

# Shamanic Journeying

A Beginner's Guide



Sandra Ingerman

*Author of Soul Retrieval and How to Heal Toxic Thoughts*

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A Beginner's Guide

By  
Sandra Ingerman

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# Introduction

When many of us think of the word “shaman,” it brings to mind a spiritual healer steeped in secret knowledge and mysterious powers. So how did an ordinary girl from Brooklyn get involved in shamanism back in the 1980s?

In 1980, I was attending the California Institute of Integral Studies, where I was getting my master’s degree in counseling psychology. For financial reasons, I had to work sixty hours a week—and I was taking twelve credits a quarter—so I was always looking for easy credits. One day I was in the office at school, and a friend walked in and told me that a man was flying out from Connecticut to teach a weekend workshop on something called shamanism. He did not know what the workshop involved, but he told me that I could get two easy credits by taking it. I immediately signed up—without even looking at what the required reading was. The workshop began on Halloween of 1980.

The man flying in from Connecticut turned out to be Dr. Michael Harner, anthropologist and author of *The Way of the Shaman*, who is known for having revived the tradition of shamanic journeying in modern Western culture. While researching his book, Dr. Harner made a critical discovery that became the basis of his widespread teaching in the West. He

found that the shamanic journey is a practice common to all shamans and cultures throughout history, regardless of their geography or cultural differences.

During a shamanic journey, the shaman goes into an altered state of consciousness to journey outside of time and space into what Carlos Castenada called non-ordinary reality—or what I think of as a parallel universe. Typically, the shaman listens to some form of rhythmic percussion, which carries the soul into non-ordinary reality. In these journeys, the shaman retrieves information from helping spirits who make themselves available in non-ordinary reality for healing help and to provide information for patients, family, and their community.

During the weekend workshop, I learned that the practice of shamanic journeying can be used by anyone today in order to get answers to personal questions, to learn different healing methods, to help others in the community, and to work on world and global issues. As soon as I met my helping spirit during my first journey, I realized that this practice would not only help me face the challenges in my life, but would also further my personal growth and evolution. Since then, in concert with my background in psychotherapy, my goal has been to find the best way to apply and share this powerful, ancient technique.

The practice of shamanic journeying is a way for us to feel personally empowered in our lives. It provides us with a way to have direct revelation and is a simple approach for accessing spiritual guidance. It is a way to get us out of our heads as well as to expand our awareness and consciousness.

When we begin to learn that we have the ability to problem solve for ourselves, it raises our self-esteem in a grounded way. Going to meet our helping spirits makes us feel valued and connected to the spirit that lives in all things. We feel loved by the power of the universe, and we never feel alone again.

In working with the helping spirits, we learn the true definition of power. True power is being able to use our energy to create transformation for ourselves, others, and the planet.

Shamanic journeying is a joyful path to regaining the knowledge of how to bring our lives back into a place of harmony and balance. It helps us to wake up to our full creative potential. As we do this, our lives change in a way that brings good health and well-being to ourselves and others. I have watched people who have been depressed wake up to the joy of life. People have started dancing and singing after a lifetime of repressing their creative spark. I have watched people build their lives back up after suffering debilitating illness and personal loss. I have watched

people get their “voice” back. We just need to have the desire and an open heart to do this work. Everyone can journey and open to the new dimensions of life that the spirits are waiting to show us.

It is important to understand that I will not be training you to become a shaman. Traditionally, it is not typical for someone to volunteer for the role of shaman or to self-identify as a shaman. Rather, someone is chosen by “the spirits” to become a shaman and to act in the service of his or her community. In shamanic cultures, it is actually considered bad luck to call yourself a shaman, because this is seen as bragging, and the shamanic view about power is that if you brag about having it, you will lose it. Instead, your community recognizes you as a shaman based on the successful results that you achieve for the benefit of your clients and the greater community.

In *Shamanic Journeying: A Beginner’s Guide*, you will learn one of the most fundamental techniques used by shamans worldwide to connect with spiritual helpers, to access personal spiritual guidance and healing, to help others and the planet, and to reconnect with nature and its cycles and rhythms: the shamanic journey. This practice is designed to give you direct access to your own spiritual guidance. I believe that the times we live in call for each of us to develop tools for resolving our own problems, tools

that enable us to become more empowered and resourceful.

Many of you will use this method for your own personal healing, growth, and evolution. After extensive practice, some of you will be guided to begin using this work to help others in your community and in your work to help the planet. This program is designed to provide you with an introduction to the technique of journeying in such a way that your own destiny with it can unfold. The accompanying CD contains three drumming sessions to help you get started with your journey practice. Once you have completed reading *Shamanic Journeying: A Beginner's Guide*, you will be ready to use the CD as an accompaniment to your journeys into non-ordinary reality.

## Chapter 1

# Shamanism: The Path of Direct Revelation

Shamanism is the earliest spiritual practice known to humankind, dating back tens of thousands of years. Although the word "shaman" is a Siberian word for a spiritual healer, shamanism has also been practiced in parts of Asia, Europe, Africa, Australia, Greenland, and native North and South America throughout history. The fact that the practice has survived and thrived for tens of thousands of years speaks to the potency of the work.

