

WALKING
BETWEEN THE
WORLDS.
TECHNIQUES OF
MODERN
SHAMANISM
VOL.1

BY

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a collection of practical exercises, the aim of which is to enhance awareness of the world around us. The first part of this book deals with basic sensory exercises, while the second half deals with trance states, and some of the basic group dynamics involved in helping other people into them. Using these techniques will not make you a 'shaman/shamanka', but they are drawing on the shamanic outlook - which depends from an enhanced awareness of our environment, and the ability to mediate between the everyday, and the sacred aspects of our experience. "Walking between the Worlds" requires that we learn to extend our perceptions from the ordinary, to see the extraordinary which lies within it. Many of the techniques require group exploration, since it is impossible to grow in total isolation from others.

Many of the exercises were originally part of the Shamanic Development Course run by Sheila Broun and myself in 1987. I am particularly indebted to Sheila, whose continuing work is a spur towards my own efforts. Also, to the course participants, who gave much in the way of enthusiasm, criticism, and their own experience, so that the course far surpassed our own hopes for its success. Also, I would like to thank Rich Westwood for supporting this project, and just about everyone to whom I've ever written to or talked with on this subject.



THE SHAMANIC SURVIVAL

The Shaman is one of the most ancient and one of the most enduring figures in human evolution. Shamanism is the source of both Magic and Religion, and as Mircea Eliade put it, is "an archaic technique of ecstasy". Its structural elements can be traced well back into the Upper Palaeolithic era, and these elements are essentially similar throughout many different cultures, in different frames of time. Even though the surface details of the shamanic world-view tends to differ even within particular cultures, the underlying principles remain similar, supplying some elemental requirement of the human psyche which has remained constant over a period of hundreds of thousands of years.

Shamanism shows a remarkable survival, and there are many examples of shamans co-existing with other religious or magical systems in a given culture. Most of the world's healers are shamans, for example. As societies evolve into more complex forms than that of the hunter-gatherer, the roles that the shaman fulfils is taken up by others. From shamanism arises theatre, religion, magic, art, dance, music and perhaps even writing and language. traces of shamanism remain, in folklore, customs and myth - deference to those who can manipulate the hidden forces of the world as tricksters and healers.

Westerners are increasingly turning to shamanism in a search to revitalise and reintegrate themselves into a world-view which is beyond that offered by our culture.

Until fairly recently, interest in shamanism was limited to those researching into ethnology and anthropology; and psychoanalysts such as Carl Gustav Jung. Now it seems that shamanism is suddenly very popular. Business managers are sent on weekend courses that include firewalking, whilst the accumulated wisdom of many tribal peoples is being hungrily devoured by people who are eager to contact ancient wisdom and a sense of belonging. writers such as Carlos Casteneda and Lynn Andrews have made shamanism accessible and popular.

The Shamanic World-View

The term "shaman" is derived from the Siberian Tungusic root "saman". The word Shaman usually refers to a male practitioner, whilst the word shamanka refers to a female. As a loose generalisation, it is possible to draw a composite picture of the worldview of the shaman. The universe is multi-layered, with both a celestial overworld and a chthonic underworld, with appropriate spirit rulers and other denizens. there are also rulers of the principle directions or quarters. The levels of the universe are connected by a central axis, the axis mundi which appears as a sky ladder or worldtree. It is via this central axis that the shaman gains entry to all the levels of the universe.

Another central feature of the shaman's world is that humanity, animals, and all other life is equal - the shaman is at one with nature. Such equality may be expressed for example, in terms of rituals to appease the souls of dead animals. The precise arrangement of the skulls of animals so that they face east (the place of rebirth) is found in many cultures. Both Finnish and American Plains Indians for example, perform such rites. A related concept is that of metamorphosis, being the belief that humans and animals are capable of assuming each others shape. In many genesis-stories, this ability was had by all, but it was lost, usually through taboo violation, and became the sole province of the shamanka. In South America, the most common doppleganger to the

shaman is the Jaguar, so much so that the words for Jaguar and shaman are interchangeable.

The idea of a gateway between the worlds is also central to the shamanic vision. This is the entrance to otherworlds, where dwell ancestral spirits and demons. The gateway is often represented as clashing rocks, the jaws of a monster, or icebergs.

The Origins of Shamanism

The roots of shamanism are lost in antiquity. However we do know, that given the similarities between shamanistic practices in the new world and Europe, that the fundamental elements of shamanism had been established as the first Paleo-Americans began to move across the Bering land bridge which connected Siberia to Alaska. This bridge disappeared about 12,000 years ago, as the Arctic glaciers melted.

Another source of the origins of shamanic practice lies in the study of psychotropic plants. The ethnobiologist R.G. Wasson proposed that all major world religions grew from psychotropic experiences, and most shamanic cultures have some form of psychotropic plant associated with them. Siberian shamans make use of *Amanita Muscaria*, which has been tentatively identified as the divine Soma of the Rig-Vedas. There are at least 80 different types of psychotropic plants that were, and continue to be used in North and South America, and American Indian shamans have made extensive use of both the red Mescal bean and peyote. An American researcher, R.K. Seigal, has also demonstrated a link between the psychotropic-induced visions of shamans and tribal pottery and weaving designs.

Of course drugs are not the only means of inducing ecstasy, and many shamanic techniques revolve around drumming, dancing, singing, fasting, sleeplessness, and physical feats of endurance.

Shamanic Traditions

The shaman, as the sole mediator between humanity and the universe of spirits and omens, originated in the very early stages of human cultural development. The hunter-gatherer stage of society endured for hundreds of thousands of years. As societies began to move towards settled agriculture (this being only about 10,000 years ago) then the shamans began to differentiate into a developing priesthood.

The hunter-gatherer society is a closely-knit culture, geared towards the least possible change both within and across generations. This is a stark contrast to modern society, where the pace of social change is seemingly outstripping our capacity to assimilate it.

As Alvin Toffler put it, many of us are suffering from future shock. This naturally poses a problem for anyone seeking to emulate the shaman in our society. All lines of tradition have been broken, and in the West, we now have the ability to enter any world-view at will and imprint its symbolism on our minds. If you work at it long enough, then the deeper regions of the mind will 'speak' to you in terms of a particular set of symbols. There is a wide range of belief systems which we can adopt with varying degrees of success, and the criteria seems to be that you adopt something that fires your imagination to greater heights. Our idea of spiritual progress has become synonymous

with the idea that as we change ourselves, we change our society as a whole. This idea is a direct antithesis to that of the hunter-gatherer, where any changes which threaten the continuity of tradition are viewed with great suspicion.

