



How Does The Shaman Heal?

By Susan Keiraleyn, Ph.D.

The spiritual healing methods of shamanism are now receiving increased and significant attention in our culture as a result of the widespread search by many for effective, efficient, and non-invasive assistance in healing and personal growth. Because shamanic healing affects the energy field of a person, it may be appropriate in a wide variety of circumstances and can be used for problems throughout the lifespan - even during and after death.

To better understand how the shaman heals it is important to understand some of the fundamental concepts of what shamanism is. Some people mistakenly believe that shamanism is a religion. In fact, however, it is not a religion but a specific set of methodologies for accessing the spirit or energy field of anything or anyone. The shaman heals by working in unseen/inner/spiritual reality to create changes there, which in turn create changes in seen/physical/ everyday reality.

The essential perspective of the practicing shaman is this:

1. Everything is alive. Everything has spirit and awareness.
2. Energy and matter are the same. Everything is vibration. Everything that

exists is an energy system within a greater energy system.

3. Everything that exists is connected to everything else in a web of energy or life.

4. Unseen/inner/spiritual reality affects visible reality.

Working within this system of perceptions, the shaman strives to create balance or harmony or free flow of energy or spirit. This work typically focuses on the individual human, but traditionally also often was applied to social groups such as an entire tribe. The same kind of healing energy work can be applied to anything that exists - animals, plants, and geographical locations - even to ideas.

What distinguishes a shaman from other types of healers are her/his methods. The central technique used by the shaman is what has been called "soul flight" or journeying. To journey, the shaman enters a particular kind of trance state sometimes called the "shamanic state of consciousness" or SSC. Entry into the SSC can be accomplished in a variety of ways; drumming is one very widely used induction method.

While in the SSC, the shaman sends out part of his/her consciousness/spirit/energy to obtain information or do work in the realm of spirit or energy. The information obtained by the shaman's journeying consciousness may come from a variety of sources, including communication with nonhuman beings and the shaman's own visions or "second sight." This information is retrieved and used for insight and healing.

The work the shaman may do while in the SSC has to do with directly affecting the presence or flow of energy in one or more energy systems. For example, a shaman might help a person heal a broken bone by opening up increased energy flow to the affected area; a shaman might help a person heal from emotional depression by restoring emotional energy lost as a result of a traumatic event.

In summary, the practice of shamanism involves making conscious connection with that which is spirit or life - that which is sacred - in all things. Healing can be accomplished through this connection by working directly to create greater balance and harmony of energy or spirit, and by bringing back to the "ordinary" world transformative awareness from sacred space and time.

To do healing work of any kind, a shaman typically will first make a journey to learn (through "seeing" or through communicating with helping spirits) the spiritual cause of a given problem. A particular problem in everyday life

(such as depression) might have very different spiritual causes in different people. In other words, illness that looks exactly the same symptomatically in two different people might be the manifestation of very different underlying situations. In one person, for example, depression and fatigue might be caused by spiritual injury to the heart; in another person, identical symptoms might be caused by habitual thought patterns of intense rumination and worry.

The shaman seeks to address the underlying spiritual cause that creates observable symptoms. Therefore, treatment of identical symptoms might be very different in two different people, depending on the spiritual cause. This concept is similar to ideas of traditional Chinese medicine, in which it is understood that "anything can come from anything." Once the shaman gains an understanding of the spiritual cause of a given problem, she/he may use a variety of healing modalities to resolve it. Although there are a number of specific techniques employed, they generally fall into three broad categories:

1. Taking things out of the energy field that don't belong there.
2. Restoring lost energy or power to the field.
3. Altering the balance or flow of energy within the field.

In all of these methods, the shaman is a mediator between physical and non-physical reality, between the seen and the unseen.