romuva* as it is called – with its re-creation of pre-Christian rituals and faith. In Hungary, a former electronic engineer has registered his own shamanic church and school (*Táltos iskola*), an educational camp where one can gain first-hand knowledge of holistic healing, fortune telling, and supernatural phenomena. Such formal schooling is also coupled with the explanation of an alternative national history not readily taught in formal schools. Compulsory state education, for instance, does not allow for alternative views of ancient history, an area the neo-shamanic practitioners take for granted. For instance, the Scythian and Hunnish archeological remains and historical sources are viewed as direct evidences of Hungarian connections. Novices are required to pass through several stages, or levels, to advance in their spiritual training. Folklore, songs, and knowledge of Hungarian peasant art, runic writing and history are essential constituents of the shamanic training.

In post-Soviet Siberia, new shamans emerge among the elites, mostly those with university and college education, bringing back long-lost spirituality, lifeways and practices. Among the Buryat-Mongols a specific shamanistic institution (the Golomt Center for Shamanist Studies) serves this quest; in Tuva and Udmurtia, practicing shamans are commonly featured in local media. In Sakha-Yakutia, artists openly declare their shamanic family heritage or their quest to attain shamanic powers. Well-known Siberian artists with shamanic powers are often featured attractions in European festivals and artistic shows. The Sakha (Yakut) dancing and singing ensemble, known as *Katylyk*, or alternately the Udmurt (*Votiak*) artist Olga Alexandrova, performing in various Hungarian, Baltic or Western cities, provide not only a lively context to connect neo-shamanism to its traditional precursor, but also reinvigorate interest in shamanistic consciousness and knowledge. Because of the linguistic connection to the Finno-Ugric peoples and languages, Siberian artists and performing groups – Hanty, Mansy, Mari and Udmurt – are frequently featured events in Hungary.

No other explanation serves better the fundamental connection that exists between neo-shamanism and the natural environment than the Buryat Mongolian credo quoted on the Buryat homepage:

From the traditional Buryat point of view, the world is not a dead place, but vibrantly alive with spirits and souls in every thing and in every place, also that all animals and plants have sentient souls much like ourselves. For that reason respect for the spirits of nature and living things shaped a religion and life ethics that minimizes negative impact on the earth. For that reason also, for the many thousands of years that man has lived in Siberia there was minimal negative impact on the environment until the current time. This is a way of life which is radically different from that of European peoples, whose philosophy considers most of the world to be lacking sentience and useful only for exploitation (<http://www.buryatmongol.com>).

In this sense traditional and late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century shamanists are wholly similar. They see, as well as reveal, the fundamental unity of nature and culture. Neo-shamanism differs fundamentally, however, from classical (tribal and prehistoric) shamanism in that it is anchored not to a single culture, people or time and space. It can be found today in milieus where it never existed before; it can possess complexes that never have been previously utilized. Another major difference is the social environment from which novices are selected and into which they are initiated. A collage of symbolic paraphernalia is also symptomatic of neo-shamanists. Urban shamans often use incantations with no real songs or words. As the claim goes, the feeling, rhythm and spirituality are what matters. Rock musicians, however, often invoke images and texts imitating tribal lore or those that are considered by them to be shamanistic. Similarly, in dancing – which could reflect some borrowed steps and figures from tribal dances – connection to indigenous dance forms is neither a requirement nor an important aspect. The neo-shamanic world borrows elements from European folkways, mysticism, Buddhism, Judeo-Christian beliefs, Yoga, Wicca, Daoism, the occult and Paganism. However, as neo-shamanic intellectuals themselves argue, these religious ways could also trace their roots to the more archaic shamanism(s). Neo-shamanists are also concerned with present-day affairs. Specifically, to them all current evils – breakdown of societal values, unbridled capitalism, industrialization and modernization, pollution and the degradation of the natural environment, consumerism, Westernization, poverty, crime, and loss of morals as well as peaceful existence – must be fought with new spiritual strength and vigor. This is based on “traditional values,” love of nature and animals, and a holistic way of living. In the neo-shamanic worldview, practitioners find both explanations for the past and solutions for the present ills of the world.

As practiced in Eastern Europe, neo-shamanistic belief is mildly anarchist. It is predicated upon the belief that the

post-communist and postmodern era is fraught with increasing injustices and inequalities. Their worldview is both liberal and communitarian in that it places the individual – the shaman with powers – at the center to assist the community and work for its welfare. Believers also claim that the present world is out of balance; there is no central harmony any more and political regimes and states are natural enemies of groups with alternative views and marginal positions in society. Neo-shamanic ideology is also based on utopian consciousness for it argues that the present-day realities are harsher than ever before and that paradise on Earth can only be experienced, or achieved, in a magical world of our own creation. Consequently, the neo-shamanic constitutes a cultic milieu that readily accepts magic, science and half-belief at its base.

Regardless of the claims to authenticity, the specific features of neo-shamanism include four important components: 1) spirit mediation or communication to reach the desired aims; 2) healing and initiation rites to conduct various services; 3) the healthy symbiosis between nature and the biosphere; and 4) a culture of rejuvenation that concerns both the individual, the collective, and the Earth. Neo-shamanistic belief is separated from its more archaic form by the very fact that neo-shamanic rituals are now everyday occurrences that do not necessarily require sacred sites, secrecy of affairs or blood-letting through animal sacrifice. In fact, most neo-shamanic rites avoid “hurting the natural world.” Neo-shamanists in Eastern Europe may perform in artistic clubs, university surroundings, corporate offices or urban tenement houses. Neo-shamanic religion is also highly diffuse so it may be extended into rural revitalized neo-pagan events, healing rites and syncretic nationalist revival movements. In its more extreme forms neo-shamanic ways may be utilized for nationalistic or political propaganda. Aside from Western and Northern Europe, in the Ukraine, Russia, and Hungary such extremist versions have been recorded recently.

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- See also: Harner, Michael – and the Foundation for Shamanic Studies; Neo-paganism and Ethnic Nationalism in Eastern Europe; Psychonauts; Raves.

## Shamanism – Southern Peruvian Andes

In the southern Peruvian Andes, at an average height of 4500 meters above the sea, live small groups of shepherds who raise large herds of alpacas (*Llama pacos*), llamas (*Llama glama*) and sheep. Their traditional religious life is centered on the charismatic figure of the *altomisayoq*, a practitioner who plays the role of a mediator between humans and supernatural beings, and is capable of influencing the course of events. Generally speaking, he may be called, according to anthropological categorization, a shaman.

There appears to be several popular religions rather than a unique and distinctive one in these traditional societies. Depending on the informant, or on the circumstances, one can be referred to one cosmology or another in order to explain natural or social phenomena. Beyond Christian and syncretic explanations (such as for instance the myth of the “three ages of humanity”), lies a coherent group of beliefs, centered on the spirits of mountains, called *apu*. According to the people, these *apu* are the genuine “creators” of the Andean world. Many myths explain the way fauna and flora species were “created” and scattered in the valleys by the *apu*. Mountains are natural borderlines in the Andean space, and species distribution may be different according to valley geographical features. *Apu* control, in the day-to-day life, natural and social phenomena – they are godfathers of recently born children, and a myth says they taught women the art of weaving. Thus, *apu* are the ultimate