The Value of Shamanism

Having said that, we cannot dismiss shamanism as having no relevance to modern society. Obviously it does, but this very much depends how you approach it. In an age where most information is transmitted via print or electronics, the value of adopting shamanic techniques lies in recovering knowledge from within, and also in relating with other people. Ecstasy can be freed from the purely private domain and returned to the communal. Also, in trying to regain the spirit of our collective past, we can regain a sense of community with our ancestors, using techniques which carry us back to our forebears on the savannah plains of Africa. this can endow us with a sense of community that surpasses all cultural differences. In learning to see the world as shamans, we reconnect with ourselves, and can adapt much easier to the world around us.



BASIC EXERCISES

At the outset, we should acknowledge that shamanic techniques have a certain glamour about them. Many people aspire to use shamanic-style practices and approaches to their own evolution. Two things should be stressed; it's very hard work and, unless you have no other commitments at all, it will take you far longer than you think. The exercises contained in this book are ones that I (and others) have found useful in taking our first steps into a magical universe.

As I see it, the basic essentials of the shamanic approach are:

- (i) Enhancement of our senses
- (ii) Awareness and understanding of our own BodyMind
- (iii) Understanding of self
- (iv) Empathy
- (v) A desire to engage with others (be they people or spirits)

As I said in the introduction, you can't go off and 'learn to be a shaman' on your own.

Unlike the Western-Mediterranean tradition of 'secret schools', the shaman does not learn in isolation from others. You need a community, no matter how small or spread out, to live and learn in. It is essential to get feedback, advice and criticism from others. Anyone can declare themselves to be anything, if they themselves are the only important opinions in their mental walnuts.

Likewise, you can enter a particular system and earn for yourself all sorts of fancy degrees and titles, but out in the big wide world, the only thing that matters is competence - being able to deliver the goods. Which, given the complexity and diversity of our society, could range from blessing houses, officiating at funerals and marriages, to helping someone else get their Income Support claim through. A great deal depends on what skills you have, what you are prepared to do, and in what directions you wish to go. As far as I can see, it doesn't matter what system you adopt, so long as the fruits of your activity are relevant to you, and better yet, meaningful to your clients.

A Note on Practice

One of the aims of the exercises in this book is to help you break the sensory or BodyMind habits which we unconsciously develop. In effect, to extend our perception from the ordinary into the extraordinary.

This requires practice which, in turn, requires determination, tenaciousness, and at times, sheer bloody mindedness.

In attempting these basic exercises, you will encounter the 'enemy within' - your own inertia and resistance to learning new skills. This is a far more tricky opponent than any spirit you can meet in dream or vision. As you probably already know, it is easier to

come up with an excuse for delaying an exercise just for today than to actually get down and do it.

I would strongly recommend that all exercises, experiments, insights and experiences be recorded in some form of workbook. This will provide you with a continuous account of your progress, and is an invaluable resource for you to go back and refer to in the future.

The Three Stages of Learning

In performing an exercise, we tend to experience three distinct phases of learning:

1. Initially, the novelty of the exercise gives rise to the feeling that you are progressing very quickly, and reaping the benefits of the new exercise.
2. As time passes, however, this initial enthusiasm is replaced by a 'dry' phase during which it seems that you are not getting anywhere. It is at this point that many people give up on what they are doing. The only thing to do is to grit your teeth and hang on in there.
3. If this 'hump' can be struggled through, then you will be rewarded by seeing just how far you have progressed, and will be able to feel the full benefits of what you have been doing. It is definitely a struggle to get over the 'hump' of the second phase, but if you are at least aware of what is happening, then it helps you not to give up at the first signs of inertia.



SIGHT EXERCISES

Our sense of vision tends to be the major route by which we perceive what is going on around us. We are continually bombarded to a vast array of visual images from our environment, and even when we close our eyes, can visualise a world just as rich in detail and events.

We rely on sight so much that as soon as we lose this sense, our others are automatically magnified. The first point to stress about sight is that there is much around us that we don't notice. Try out the following exercises:

Walking a Route

This involves taking a route that you are used to walking, so much so that you don't tend to notice the details of things along the route. This time, try to be intensely aware of all the details of things around you, and later, write down everything that you noticed. A group variant on this exercise is to move a group of people from one area to another, and ask them to note down everything they noticed about the intervening space.

Kim's Game

This consists of placing several objects on a tray, looking at them for a minute or so, and then covering them with a cloth. See how many objects you can recall in 30 seconds. Try this with both familiar and unfamiliar objects.

Colour Census

Take a day (or even a week) and pick a colour. Try to be aware of how that colour appears in your surroundings, and how, if at all, it affects your moods, thoughts and perhaps, those of people around you.

Exercises such as these bring home the realisation that, very often, we are lazy when it comes to really seeing what goes on around us. We tend to tune out more information than we actually allow ourselves to notice, and we often don't notice subtle changes in our environment. Yet it is these subtle clues which are often most important in our magical development.

Colour Meditation

The aim of this exercise is to stimulate the ability to visualise. Imagine sounds, smells, tastes and even touch as though they were colours, and try and let these colours flood the field of your inner eye.

Animal/Plant/Colour

It can be interesting (and fun) to discover new ways of looking at other people. A group exercise that we tried out during the Shamanic Development Course was for everyone in the group to study each other for a few minutes, and to assign each person an animal, plant and colour which they felt was appropriate to that person. Each person then read out their list in turn. Occasionally, people's attributions were remarkably similar for the same person. It's possible to use this exercise as the basis of a discussion on how

people's attributions relate to the four cardinal elements and other symbolic associations.

From looking at other people we pick up a vast range of signals and clues, many of which are 'coloured' by our own habits, beliefs and attitudes. A way to highlight this is to sit in a public place and watch people passing by. Look at someone for a few seconds, and then see if you can make up a story about what you imagine their lives to be like, based on your first glimpse of them. You may be surprised to find how much detail you can infer about someone from only a quick glance. Paying attention to others, and being able to cast aside your own attitudes is an important skill to develop if you are interested in any way of working with others.

"Seeing Auras"

There is an old story about a young man who read a book about the auras of trees and their different colours. He spent a great deal of time trying to concentrate on seeing the auras of trees; alas, with little success. One day, he considered a Rowan tree, and wondered what the aura would look like, if only he could see it. He thought that it would be a kind of golden, russet-brown, with yellowish edges and....and suddenly realised that he was seeing the tree's aura. He also realised that seeing auras was not so much about seeing something physical, more a case of opening your mind to impressions. As sight is our dominant sense, we tend to interpret these impressions in terms of visual images such as colours, but there is no reason why we cannot use other senses as well. It's also worth remembering that very often, we see what we expect to see, not what is actually there.



SOUND EXERCISES

We are continually bombarded by sounds from all directions, from the ceaseless flow of industrial and electronic noise, to the slow thump of our heartbeats and the rush of blood through our veins. We tend to spend more time deliberately not listening, screening information out, than we do actually paying attention to what is going on. Our brains learn to distinguish between noises that are 'significant' and those which do not threaten us. There are plenty of reports for example, of soldiers who could sleep through an artillery barrage, but be wakened up by the sound of someone sliding back a rifle bolt a few feet away.

