

Chapter One

The Shamanic Path

Bare awareness: the place where our mind falls silent with inner knowing.
—Colleen Deatsman

Shamans are students and practitioners of awareness. They study the natural world, observing the ebb and flow of energies as these energies pass from one form to another, from one being to the next. Shamans study the ritual of life, looking beyond and beneath the surface in order to see the driving mechanisms of the universe. The universe is layered, and shamans use their finely honed awareness to peel back these layers and see what lies underneath each one. On the surface, a shaman sees the sun rise, reach its peak, and set in the evening. The typical ritual we know as a day has its beginning, middle, and end, but the shaman knows, through observation of the next layer, that this day ritual is a cycle. It happens again and again and again. More than that, this day cycle is part of the larger, more complex annual cycle—another layer. That year cycle is also merely a part of the grand cycle of our sun as it moves through the cosmos, orbiting the galactic center over the course of 226 million years—yet another layer.

A study of these cycles provides useful information, but through shamanic discipline we can also develop an awareness of the universe's underlying nature. The shaman observes the consistency and utter simplicity of these cycles and begins to appreciate a natural pattern. The day is a circular cycle, as is the year; the horizon is a circle, the world itself a circle, and, through observation, it appears to the shaman that life itself is a circle. The shaman sees mankind as but a traveler on this disc of world as we move through the circle of our existence. Observing even more deeply, the shaman sees that we travelers are changing the nature of our world. We do not drive the wheel of time or the circle of life, but we do affect the very nature of our reality. The shaman seeks to understand the dynamic and the mechanism of that change.

There are many tools in the shamanic toolbox to accomplish this understanding. In this book we will investigate quite a few of these tools; but keep in mind that shamanism is a discipline requiring awareness and responsible application of that awareness. It provides tools not only to change the way we perceive reality, but also to change reality as well. The world stands at a precipice, and it has been brought here by the choices we, as a species, have made. We have collectively agreed to be in exactly the position we are in. That's a humbling thought. We have arrived at this juncture, this intersection of space and time and circumstance, largely by addressing what we are not and what we think we need to have, rather than what we are and what it is we can be. The truth is, we are a magnificent species, the flower of the universe, but we don't act like it. We act like clever animals, striving to make sure we are fed, safe, and comfortable. In this regard, we aren't that much more evolved than a groundhog. As long as we are in our own little holes, safe and sound, we don't need to pay attention to the rest of the world. No wonder the world is in trouble.

Shamanism cultivates a broader view than the involute perspective of self-gratification. It demonstrates, through experience, that we are part of something much grander, that we have a responsibility to express what we have the potential to become. In so doing, we shape reality and can therefore chart a different course for the planet, our species, and ourselves. Shamanism operates in the now. It requires that we engage in the moment. As a discipline, it provides the framework within which we can observe the universe as it is, dream a new one, and connect the dots to get us there. This requires an awareness of what is, and a commitment to be here and apply what we know right now.

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To a certain extent, what is can be defined and catalogued by empirical science or deduced through myriad natural philosophies. So what makes shamans unique in their ability to observe or function within extreme, unusual, or even confounding mundane circumstances that the coming age may present? Why does shamanism have an advantage over other disciplines when it comes to survival, adaptation, or the shifting of reality?

The answer is that shamans learn to observe with all levels of being. By exploring and utilizing methods of observation other than merely the five senses, the shaman can discern the forces that drive not only the universe, but also the individual sentient beings that live within it. We initially explore the limits, potential, and function of each element of self—body, mind, emotions, and soul/spirit.

We apply these elements of self by allowing the soul to express cleanly and clearly through our bodies and into the world. The shamanic life demands that we express soul in this manner. This is quite simple, really, as the expression of soul is perfectly natural. It is the added complexities of those things that get in the way of that, most particularly our conditioning, behaviors, and personal history, that are unnatural. Once we have integrated the self and can express soul in this manner, we can bring about positive change anywhere and everywhere we can secure Agreement to do so.

The circular nature of life demands that the shaman accept the soul as eternal, even while the body is ephemeral. Just as energy cannot be created or destroyed, neither can the soul. But if the body is temporary and the soul eternal, then the soul must have a reason, an agenda, for occupying a human body. Shamans discern this agenda and use their bodies as instruments of communication between the soul/spirit realm and the world. In order to be a clear channel for this communication, shamans must do the challenging work of clearing away attachments, disadvantageous or self-sabotaging behaviors, unhealthy mindsets and energetic blockages, and intrusions in order to integrate the self. This integration of body, mind, emotion, and soul allows shamans to be “hollow bones,” allowing Spirit to express itself clearly and cleanly through them.

The shamanic path utilizes everything available in the realm of body, mind, and soul in order to establish an extraordinary awareness of the universe. As such, it is a path of unflinching honesty, requiring us to see what we observe *as it is*, not just how we want it to be or as we think it should be. But the expanded awareness is far more than merely the observations gathered by mind alone.

