

THE SHAMAN'S SPIRITUAL CRISIS
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[What follows is an extract from my new "Spirit Grooves" video called "Shamans: Spirit Guides," which can be found here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_lwcbA_K00

The traditional shaman does not choose to be a shaman. Shamanism of this kind is the result of a series of psychological experiences (call them visions) whose very nature estranges (at least for a time) one from conventional society and the normal way of seeing things. The shaman is somehow, often against their will, thrust outside of how everyone else sees life, and into a space and a view that is markedly altered from and mostly non-communicable to the society around them. In other words, they can't be heard and understood.

The shaman, usually through a personal psychological or spiritual crisis, has become aware of the inner sequence of life processes, processes typically hidden from society by their very obviousness, processes that are thus somehow as the Tibetans call them "self-secret." They hide themselves or are hidden in the one place no one would ever look, and that is: in plain sight.

This shamanic propensity can come about in several ways, through having a near-death or life-changing experience, mind-altering drugs, or somehow becoming psychologically separated for a time from conventional societal consciousness.

Not the Same as the Vision Quest

The shamanic experience has some similarities to the Native American vision quest, but, unlike the vision quest, which is generally voluntary, the shaman's own internal psychological chemistry thrusts the future shaman beyond convention (beyond normal society) and into an altered state of consciousness, until such time as he or she can manage (often through what is sometimes a life/death mental struggle) to find a balance, stabilize, and return to normal society.

The shaman cannot communicate what he or she sees to others, because society is not able or prepared to understand it. Society in general (by the very definition of conventional) has not had the experience needed in order to understand the shaman's view. The shaman, by virtue of their unorthodox and altered experience, is just "out there" by his or herself.

Unlike organized religions, shamans act alone and are "self-chosen," rather than appointed, in that the intensity of the shaman's own internal experiences separates them permanently (or for a while) from the other members of their society, at least in some ways.

They are outsiders not by choice, but by the nature of their own inner experience and awareness, permitted to see and experience realms of the psyche the average person never sees.

Typically, a shaman may take years to stabilize the vision or mental experiences that they are thrust into, often struggling against mental unbalance and even madness. The shaman can be discriminated from a madman because he or she learns to control and understand what has been experienced. He or she masters those altered states of mind and gradually rejoins society, but with a permanently altered view.

The shaman always exists in conjunction with and in contradistinction to his or her society. They are the original outriders, literally defining the edge of conventional time and mentality.

Every society, and even smaller groups, has its shamans or something similar. Shamanism is a purely organic role that spontaneously arises in all civilized society. Why is this?

It is as simple as the fact that normality and conventionality is defined by those who fall outside its boundaries. Most shamans want nothing more than to fit in and be accepted in their society. What separates them are their own inner experiences that are abnormal or somehow beyond convention, allowing them to see and experience states of mind, altered states, that the general society has little to no idea of.