Active Listening

Try sitting in a room which has a steady, repetitive noise in the background, such as a clock ticking. If you are occupied with something else, you will eventually find that the noise slips below the level of your awareness. It can be interesting to try this exercise on a daily basis, until you can maintain awareness of background noise, without losing awareness of it, or for that matter, fiercely concentrating upon it.

Listening is very important when we come to dealing with other people. Very often we give the appearance of listening to others, but in actuality we are only waiting for them to finish so we can get on with what we want to say next. catching yourself doing this can be a valuable lesson.

Humming Meditation

This is a group exercise which begins with everyone sitting in a circle, eyes closed. Each member of the group begins to hum, and there is no rhythm to be kept to; each person can hum at their own pitch, and rest when they like. It should be done for at least 15 minutes, and then the results discussed.

Sound Concentration

The simple repetition of a word or phrase is one of the simplest and most effective ways of entering a state of one-pointedness. All that you have to do is sit in a comfortable position and repeat, verbally then silently, a word or phrase that you have chosen. After a while you will lose awareness of doing so, and it can seem that it is no longer you that repeats the sound, but that it repeats itself through you.

Feeling Music

One way of enhancing our ability to listen is to use music, either in a group or solo setting. A very simple exercise is to use any relaxation technique and then listen to a piece of taped music. The idea is to try and feel the music across your body, and see if any images, or even smells, well up in your mind.



SMELL EXERCISES

Our sense of smell is probably the least understood, and most undervalued of our senses. It is often difficult to describe a particular smell, unless we resort to comparing it with others. Smells are all around us, yet unless a fragrance is particularly sweet or pungent, most of them remain below the level of our conscious awareness. Many smells are unnoticed, unless we make a conscious effort to pay attention to them.

Yet smells have a remarkably powerful evocative effect upon us. The merest whiff of an odour can stir in us desire, hunger, thirst or bring to mind a past event. Smells are a hotline to memory. Most hospitals nowadays have "Coma Kits" a range of powerful synthetic smells, ranging from freshly-cut grass to cigar smoke, which are used to try and awaken accident victims from deep comas. It is worth just going out of your way to notice smells, and to pay close attention to how they might influence your behaviour. It is also interesting to pay attention to your own body odour, which is still something of a taboo in our sterile-conscious society. Sweat changes its odour from time to time, and this is often related to diet and general health. We communicate a great deal of subliminal information to each other in the form of pheromones (external chemical messengers). It is possible for people, as well as animals, to pick up messages of fear, pain, pleasure, and a variety of illnesses.

The aura that some people seem to have about them - causing fear or peace in others, may be due to the pheromones they are giving off. People who are grieving the loss of a partner often report that they smell the unique odour of their lost lover, and feel through this, a comforting presence. Similarly, many spirits make their appearance known to us by a sudden influx of smell, and strange odours are often associated with UFO encounters.

Memory/Image Association

This exercise demonstrates the evocative power of smell. Have someone prepare a variety of aromatic substances (such as essential oils) in unlabelled containers. Then take each container, and sniff the contents, while relaxed. As you sniff the substance, allow memories and images to well up, and pursue each image that the smell evokes.

Building up a Smellphabet

Rather than relying on someone else's attributions of perfumes & incenses, it is useful for you to try and build up your own. This is very useful if you wish to make your own incense, or if you want to use aromatics in healing or trance work.



SPACE EXERCISES

Shamanic magic involves the exploration of 'inner' space, via visualisation, trance and dreaming. Equally important, however, is our sense of the space which is around us; the immediate environment, and that bubble which we feel to be our personal territory. The degree of closeness which we allow another person near us is generally indicative of the degree of intimacy which we share with them. People tend to have very different feelings as to what constitutes their 'personal space', and it is important, when working with others, to acknowledge and be sensitive to this. This was brought home to me very clearly a few years ago, whilst standing in the lobby of a youth hostel in Cairo. I was standing watching some Arabs trying to make conversation with a group of American tourists. The Arabs walked up to the tourists and stood very close to them. The Americans clearly found this uncomfortable, even threatening, and backed away. This continued for a few minutes until both groups broke away, muttering angrily to each other. The problem was, of course, that the two groups had very different standards of how much space to give each other.

Awareness of peoples' space needs is important when it comes to healing, and it's important to know when to keep your distance, and when to move closer to someone. This very much depends on honing your ability to observe, empathise with, and intuitively assess others.

People who are very nervous or anxious tend to curl up so that their body extends into as little space as possible. The more confident we are, the more we use our body to extend our own space. Our everyday perception of space is that it separates and insulates us from objects and other people. This is a perceptual 'trap' which we can grow out from, by experiencing space in different ways.

Blind Walks

A simple way of exploring our surroundings in a different way is to do so blindfolded, being led around by a partner. Try it for a few minutes and then swap over. Try it again, but this time attempt to sense what is in front of you, as though the space around you was an organ of perception.

It can be very interesting to explore attitudes to personal space in a group, particularly how people feel when their space is ignored, infringed or disrupted. By examining and understanding our perception of space, we can learn how to manipulate it.

As a solo exercise, try and observe yourself in different situations, from stillness to movement, and how you relate to the space around you. We can learn to feel that the space around us is a medium, or an organ of communication through which we can send ripples or waves. T'ai Chi is a very good BodyMind exercise in this respect, as its slow, graceful movements are useful in enhancing the feeling of being immersed in a fluid-like space.



SPEECH EXERCISES

Speech is the main form of communication that we use. we are all capable of making a wide range of noises with which to express ourselves, but it is easy to undervalue the power of our voices. The voice is an important carrier of power, from sacred chants to working songs, prayer to battle chants - all have a powerful affect on us. As the word 'en-charm-ment' suggests, the voice has long been associated with magical effects. Songs, chants, invocations, prayers and even nursery rhymes can be found in all cultures as ways of raising power, especially when combined with dance and music.

Use of the Voice

The way in which we use our voices is a powerful way of projecting our personalities. the way in which we deliver speech in a given situation can reveal many things (both to ourselves and others) about our feelings. To use speech effectively we must be:

- (i) Confident
- (ii) Aware of others
- (iii) Relaxed
- (iv) Clear in our thoughts
- (v) Aware of how speech affects a situation.

With practice and experience, we can learn to use our voices so that we can carry emotions and feelings to others, ranging from stirring people to enthusiasm and action, to lulling gently into relaxation using soft words and tones.

Group Chants

Group Chants are one of the most effective ways of raising power, and can range from the simple "We are at one with the infinite Sun, forever, forever, forever" to the more complex "Darksome Night and Shining Moon" chant used by Wiccans. whatever the ideas the chant expresses, a rhythm is soon built up, which carries everyone along with it.