The shamanic path is the path of the heart and the soul. It is a path of beauty, wholeness, sacred living, oneness and connectedness with all things and nonthings, awareness, mindfulness, respect, honor, and gratitude. It’s a path of extraordinary moments when nature and Spirit speak more clearly than the racket of our mental chatter and we stop everything and take notice, listening and feeling the message. It is a path where the central focus of life is creating balance, harmony, impeccability, and wholeness. It is a path that requires integrity and honesty—with one’s self and others. The shamanic path is a loving, healing path that invites all, yet it is also a truth-revealing path, turning away initiates not yet ready to face the awesome truth of reality. If you will continually accept the challenge (typically a daily choice), we invite you into the sacred circle of personal shamanic practitioners—a circle where healing, growth, change, and transformation are constants and where miracles happen.

She stared into the open sky knowing that she could fly. But how? “How can I fly with this human body?” she thought.

“By becoming me,” said Great-grandfather, who shape-shifted into Loon, and they took off into the blue. They flew for miles over towering pines and rolling mountains, swooping through the valleys and skimming the glistening lakes. Diving deep into the clear water, she became the silvery fish they sought for nourishment, and

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then headed upstream, driven by instinct. At just the right place, the very place that all of her ancestors had created and ended life, her experience as the salmon ended, and she slowly dissolved into the bottom of the river. In what seemed like minutes, but in ordinary reality would have taken millions of years, the essence that was once her, then loon, then fish, became sediment, soil, mineral, seed, seedling, majestic pine, petrified wood, stone, mountain, jagged stone, rounded river stone, small pebble consumed by Loon, mineral in Loon's bones, Loon, Great-grandfather, and her once more.

“Energy, is energy, is energy,” Great-grandfather instructs with a chuckle and a sweeping gnarled old hand. “The same energy that is you is me, the loon, the tree, the lake, the sky. The form that things take is determined by the density, compilation, and characteristics that the energy takes on at any given time. As you see, energy can be changed—we can change. We can change form to learn new things and have different experiences. We can change energy to heal imbalances. Misfortune, disease, and unhappiness are energies that can be changed into abundance, health, and joy. If you want to change something, intend for it to change. Use your mind and willpower to concentrate your energy, the energy of creation, and the energy of that thing. Focus the energy into the change. See it, feel it, experience it, and believe in the change. It's far easier than you think. Look, you just did it without thinking! Spirit will help if you ask. Trust and believe. It's as simple as converting an electric current into light, a kernel of corn into an ear of corn.”

The path of shamanism will shape you in much the same way that energy shapes things in nature. The natural forces of destruction and creation will help you eliminate the things in your self and your life that no longer serve your highest good and cultivate those things that do. This transformative process will be unique to each person. For some, it will bring about a softening of the hard edges of the self and the ego, causing the mind and soul to become smooth like a river stone. For some, the process will facilitate them becoming more assertive and to stand solid and strong like a mountain. For some, the path will help them become firmly grounded and rooted in Mother Earth while they bend and sway with the winds of life, like the great trees. For some, the process will help them flow through life like the great rivers, liberating resistance and attachment in order to plummet into the abyss like the majestic waterfall. For all, the process is always experiential and pragmatic. This path requires more than studying, thinking, or knowing. The power of this path is doing, practicing, living, and being.

As we said in the introduction, shamanism is the oldest living path of spirituality and healing known to man. Shamanism is a way of life and a practice that is rich in tradition, eclecticism, and mysticism; as such, it is a living power path. It is currently practiced in many countries, where it coexists, blends with, and complements all the major and minor world religions, including Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. It is practical, not dogmatic, largely non-dualistic, and has no specific set of rules to follow. Shamanism is interactive, creative, and constantly dynamic, based on what works in each unique set of circumstances.

The term *shaman* (pronounced *shah-maan*) has been adapted from the Tungus people of Siberia and means “one who sees in the dark.”ⁱⁱ This name denotes the shamans' ability to journey out of ordinary space and time into nonordinary reality, where they connect with helping spirits to receive guidance, to gain insight or power, or to diagnose and treat illness. The term *seer* also reflects this ability to journey into nonordinary reality and experience extraordinary information firsthand. The shaman is the bridge between the ordinary reality in which we live and the nonordinary reality that exists just outside of our everyday perceptions.

The role of the shaman is diverse. Shamans are the counselors, advisors, mediators, and psychologists of their communities. They are the teachers of spiritual ways and the wise sages that understand the universal laws of energy and nature and know how to harness these energies for the benefit of the people. They are the doctors, nurses, midwives, bone-setters, herbalists, massage therapists, and the energy practitioners of their

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communities. In shamanism, physical, mental, and emotional illnesses are recognized as being caused by spiritual and energetic imbalances that can be affected by spiritual intervention. In the capacity of healers, or medicine persons, shamans journey on behalf of their patient/client to the spirit world to meet with their helping spirits. While there, they use Spirit guidance and an array of techniques to diagnose illness etiology and restore wholeness and power to the person. The shaman usually expresses the wisdom offered from the spirit world to the client to help them on their path of healing and living in balance.

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