



CHAPTER 3

Shamanism and States of Consciousness

Shamanism represents the most widespread and ancient methodological system of mind-body healing known to humanity. Archaeological and ethnological evidence suggests that shamanic methods are at least twenty or thirty thousand years old. Quite possibly, the methods have much greater antiquity—for, after all, primates that could be called human have been on the planet for more than two or three million years.

Today shamanic knowledge survives primarily among people who, until recently, had primitive cultures. The knowledge that they preserve was acquired over hundreds of human generations, in situations of life and death. The ancestors of these peoples painstakingly learned and used this knowledge in their efforts to maintain health and strength, to cope with serious illness, and to deal with the threat and trauma of death. These custodians of the ancient methods are very important to us, for almost none of their cultures left written records. Thus it is only from their remaining living representatives that we can learn the shamanic principles.

One of the remarkable things about shamanic assumptions and methods is that they are very similar in widely separated and



remote parts of the planet, including such regions as aboriginal Australia, native North and South America, Siberia and central Asia, eastern and northernmost Europe, and southern Africa. Even in the historical literature from the Classical Mediterranean, or from medieval and Renaissance western Europe, one finds evidence that the same basic shamanic knowledge once existed there until it was largely eradicated by the Inquisition.

The widespread similarities in shamanic methods and beliefs throughout much of the world have been extensively documented by Eliade in his classic work, *Shamanism*.¹ It is precisely because of the consistency of this ancient power and healing system that Eliade and others can speak with confidence of the occurrence of shamanism among peoples long isolated from one another.² For example, one anthropologist notes: "Wherever shamanism is still encountered today, whether in Asia, Australia, Africa, or North and South America, the shaman functions fundamentally in much the same way and with similar techniques—as guardian of the psychic and ecological equilibrium of his group and its members, as intermediary between the seen and unseen worlds, as master of spirits, as supernatural curer, etc." The shaman is able "to transcend the human condition and pass freely back and forth through the different cosmological planes. . . ."³

The remarkable worldwide consistency in basic shamanic knowledge has also been noted by many other anthropologists. Wilbert, for instance, writing on the nature of shamanism among the Warao Indians of Venezuela, notes, "It will have been immediately apparent to anyone familiar with the literature on shamanism that the Warao experience contains much that is near-universal. . . ." He provides a long list of the practices and beliefs that the Warao shamans share with those elsewhere in Australia, Indonesia, Japan, China, Siberia, and native North America, Mexico, and South America. Wilbert further concludes that there is a "remarkable correspondence . . . not only in general content but specific detail" between the shamanic journeys of the Venezuelan Warao and the Wiradjeri of Australia, an ocean and continent away.⁴

The shamanic approach to power and healing was maintained in a basically similar form in primitive cultures that otherwise represented radically different adaptations to contrasting environments and to distinctly different problems of material survival. Through prehistoric migrations and isolation, many such groups were separated from other

divisions of the human family for ten or twenty thousand years. Yet, through all those years, the basic shamanic knowledge did not seem to change significantly.

Why was this? It was obviously not due to lack of imagination on the part of primitive peoples, for there is great contrast and variation in their social systems, art, economics, and many other aspects of their cultures. Why, then, is shamanic knowledge so basically consistent in different parts of the primitive world?

I suggest that the answer is, simply, because it works. Over many thousands of years, through trial and error, people in ecological and cultural situations that were often extremely different came nonetheless to the same conclusions as to the basic principles and methods of shamanic power and healing.

Shamanism flourished in ancient cultures that lacked the technological innovations of modern medicine. In my opinion, the low technological level of those cultures compelled their members to develop to the highest degree possible the ability of the human mind to cope with serious problems of health and survival. Some of the most interesting methods that humans possess with regard to the health and healing potentialities of the mind are those of the shamans in these low-technology cultures.

To perform his work, the shaman depends on special, personal power, which is usually supplied by his guardian and helping spirits. Each shaman generally has at least one guardian spirit in his service, whether or not he also possesses helping spirits. In her classic work on the concept of the guardian spirit in native North America, Ruth F. Benedict observes, shamanism "is practically everywhere in some fashion or in some aspect built around the vision-guardian spirit complex. . . ."⁵

Outside of North America, the guardian spirit is similarly important, but is often called by other names in the anthropological literature, such as "tutelary spirit" in works on Siberian shamanism, and as "nagual" in Mexico and Guatemala. In the Australian literature it may be referred to as an "assistant totem," and in the European literature as a "familiar." Sometimes the guardian spirit is just called the "friend" or "companion." Whatever it is called, it is a fundamental source of power for the shaman's functioning.

The best-known way to acquire a guardian spirit is in a spirit quest in a remote place in the wilderness. The location may be a cave, the top of a mountain, or a tall waterfall or an isolated trail at night, as among

the Jívaro. There are also involuntary as well as special shamanic ways to secure a guardian spirit.

Without a guardian spirit it is virtually impossible to be a shaman, for the shaman must have this strong, basic power source in order to cope with and master the nonordinary or spiritual powers whose existence and actions are normally hidden from humans. The guardian spirit is often a *power animal*, a spiritual being that not only protects and serves the shaman, but becomes another identity or alter ego for him.