The Spinning Mantra

In a normal group chant, each member of the group repeats the whole verse. In the 'Spinning Mantra' however, one person intones the first line, a second, the second line, and so on. One note is used throughout, with the same syllables stressed on each line (for example, the second and fourth syllables on each line). A variant on this chant is to begin with the group sitting in a circle, then have each person stand up one by one, and begin to wander around, stopping in front of each other and keeping the chant going.

Gibberish

For this exercise, find a partner and choose a theme for a conversation. No recognisable words can be used, and the aim is to try and develop expression using tone and inflection to convey messages.

You will find it useful to explore the different ways in which you can use your voice. Using a tape recorder to give yourself an instant replay is useful. Most people seem to start out using songs, chants, and invocations that have been written by someone else, but eventually, once you have built your confidence up, you can move to using words which come spontaneously to mind. Only sheer practice will do this for you, but the voice is one of our most powerful projective tools for propelling ourselves, and others, into trance.



TOUCH EXERCISES

Our sense of touch - being able to feel pressure, heat, and texture, is something that we tend to take for granted. we only realise how much we rely on it, when it is lost to some part of the body. Touch is important in both survival and communication, particularly intimate communication. Speech is more of a social means of communication, whereas touch is much more intimate & personal. A single touch can carry more meaning than a thousand words. When gentle words and touch are combined, they can transport us to others worlds – in relaxation, sleep, visions, or the illumined darkness of lovers.

Enhancing the sensitivity of our awareness of touch is very useful, since it often becomes the dominant sense in healing, propelling others into trance, and psychically examining objects and places. It is well known that when we lose our vision, our sensitivity to tactile impressions is greatly increased, so a good starting point is to work in darkness, or blindfolded.

Blind Explorations

A beginning group exercise is to have people pair off and sit facing each other. Both then close their eyes, and one person gently explores the others hands using their fingers - allowing impressions & images to arise in their minds. If people feel comfortable in doing this, then faces can be explored as well. Another useful exercise is to examine objects (both familiar and unfamiliar) in darkness, or to try and assemble interlocking puzzles.

Seeing through the Skin

It is possible to see using your hands. many healers develop this ability, and it involves placing your hand at a point on the clients' body and letting impressions well up in your mind. It is not unusual to see trauma or pain as a knotted bolus or jagged spike, which can then be removed. Possibly the hardest part is learning to relax so that your mind opens up to the fleeting sensory impressions. At first it feels like guessing, but practice will develop your confidence.

Colour Sensing

Cut out squares of coloured paper, and have someone else arrange them on a table so that you do not know the sequence, and then have them devise some sort of covering over the table, under which you can slip your hands. Try and feel with your hands for the colour of the paper - call out the colour you feel, and see if the square you pull out is that colour. This exercise may take a good deal of practice, as you have to learn to sense the different feelings in your hands, and learn to associate them with particular colours.

Sensitising the Hands

This exercise is used as a warm-up before working with your hands, for example in healing, massage, or working with crystals. Begin by rubbing your hands together briskly, and then feeling an energy field between them, like a ball. try stretching and compressing the ball, and bringing your hands further apart until you can no longer feel it. This helps you to focus your awareness into your hands.

Using touch is not only a matter of sensitivity, but also knowing how, when, and where to touch someone. Some people like to be touched, while others do not, and only by allowing yourself to become sensitive to others, will you be able to judge how to act in a particular situation. One of the best ways to learn to develop this sense is with a lover. in the post-coital afterglow, all the senses are magnified, as is one's sensitivity and empathy. By exploring touch in this most intimate of settings, we can learn how to develop the sense, and use it in other situations.



STATUS SHIFTS

It is well known that the shaman encompasses many different roles - such as that of trickster, sacred clown, healer, mediator and sorcerer. It is one thing to know of these different facets, but quite another to actually assume them in a practical situation. This requires not only confidence, insight and empathy, but also some kind of acquired skill in knowing how to present and project yourself in different roles. One of the basic ways of approaching this is to look at Status Shifts.

We move through status shifts all the time, and tend not to be too aware of this, unless we move into a situation where the apparent difference in status is quite marked, such as in teacher/pupil, healer/client, speaker-audience interactions. Status is concerned with how we present ourselves in a given situation; our stance, tone of voice, words we use, eye contact and gestures. Someone who is attempting to raise their status in a situation tends to raise their voice, attempt to catch people's eye, make witty remarks and generally boost their position. A great deal depends on what you say, and the way in which you say it. Here's an example:

A: What are you reading?

B: Weaving the Web.

A: Oh yes. I've read it. It's not bad for a *beginners* book.

Here, A is using the subject matter to raise his status in relation to B. If A wanted to lower his status, the conversation could go like this:

A: What are you reading?

B: Weaving the Web

A: Really? I've *always wanted* to read that.

These sorts of transactions go on all the time. Stephen Potter called them examples of "OneUpManship" in a series of humorous books - well worth reading if you want to look at this subject in more detail.

A further complication is that not only do we go through continuous status shifts, but we tend to ascribe status onto other people in accordance with our expectations. As a therapy student studying medicine, I often walked around hospital corridors in a white coat. I was often mistaken for a doctor, both by visitors and other staff, and accorded high status as a consequence. I just found this embarrassing, but a friend who had more confidence, took to wandering round with a couple of thick books in his pockets, and a name tag that he had acquired somewhere. People automatically thought he was a doctor, given his dress and air of complete assurance, and never thought to ask him why he was in a particular place - which was often somewhere which was out of bounds to students.

Conversely, some people go out of their way to disguise or reject the high status that others project upon them. This is a favourite trick amongst Zen Masters, who answer a students' erudite questions with humour or seeming nonsense.

“Master, does a duck have Bhudda-nature?”

“Quack.”

Gurus and Disciples

This is a two-player game to demonstrate status shifts and how we tend to collude with each other when we play them. One player is a Guru, licensed to pontificate on all manner of subjects, while the other is the disciple, who asks awed questions and hangs on the master's every word. After trying this for a few minutes, swap the roles around. the game can also be played using gibberish instead of speech.

The lowering and raising of status for a sacred purpose is very common throughout all cultures. Popular myths often feature the king who changes places with a beggar, or the god who comes to the earth in mortal guise. The fool-king, who is accorded great status for a day and then ritually sacrificed, appears in many different cultures, from Europe to the Aztec civilisation. This theme is particularly well-treated in the pagan classic, *The Wicker Man*. In this film, the policeman 'victim' is given very high status - as only a very high status sacrifice will appease the gods.

It is useful for the shamanic practitioner to become adroit at shifting status to suit a particular situation. One problem is that we tend to develop a particular status projection, and manoeuvre ourselves into a position where we can adopt it and thereby feel safe. A Shamanka in her own culture is automatically ascribed a great deal of high status by her people and so her different roles are still based on that status. Also, it is part of the shaman's role to momentarily disrupt the status conventions of the tribal culture.