One of the beautiful aspects of the shamanic journey is the principle of direct revelation. The practice of shamanic journeying helps us to part the veils between the seen and unseen worlds and access information and energies that can help awaken us and restore us to wholeness. A shaman is a man or woman who interacts directly with spirits to address the spiritual aspects of illness, perform soul retrievals, divine information, help the spirits of deceased people cross over, and perform a variety of ceremonies for the community. Shamans have taken on many roles in tribal communities. They have acted as healers,

doctors, priests, psychotherapists, mystics, and storytellers.

Traditionally, the practice of shamanism has focused on practical results achieved by the shaman. In a traditional shamanic culture, there was either a single individual or a few people in the community acting in the role of shaman. The shaman would be consulted by hunters and gatherers in the tribe to identify food sources. If the shaman were unable to accurately divine the location of food, the tribe would not survive. Shamans were also expected to perform healings for members of the community. Once again, the survival of the tribe was largely dependent on the shaman's spiritual abilities.

Shamanism teaches us that everything that exists is alive and has a spirit, and that we are joined with the earth and all of life via our spiritual interconnectedness. Just as quantum physics describes a field of energy that connects all of life, shamans also speak of a web of life that connects everything. In modern culture, many of us feel a deep longing to experience our unity with this web of life and to heal our sense of isolation. When we travel to non-ordinary reality in our shamanic journeys, we learn how to communicate with the spirit of the trees, plants, animals, insects, birds, fish, reptiles, and rocks, as well as the spirit of the elements of earth, air, water, and fire. We directly experience the web of life.

As we are a part of nature, we have a deep need to reconnect with nature's cycles and rhythms. Imagine how exhausting it would be to walk against the flow of a river every day of your life. In truth, we have disconnected from the cycles and rhythms of the moon and the seasons, and often we do walk against the flow of the river of life. I believe this is partly the cause of such ailments as chronic fatigue, depression, and a host of other illnesses, both psychological and physical, that are so common today. The helping spirits have a great deal to teach us about restoring balance and harmony into our lives by reconnecting with nature's cycles and by living in unity with the natural world.

Within the practice of shamanism, there are a variety of ceremonies performed for honoring and working with the cycles of nature and the cycles in our own lives, as well as for reading omens and interpreting dreams—all of which provide insight, healing, and empowerment. Shamanism can also teach us the value of having a regular spiritual practice and the value of being in service to others, which brings a genuine sense of meaning and purpose to our lives. Finally, shamanism enables us to access powerful forces to help us create the world we want to live in—for ourselves and for others.

Shamans heal emotional and physical illness by working with the spiritual aspect of illness. The tradi-



tional role of the shaman has been to perform ceremonies. After tens of thousands of years, traditional shamans are still part of community life and practice in Siberia, Asia, Australia, Africa, and North and South America. The technique of shamanic journeying that you will learn in this book is just one of the ceremonies shamans use to establish communication with the spirit world.

There are three common causes of illness in the shaman's view. First, a person may have lost his or her power, causing depression, chronic illness, or a series of misfortunes. In this case, the shaman journeys to restore that person's lost power. Or a person may have lost part of his or her soul or essence, causing soul loss, which sometimes occurs during an emotional or physical trauma, such as accidents, surgery, abuse, the trauma of war, being in a natural disaster, or other traumatic circumstances. This soul loss results in dissociation, post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression, illness, immune deficiency problems, addictions, unending grief, or coma. It is the role of the shaman to track down the parts that have fled and been lost due to trauma by performing a soul retrieval ceremony. The third cause of illness from a shaman's perspective would be any spiritual blockages or negative energies that a client has taken on due to the loss of his or her power or soul. These spiritual blockages also cause illness, usually in a localized area

of the body. It is the role of the shaman to extract and remove these harmful energies from the body.

Other ceremonies performed by shamans include welcoming children into the world, performing marriages, and helping people at the time of death transition from body to spirit. Shamans also work to encourage the growth of crops, help people to interpret dreams, and advise people who are experiencing trouble. Shamans are in charge of initiation ceremonies conducted around transitions from one phase of life into another, such as initiating children into adulthood. Shamans tell stories about the meaning of life and show us how the spirits can help us find our way when we feel lost in our life circumstances. They can remove spells or dark energies, and read the tenor of the community, picking up disharmony and imbalance. They create ceremonies to mourn the loss of a member of the community. Shamans also read signs and omens to choose auspicious times to undertake activities such as hunting and celebrations.

Shamans understand the cycles of nature—the cycles of the seasons and moons, and how the stars move across the sky. They read the signs that come with these changes and movements. They communicate with the weather spirits and maintain harmony and balance in their communities.

Typically, there would be more than one shaman in a community. Different shamans would be known for their spiritual areas of expertise. For instance, some shamans would be known for their great successes in particular healing ceremonies such as soul retrievals, while others are known for their divination abilities.

Over time, the practice of shamanism has adapted in response to different cultural needs and the changing needs of the times. Currently, there is a dramatic revival of shamanism in the West, with a wide range of people integrating shamanic practices into their lives, including students, housewives, teachers, psychotherapists, lawyers, nurses, doctors, politicians, and scientists. I believe that one of the main reasons for this revival is that people want to be able to access their own spiritual guidance. We want to stop giving away our power to socially acceptable authority figures. We know that we are the only ones who truly have the power to change our own lives.