

The Spirit of Shamanism

1. *Written by Trent Deerhorn, Deerhorn Shamanic Services, for the Wholife Journal Volume 8 Issue 8 March-April 2003, Saskatoon, Sk.*

When people think of shamanism they often conclude that it is strictly based on the philosophies of North American aboriginal culture. Shamanism has, however, existed in every culture throughout the world and is based in the deep spiritual history of all Earth's children. My shamanic roots extend from Ireland, Tibet, Hungary, and Romania. Throughout my life I have also had the benefit of shamanic teachings from numerous other cultures. Shamanism is our birthright, no matter what colour, creed, nationality, gender or spiritual point of view.

Kenneth Meadows said it best in his book, *The Medicine Way*, when he explained that shamanism is, "the practice of the principles and techniques of shamans which involve working with the powers of Nature that exist both inside and outside the individual self as both manifest forms and unmanifest potentials. Shamanism is a way of learning by direct personal experience. Its methods transcend the intellect since they form part of the ancient Science of Spirit."

Shamanism helps the individual to deeply connect with the world of nature, which we all need in this highly technological world, and with the spiritual realms of reality. These connections bring about profound insights into the personal psyche and help us to better understand our own spiritual point of view. Shamanism helps us to locate ourselves in the world and in the universe. It helps us to truly know and understand who we are as children of God or whatever one calls the Higher Power.

One of the best ways of accomplishing this is the practice of the Vision Quest. There are many traditions around the Vision Quest and many healing ceremonies involved. What I have found works best is to designate a daily time to enter the silence. It is best done in nature but it can be done indoors. I prefer the healing energies of nature. Find a place to be in nature. Sit and close your eyes. Blindfold yourself, if necessary, to keep yourself from opening your eyes. Breathe deeply in through the nose and out through the mouth. Being in this silence, one will receive a guiding vision. The vision may not be visual in nature. We have many other senses through which to perceive. The clarity and connectedness becomes profound and yet is also more commonplace as you go along. The more commonplace it becomes, the more in tune with the synchronicities of life you get, and life itself becomes a flowing meditation. When this happens you are truly living the dream weave, that state of consciousness in which we become aware of ourselves as co-creators in our lives and our connection to all that is throughout the universe. This state of consciousness can be very helpful, especially at times when we feel the effects of the "spin cycle" of life.

One of my teachers helped me to connect more fully with the dream weave while teaching me to do "Shamanic Journeying." He was able to help me see how my defense mechanisms were so entrenched that I was becoming aloof toward life and relationships. Although these defense mechanisms were necessary when they were acquired, they were no longer appropriate to the self that I had become. Removing these defense mechanisms was one of the more frightening things that I had to do, but I knew that my existence on this earth walk depended upon it. A heart that

had become skeptical and cold began to open and slowly there emerged a beautiful spirit that could freely and creatively express itself.

In order to release I had to enter the silence. I spent a long time in isolation, my teacher being my only contact, and we did not speak until I received my vision. I spent most of my time sitting inside a circle of stones in the shade of the trees. I was not starved by fasting and I was not dehydrated with lack of water. He brought me water and small amounts of food so that the silence would not be interrupted by my physical needs. When I entered the dream weave consciousness I was met by a beautiful spirit who showed me what to do in order to shed the fears that were behind the defense mechanisms involved in my aloofness. Since then, I have connected more freely with people and do so on a deep heart level, the path of the heart. A path that many of us do not even know exists.

This path of the heart is a path of personal authenticity. It is not a path of nostalgia or of sentiment. These two aspects of the human experience isolate us from the reality of the moment by trapping us into what always was, or into what could have, would have, or should have been. The path of the heart, however, is about truly knowing yourself and knowing your current limitations, as well as knowing that these limitations are not written in stone.

The path of the heart is about knowing we are more than human beings desperately trying to be spiritual, we are spirits trying out the human experience on this earth walk and that only the bravest of souls take on that task. It is also about knowing that we are not alone in the universe and although we may experience pain and strife, the universe is a safe and supportive place in which to exist and experience life. The pain and the strife are learning opportunities for us to experience gratitude and appreciation for the many gifts life has to offer. We can choose to either cower away from life's experiences, or to learn and receive the gifts life has to offer. If we choose the latter we live more fulfilling and rewarding lives. We also cannot judge our pain or the pain of another as being more or less than someone else's. It is simply pain. We can heal from it and learn from it, or we can experience it again in some other form until such time as we are ready to heal and learn.

Shamanism is a way of being that can bring us out of our victim/survivor mentality and introduce us to our innate ability to thrive. How it does so cannot be measured or explained in scientific terms. Mostly it is through the experience of shamanism and the healing ceremonies that results occur. It is my hope that more people will be able to release their fears and misconceptions about shamanism and open themselves to the possibility of healing and growth on a deep soul level.

Trent Deerhorn has fostered shamanic principles for over 30 years and is a practitioner of shamanism in Saskatoon. He does private healing sessions and workshops locally and throughout Canada.