Perhaps the nearest figure we have to this is the comedian or street performer. In our culture, anyone can declare themselves to be a shaman, but this won't automatically mean that you are accorded high status. This will depend very much on the situation, how much you are able to project yourself, and also being good at what you do. If you are truly competent, then your clients will accord you high status. I'm not saying that your clients should worship the dust beneath your feet, but on the other hand, if they don't have much faith in your ability to help them, then working with them can be more difficult. A good deal of practical shamanism depends on your personal charisma, and how you use it. One example where status shifts play a key role is in leading groups. Now it is currently fashionable for group leaders to take a very non-directive approach to organisation. This is fine if you want people to relax and feel at ease with what they are doing, but it's not always appropriate. Whilst co-running the Shamanic Development Course for example, I tended to play down the role of leader. However, when we came to do a workshop on Masks, I deliberately changed my approach - adopting a more serious bearing, standing up rather than sitting, and generally behaving in a way that commanded attention. This was deliberate, since teaching maskwork can involve people entering trance-states bordering on possession. In this sort of situation, a group leader is definitely required, to act as an 'anchor' for the situation, giving group members the confidence to 'let go', knowing that someone is in control of the situation and will not let it get out of hand. Once we had finished the mask workshop, however, I dropped the serious leader role and went back to being more nondirective. It seems to be easier to move from playing relaxed to serious, than from playing serious to relaxed. I've noticed

this in films of tribal ceremonies, where the shamans orchestrating the ritual can be at times quite indulgent to the whims of their performers, and at others, keeping a tight rein on the situation.



JACK YOUR BODY...

The ability to enter trance states is a prerequisite of most magical systems, particularly Shamanism. A good deal of a shaman's training is concerned with cultivating the ability to enter trance states and control them, for it is in such states, that much of the shaman's power resides. There are many routes into trance, and indeed, there are many different shades of trance. The aim of this series is to discuss some trance states, where possible giving practical techniques for entering them. At this point it may be appropriate to make a disclaimer - some routes into trance are dangerous - so if you try anything out, the responsibility is yours alone.

What is Trance?

A good question, that. In modern Western Society we tend to have very fixed ideas about what constitutes a trance state - we tend to think of someone who is passive, eyes closed & limp, or oblivious to their surroundings. We tend to think of hypnotised people (the word hypnosis derives from Hypnos - Greek god of sleep) as quiescent & awaiting instructions. Two incidents come to mind at this point. The first was many years ago, sitting in a circle watching a "sensitive" woman enter trance. It started normally enough, but she began to thrash about and scream - no one knew quite what to do, and some members of the group tried to restrain her in various ways. As it turned out, in her trance, the woman was struggling against a demon, and the attempted ministrations of the onlookers were hindering her performance. In the second incident, I found myself in a similar position. After participating in a completely botched-up ritual, I wished to leave the place where I was staying, but didn't fancy wandering the streets at 3:am in the morning. So, finding a quiet room, I performed a shape-shifting exercise (I'll go into the details of this in a while) and entered a fairly deep trance. Eventually, some of the people present decided that I was under "astral attack by demons" and forcibly brought me back - not a very pleasant experience, as you can imagine. The moral of these tales is that we tend to have very definite ideas about what people "do" in trance states, and when something happens outside this framework, it is easy to do the wrong thing.

We tend to think of trance states as very definite & different to 'normal' consciousness. But 'normal' consciousness is very difficult to track down. We move in and out of different shades of trance all the time, from daydreams to the total absorption that occurs whilst performing any energetic physical activity - and both daydreaming and physical exertion are routes into Shamanic trance.

A problem that we acquire from our culture is that we tend to be very 'head-oriented' in our experience - caught up with the continual commentary of the inner dialogue, and the words & images of the Hyperreal. Our sense of being a stable personality is maintained by transactions, both real and imaginary, with others. Move somewhere isolated and the self becomes more malleable - another classical shamanic gambit for entering trance states. The personality we acquire sets the limits on what we can, and cannot do. Often, by entering trance states, whether intentionally or not, we can perform feats or tasks that are normally outside our normal repertoire. If the self-referential awareness is frozen by shock, or distracted, the body seems to take over, moving us out of the way of danger. We like to think of ourselves as being 'in control' of our bodies. This is in itself a problem, as 'letting go' and becoming disinhibited

(especially in a group setting) is very difficult for some of us - letting it all hang out is generally frowned upon. In other cultures, however, disinhibition is sanctioned and is the mark of a successful event. Here's Lucian's description of a Priestess of Delphi entering trance:

She went blundering frantically about the shrine, with the god mounted on the nape of her neck, knocking over the tripods that stood in her path. The hair rose on her scalp, and when she tossed her head the wreaths went flying over the bare floor....her mouth foamed frenziedly; she groaned, gasped, uttered weird sounds, and made the huge cave re-echo with her dismal shrieks. In the end, Apollo forced her to intelligible speech.

Entering trance is not always a pleasant experience, particularly trance states involving possession. The feeling that something else is using your limbs, & that your voice is not your own, is very odd. The natural tendency, especially for Westerners, is to resist the experience, even when the incoming spirit is a beneficent one. Often, people who are possessed have no memory or awareness of what happened to them. Shamans often resort to drugs, exertion or ritual to temporarily blot out the personality, making possession easier.

Dancing

Gazing

Gyrating

Fasting

Drumming

Sleep Deprivation

Singing

Sensory Deprivation

Chanting

Sensory Overload

Hyperventilating

Emotional Arousal

Pleasure

Pain

Choose any of the above routes - pursued relentlessly enough, with determination and practice, you can use any of them to enter trance states. Shamanic group rituals are well-orchestrated uses of many of the above options. Only by repeatedly pushing yourself over the edge will you learn to override the tendency to jerk out of trance when you feel your control slipping. But the trance itself is the means, rather than the end -

this should be some objective, such as entry into one of the innerworlds, possession by a spirit, or acts of will. Different shamanic cultures can sometimes be characterised by the dominant routes into trance. The nomadic tribes of the North American Plains used pain as a route into trance, demonstrating at the same time physical prowess; while the Kaula shamans of India enter trance via prolonged sexual ecstasy. Use of drugs to enter trance is, of course, an important part of shamanic activity, but I'll go into that another time.

Why enter Trance states?

Here are some good reasons:

1) Knowledge (i.e. that which cannot be gained in other ways) - this ranges from asking auntie Freda what's it like on the other side, to asking a specific question about herbs to a particular healing spirit. This can sometimes involve journeying to particular parts of the innerworlds to consult with a particular entity.

2) Enhancement of Abilities Possession by a war-god enhances martial prowess, or temporary authority over other spirits. For example, I had a client who had a recurring throat problem. I examined her in a light 'vision' trance and saw a toad-like creature that had swelled itself up and lodged in her throat. No way was it going to come out willingly. My allies advised me (again in trance) that the only entity the spirit would take notice of was an even bigger toad, so we performed a healing ceremony during which I became possessed by a toad-spirit, in order to interact with the one in my clients' throat.

3) Communal Ecstasy The shaman provides a very important task for tribe or community - mediating between the everyday world and the larger-than-life world of myth and communal lore. The shaman becomes, or allows others to become involved in sacred mythic participation. The shaman acts as the guide - navigating the secret paths of the community's cosmology.

This brings up one of the biggest stumbling blocks to assuming shamanic roles in our culture - the fact that Western society has an extremely complex pool of mythic images to draw upon. This is not to belittle the shamanistic innerworlds. For example, a Tamang Shaman of Tibet participates in a mythic world shared by other members of the community - its history, myth and accumulated stories - actualised and intensified by years of training, visions, and rites.

Contrast this with the mythic world available to someone in modern Britain - an island that has been for centuries a melting-pot of many different cultures, with the electronic arms of the videodrome bringing in information from all over the planet, across both distance and time. It is possible for someone to have a good academic grasp of Tamang shamanistic beliefs, not to mention SF, fantasy, mythology, upbringing and the myriad ways of expressing spiritual endeavours. Also, modern society has tended to hand over the realm of the mythic to professionals: therapists, entertainers, philosophers - and we are to a large extent, cut off from participation in the mythic world, except (for the most part), sanctioned and sanitised escape routes which support consensus reality even as they provide the illusion that they challenge it. Anyway, all this leads to a pretty complicated mythic life. Fortunately, some mythic images & processes, such as the

Underworld Journey (again, I'll deal with this one another time) are fairly universal. Others however, become 'lost' as people forget or garble the routes into experiencing/understanding them. We rely so much on 'secondhand daylight' - reading & watching other people's experience, that the oral transmission of knowledge is comparatively rare. The first coven I was involved with set an good standard - whenever the priestess wanted to impart to me the 'feel' of magick, we would go out into the open -whether it was a park, moon-lit street or by the sea shore. Direct, physical experience, especially when accompanied by a guide who isn't into fucking you over, is better than sitting indoors reading a book any day! Anyhow, I digress.

4) Connectivity This is concerned with making connections - finding links between different ideas and subjects; making a creative leap that brings on a flood of new ideas & enthusiasm. I often enter a trance state to overcome writer's block - letting fragments of conversation, poetry or images slip across my inner eye. Something will well up from the inside, and ideas & connections leap up like iron filings onto a magnet.

5) Demonstration of Ability In our culture, you may be able to get away with impressing people as a shaman because you've plowed through the complete works of Kaledon Naddair (no mean feat!). Apprentice shamans however, are sometimes required to enter trance states as a demonstration of their prowess. It is quite common for spirits to test you by placing you under extreme psychic pressure, so that the experience becomes a compressed version of the underworld initiation. Some spirits, demons, & deities will do their best to drive you bananas, only yielding their wisdom when you have proved yourself equal to the task. The spirits of psychotropics are particularly prone to that kind of behaviour, but I'll save that for another time. There are other good reasons for entering trance but I've forgotten them, so I'll move on. You can't become a shaman in your bedsit, in isolation from anyone else, although periods of deliberate isolation are necessary from time to time. Also, there aren't many instructors in shamanism hanging about (not unless you commit yourself to an endless round of weekend workshops), so you will have to learn from everyone and everything. It's important to learn to recognise the onset of changes in awareness, and explore all possible routes into trance. Learn to trust your own senses and your intuition, rather than the internal dialogue or what you think you "ought" to do.

Dreams

Much instruction can be gained via dreaming. Prospective shamans may even be identified by virtue of the content of their dreams, and it is not unusual for people to meet their guides in dreams. We tend to think of dreams as a very personal aspect of our experience, so it is sometimes disconcerting when someone that we know appears in our dreams. In dreams, historical time is abolished, and distance is no object. We may witness events from the past, future, or alternative presents. Despite appearances, much of our dream content is controlled by external agencies. If you study Jung for long enough, you will have "Jungian" dreams. It can be far more rewarding to develop a personal dream-language, or avoid any rigid system of interpretation. I tend to find that prolonged magical activity of any sort will mold the contents of your dreams accordingly.

During the Shamanic Development Course run by Sheila Broun and myself in 1987, I had a dream which illustrates this process. we were preparing for a session on musical

improvisation, and I had spent the afternoon making a set of claves. In the evening, I sallied forth to the pub and got hideously drunk. I was surprised to have a very clear dream in which I was approached by two spirits who said “we are the spirits of your claves, these (below) are our names which you will burn onto the wood with a hot wire and give us butter to eat.” Which of course, I did. This made the claves a bit ‘more’ than just two bits of cut down broom handle.

Dreams are a useful starting point for entering the innerworlds. It can be useful to induce prophetic dreams, or meetings with spirits so that you can discuss a particular problem. A friend of mine who makes incense and perfumes reports that she occasionally dreams of a unique smell, which on waking, she can then analyse and manufacture. The magical artist Austin Osman Spare wrote that he would sometimes awake to find himself standing in front of a finished picture, having drawn it in his sleep.

If you’re going to get into dream-life seriously then it’s essential to keep a dream diary. Writing down your dreams helps you remember them, and is indispensable when you start to evolve your own dream-language. Here’s some practical exercises:

1) Dream Control

The easiest way to begin this is to choose something that you want to dream about, and visualise it until you fall asleep. A mantric sigil is also useful, for example:

I WANT TO DREAM OF THE MONKEY SPIRIT

Knock out all repeating letters & compress

I WAN ODREM FHK SPIR

rearrange

NAWI REMOD SPHRIK

Constant repetition of this ‘mantra’ before sleep will eventually empty the mind of the associated intent, and it will stimulate the Deep Mind (i.e. the subconscious) to throw up the appropriate images in dream.

2) Group Dreams

Here, a group of people can attempt to dream of being present, in each others’ company in a real or imaginary place that all concerned are familiar with. Again, visualisation and mantra are useful in attempting this. The first step is to achieve a common perception of the dream, and then, later on, the group can perform willed acts. A group of us once attempted this using the M.C. Escher print, “Relativity”.

3) Lucid Dreams

Lucid dreams are characterised by the fact that in a lucid dream, you are aware that you are dreaming! Lucid dreams are also much easier to remember, and you are more able to act with intentionality, rather than just being a passive participant in the dreams’ events. One way of inducing lucid dreams is to strive to see your hands in your dreams,

the 'shock' of which will allow you to enter the lucid state. I was once dreaming of my home town, with everything as it was about 10 years ago; until that is, I looked down at my feet & realised that I was wearing my goth boots – the incongruity of which allowed me to enter the lucid state, and, by projecting a symbol upon a nearby house doorway, I was able to enter one of the Innerworlds.

It can be rewarding to try and approach dreaming from a non-western point of view, such as that of the Aborigines or the Senoi of Malaysia. Some anthropologists believe that the Senoi dream psychology is the source of the tranquility of their lives. When first contacted by Westerners in the 1930's, the Senoi had had no violent crime or conflicts within their community for between 200300 years.

Shape-Shifting

This is a very common exercise - taking on the form of an animal to gain (temporarily), an ability or quality associated with it. Some sports psychologists tell athletes to pick a particular animal and visualise themselves as it during warm-up exercises - which is more or less what the shaman does, except that the shaman is more likely to use animal skins, masks, drugs, postural and vocal mimicking as aids. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn called this exercise 'Assuming the God-forms', whereby the practitioner used a variety of props to 'assume' the form of a particular mythic figure, uniting themselves with it until they took on the power associated with that figure. This can be worked towards as a group game, whereby people pick an animal and mimick its behaviour. Shamans tend to have particular favourites - in some Central American tribes, the words for shaman and jaguar are the same. The shamans of the Jivaro people, who practice headhunting and head-shrinking, assume the forms of giant tarantulas. Even forms of martial arts can be related to animals - the Crane, Serpent and Panther being three Eastern forms.

Shape-shifting is also used for innerworld exploration, both in trance vision and dreams. You could start, for example, by casting your vision forth in the form of a cat to stalk the city streets at night, and work from everyday animals and pets, towards mythological and bizarre composite entities. A friend once cured herself of a spider phobia by deliberately cultivating the spider as her power animal, using the very fear and revulsion (emotional arousal) to propel her into trance. Visualisation alone is the weakest route into shape-shifting. As a general rule, it seems that the more intensely physical the method of trance induction, the more intense the level of trance - and hence the more 'real' the experience. When the toad-spirit wore my body, I found that I couldn't walk or oppose my thumbs, & that I salivated copiously. Maya Deren, whilst researching Voodoo rites in the 1940's, found that she became possessed on several occasions, and once 'woke' to find that not only had she participated in the proceedings, but that she had led the rite! She describes her feelings of becoming possessed:

"My skull is a drum; each great beat drives that leg, like the point of a stake, into the ground. The singing is at my very ear, inside my head. This sound will drown me! "Why don't they stop! Why don't they stop!" I cannot wrench the leg free. I am caught in this cylinder, this well of sound. There is nothing anywhere except this. There is no way out. The white darkness moves up the veins of my leg like a swift tide rising, rising; it is a great force which I cannot sustain or contain, which will surely burst my skin. "Mercy" I scream within me. I hear it echoed by the voices, shrill and unearthly; "Erzulie!" The bright

darkness floods up through my body, reaches my head, engulfs me. I am sucked down and exploded at once. That is all"

While possession is quite common in shamanic cultures - it is fairly rare in Western Magick, though actors often report that they become so involved with their roles that they 'become' that character on stage. It is a kind of trance that allows us to do things that, normally, we are not 'allowed' to do - either by others, or our acquired sense of our own limitations. It is the spirit which is responsible, not the person. Accounts of possession can at first seem terrifying or violent, but in the culture where possession is accepted, that behaviour is sanctioned and expected. The spirits are known by the group, and their habits and behaviour known to most of the human participants. When someone is entered by a spirit, this becomes apparent by their altered posture, gestures, facial expressions and voice. As soon as one person enters trance, it becomes easier for others to do so as well.

Innerworld Exploration

The centre of the shaman's cosmology is the axis mundi - the pole, ladder, or world-tree, which is the shaman's access point to the different innerworlds of the mythic cosmology. It seems reasonable to assume that the Qabalistic Tree of Life evolved from a shamanic world-tree. The crossroads is another axis mundi symbol, appearing in Celtic, Greek, and Haitian mythologies. The innerworlds are populated by hosts of spirits, demons & ancestors.

Contact and knowledge of these entities is part of the shared totality of experience of a tribal society, mediated by the shaman. This is rarely the case in Western culture - there is a vast variety of innerworlds which may be explored. The Deep Mind is very receptive to suggestion (after all, that's how we learn), and can clothe itself in any kind of images. There are numerous cases of skeptical westerners being stricken by the curses of shamans.

One option for the would-be urban shaman is to allow the client to enter a trance, then act as a guide as they move through their innerworld, using empathy and open-ended questioning. I find this preferable to other options as it allows the client to arrive at their own solution, at the same time drawing on their own power from- within to heal themselves. It seems, at times, that all that is being done is that one is creating the 'space' where someone can learn to heal themselves. The alternative is to take the problem into your own innerworld and ask an ally about it. More orthodox divination techniques should not be overlooked either.

Critics of the Western approach to magick often point out that it can become too much of a head-trip, concerned with abstractions and mental constructs. Shamanism however, is intensely physical, often to the point of intense discomfiture. Shamanic magick often involves pain, disarrangement of the senses, delusions, hallucinations and states bordering on obsession and personality disintegration. It's a lot of fun, really.



CHEMICAL AIDS

There's no way that you can seriously approach the practice of shamanism without at some point, looking at the role played by chemical aids - drugs. It is a common misconception that druginduced states are somehow not as valid as states of awareness achieved by other means, and that drugs are somehow less 'spiritual'. This attitude is particularly narrow, and shamans in different cultures and epochs have snorted, eaten, rubbed into their skin or stuffed up various orifices all manner of concoctions as aids to entering visionary trance. Even if you don't intend to take in anything stronger than Perrier water yourself, it still pays to know about various drugs used in our society - their effects and what, if anything you can do for someone who's taken an overdose or is having a bad time with something. Sooner or later, someone will turn up on your doorstep who's taken some drug that they can't handle, and ask you to guide them through the bad trip or whatever. In this sort of situation it's difficult to say "sorry I don't approve of that sort of thing" and slam the door in their face. it's useful to have at least a broad knowledge of the more common street and prescribed drugs.

On another tack, you might well ask "what constitutes a drug anyway?" We know that caffeine, alcohol and nicotine are drugs, but they are generally sanctioned by society. You can have 20 pints of bitter and this is considered to be okay, but a puff on a joint ... that's something else. In the present context, a 'chemical aid' is any substance that helps you enter a trance state, a definition which covers a lot of ground. take incense for example. It's not usually thought of as a drug, but it's certainly a chemical aid. Apart from the influence of smell, some incenses cause particular physiological effects. Some gums and resins act to increase skin temperature, whilst others give off Carbon Dioxide when burnt. Camphor, in particular, affects the brain (in very large doses it can produce epileptic convulsions), and Tabunco induces a strong feeling of drowsiness.

Another common misconception about the role of drugs in trance is that all you have to do is to ingest the substance of your choice and passively 'let it happen'. Well this is fine if you just want to have a good time, but during trance, your perception must be directed or focused. Shamans often train their apprentices by guiding them through the visions, and instructing them in how to appease the spirit of the particular substance. All drugs have their own spirits, whether they grow in the ground or come in a gelatin capsule.

So where do the spirits reside? In the substance, in us, or somewhere else? I like to think that they are emergent properties of our experience, invoked like virtual particles from the dance between the molecular configurations of the drug, and the shining webs of neurochemical patterns in the brain. The substance hits our system, and the spirit is 'unbottled'. Some of them are friendly, while some of them will do their damnedness to kill you. Ride them out, and it is said that they can teach you much, but you must be very careful. In recent years, several foolhardy people have died trying to emulate Carlos Casteneda - ingesting psychotropic concoctions mixed up by obliging shamans. A friend of mine once spent about eight hours preparing a certain species of cactus which he and his friends had been told had hallucinogenic properties. It was only after they had drunk several cups of the resultant brew, that a passing native saw them and enquired what they were doing. On being shown the large pot simmering with vegetable mush, he remarked that they should be careful as the dye they were making was very strong.

They listened with growing horror as the native explained that there were two types of cactus that looked similar. One was a powerful giver of visions, whilst the other was used for making dye. If drunk though, it was a powerful emetic! So as you can see, it pays to be cautious, whatever the nature of one's chemical aids. It's very easy to slip up when dealing with any toxic substance, and there is also the legal angle to consider as well.



GOING DOWN

What is a shaman but someone who's been there, and make it back again. The Underworld Journey, they call it. A deliberate descent into the labyrinth, with only the thinnest of threads to hold onto. It comes to us all, in one way or another. Some make it - some don't, but it never stops. The summons keeps a calling you back. And Down.

This is a great cycle of transformation. It has peaks, plateaux and troughs - the movement of which you can learn to endure, and even welcome. Change is necessity - to live and adapt and grow. Sure it's painful to feel madness gnawing at the back of your brain, but maybe caterpillars feel the same way about becoming pupae - driven by a cellular necessity into the unknown.

Our culture has left us largely unprepared for this process, branding it a form of madness, to be banished by bright needles & the smug self-satisfied psychologist who explains away our secret dreams, our desires for wildness. The summons is continually being blunted by those who would set limits on the imagination. ... "it's not real, only imaginary" ... "stop daydreaming" ... "you're an escapist" ... yeah, right. We break from the lies, then break from ourselves, and shatter. Not once, but again and again. Not breakdown, but breakthrough... into where?

Doesn't matter how long you stay down there - a week, a year, a day - you'll be back. Might as well get used to the scenery. When the summons comes, you'll know it. The journey may well take years. You'll meet friends and allies, be challenged, and maybe crushed occasionally. Necessity can be a mean mutha. Remember, never leave the boat - unless you're going all the way. The trigger may be different each time - crisis, drugs, gnosis, a brush with death - these are the ways your allies open the doors for you - the risk is entering feet first. Death is, in fact, a critical factor. You must surrender yourself to death - lie back in her arms and she will most likely hand you back. If not, well better luck next time.

A helpful clue is to let go, when there's nothing else you can do. Relinquish control. Imagine yourself hanging above a bottomless cliff, holding onto a branch. Take a deep breath, cross your fingers and let yourself plummet. If you're going down, you have to go all the way. It's hard sometimes for us to do this - to sit still and do nothing - but occasionally it's the best option. Knowing when not to act is as useful as knowing when to act. You can only get this by paying attention to yourself & to what's going on around you. We tend to live in a sea of words and symbols, but below our necks lies a good ally - the body.

There's various titles for this process - 'the Dark Night of the Soul', 'the Hump', 'the Apophis phase', 'Nigredo', but it's all the same. This is a time for testing. And you can't take anything in with you - forget beliefs, dogmas, weapons, attachments. You're on your own, kiddo.

A weird ramble, eh? Well sorry 'bout that, I'm trying to write with my feet rather than my head. Trying to get the feel across rather than easy bite-sized chunks of text. What I'm talking about here is initiation. There's a lot of bullshit talked about this term, like the prats I used to meet (not so many these days) who used to say "I'm not allowed to talk to you 'cos you're not AN INITIATE." Or, "Well we can't give you the details of that

ritual 'cos you're only a Neophyte" which was great, 'cos I went into W. H. Smiths & got the details out of Mr. Farrar's latest book. It's like saying "I'm better than you, 'cos I read the Guardian & not The Sun." Nyahh, you can't be in my gang!

Simply put, the term 'initiation' is the conscious recognition that you have reached a turning point in your development. It is the awareness that you are at this point that is the key, and the recognition that you are entering a period of potential self-transformation. All the ritual stuff is unnecessary - though many people find ritual a useful (and fun!) way of dramatising the inner/outer process. Sure, you can be initiated into the belief system of a particular group or cult, but the deepest level of initiation is into yourself. Someone else can act as a guide or helper, but they can't do it for you.

To pass between the worlds usually involves some kind of catharsis; an upheaval, trial or test. The necessary disruption seems to be the 'trigger' for the plunge. This can happen as a result of your own developmental exercises, as a 'coincidental' event, or it can be induced by someone else. This last means is perhaps the most difficult and rewarding part of the role of initiator - knowing when to apply the light touch so that the awareness of the initiation cycle is triggered. Touch, and then let go - because once someone begins an active initiation, there's not a lot else you can do. Except maybe listen, or not, depending on the necessities of the situation.

Hopefully that person will do the same for you, one day. In some ways, initiation is a feint at death. A lot of the attachments you previously held on to will most likely have to go out the window. It tends to lower your self-esteem, realising what a stupid bugger you've been. It tends to give rise to the feeling of being an 'outsider', which, if clung to, can rapidly turn into feelings of being 'one of the elect', a 'Magus', or a 'rebel' - whatever pose seems the most attractive. The choice is yours alone - either stay there in the void, or reach out your hand to someone else.

We see the initiation cycle in terms of the larger-than-life images of the Mythic world. The initiatory journey is told the world over in faery tales, plays, campfire stories to Science Fiction. Two of my own favourites are *The Tale of Jumping Mouse*, and *Apocalypse Now*. The Journey tends to go like this: summons to departure, the riverboat, journey into chaos, meeting friends and temporary allies, trials and obstacles, the final encounter with an agent of Change, the return to the surface, and the return to the community as ...?

This is of course, the journey portrayed in the major arcana of the Tarot, but it is an eternal journey that reaches into all of us; the Fool, Luke Skywalker, me, you - everyone.

It never ends; - I don't believe in utopias, perfection, or 'True Selves' which are eternally bathed in bliss. The striving is the important bit.

The techniques offered in this book are by no means definitive - just a beginning. There's much more to be said on this subject, but you will find other works to help you. Probably the best way to use this book is to find some friends who are interested and try and explore the techniques together. You don't need any fancy trappings, as your BodyMind is all that is needed at this stage. With other people helping you, you'll learn faster and have more fun too.

Further Reading

Shamanic Voices, Joan Halifax

The Black Goddess & the Sixth Sense, Peter Redgrove

The Way of the Shaman, Michael Harner

Dreaming the Dark, Starhawk

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