The fact that a person has a guardian spirit does not in itself make him a shaman. As the Jívaro point out, whether an adult knows it or not, he probably has, or has had, the aid of a guardian spirit in his childhood; otherwise he would not have had the protective power necessary to achieve adulthood. The main difference between an ordinary person and a shaman with regard to their guardian spirits is that the shaman uses his guardian spirit actively when in an altered state of consciousness. The shaman frequently sees and consults with his guardian spirit, travels with it on the shamanic journey, has it help him, and uses it to help others to recover from illness and injury.

In addition to the guardian spirit, a powerful shaman normally has a number of spirit helpers. These are individually minor powers, compared to the guardian spirit, but there may be hundreds of them at a particular shaman's disposal, providing great collective power. These helping spirits have specialized functions for particular purposes. It usually takes years for a shaman to accumulate a large crew of them.

There does not seem to be any obvious difference between the sexes in terms of shamanic aptitude and potentiality. In many societies, such as that of the Jívaro, for economic and social reasons that have little connection with the practice of shamanism itself, most of the shamans are men. But even Jívaro women, after they have finished raising their children and reach middle age, sometimes become shamans, indeed very powerful ones. In medieval and Renaissance Europe, widows and elderly women similarly often became healing shamans, partly to support themselves. Of course, the Inquisition termed them "witches," as Christian missionaries commonly still call shamans in non-Western societies.

Shamans are especially healers, but they also engage in divination, seeing into the present, past, and future for other members of the community. A shaman is a *see-er*. Our word "seer" refers to this kind

of activity, a survival of our almost vanished European shamanic heritage. A shaman may also engage in clairvoyance, seeing what is going on elsewhere at the present moment.

The shaman moves between realities, a magical athlete of states of consciousness engaged in mythic feats. The shaman is a middle man between ordinary reality and nonordinary reality, as Castaneda has dramatically described. The shaman is also a "power-broker" in the sense of manipulating spiritual power to help people, to put them into a healthy equilibrium.

A shaman may be called upon to help someone who is *dis-spirited*, that is, who has lost his personal guardian spirit or even his soul. In such cases, the shaman undertakes a healing journey in nonordinary reality to recover the lost spirit or soul and return it to the patient. Or a shaman's patient may be suffering from a localized pain or illness. In such a case, the shaman's task is to extract the harmful power to help restore the patient to health. These are the two basic approaches to shamanic healing: restoring beneficial powers and taking out harmful ones.

Shamans have to be able to journey back and forth between realities in these healing tasks. To do this, in some cultures, shamans take mind-altering substances; but in many other cultures they do not.⁶ In fact, some psychoactive materials can interfere with the concentration shamanic work demands.

One of the interesting things about shamanism is that, when a drug is used, it is taken by the curer or healer rather than the patient, although there are exceptions when both partake. This contrast with modern Western medicine is easily understood if one considers that the shaman must do his healing work in an altered state of consciousness. The idea is to provide access to the hidden reality. Such work is the responsibility of the shaman, not the patient.

In its essence, shamanic initiation is experiential and often gradual, consisting of learning successfully how to achieve the shamanic state of consciousness, and to see and journey in that state; acquiring personal certainty and knowledge of one's own guardian spirit, and enlisting its assistance while in the shamanic state of consciousness; and learning successfully to help others as a shaman. A characteristic phase of more advanced shamanism is having personal certainty and knowledge of one's own spirit helpers. There are even more advanced phases, as well as some important kinds of shamanic experiences, that are not dealt

with in this book. If you succeed in experiencing the first three phases listed above, however, you can probably call yourself a shaman. But shamanic initiation is a never-ending process of struggle and joy, and the definitive decisions about your status as a shaman will be made by those you try to help.

A new shaman, after learning the basic principles, methods, and cosmology of shamanism, builds personal knowledge and power by shamanic practice and journeying. As this knowledge is acquired, the shaman becomes a guide for other people. For example, a person in his community may have a dream or vision and ask the shaman about its meaning. The master shaman is able to say, "Oh yes, what you experienced fits in there . . ." on the basis of what he has experientially learned so far. The shaman is forever trying to articulate his personal revelatory experiences as though they were pieces of a great cosmic jigsaw puzzle. Many years of shamanic experience are usually necessary to arrive at a high degree of knowledge of the cosmic puzzle, and even a master shaman does not expect ever to complete the puzzle in a mortal lifetime.

A true master shaman does not challenge the validity of anybody else's experiences, although less capable and less humble shamans may. The master shaman will try to integrate even the most unusual experiences into his total cosmology, a cosmology based primarily on his own journeys. If he can do it easily he is probably a master, like the Conibo Indian shaman who told me, "Oh, they're always saying that."

The master shaman never says that what you experienced is a fantasy. That is one of the differences between shamanism and science. Yet there *are* similarities between the shaman and the scientist. The best of both are in awe of the complexity and magnificence of the universe and of Nature, and realize that during their own lifetimes they will only come to observe and understand a small portion of what is going on. Both shamans and scientists personally pursue research into the mysteries of the universe, and both believe that the underlying causal processes of that universe are hidden from ordinary view. And neither master shamans nor master scientists allow the dogma of ecclesiastical and political authorities to interfere with their explorations. It was no accident that Galileo was accused of witchcraft (shamanism).

The shaman is an empiricist. One of the definitions of empiricism is "the practice of emphasizing experience esp. of the senses" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary). And indeed the shaman depends

primarily on firsthand experience, of the senses, to acquire knowledge. Still, the master shaman is humble. After all, none of us really knows what is going on. Everyone is limited to his own small window onto the universe. As a Mohave woman named Hama: Utce: said:

Every shaman tells a different story of the creation. One may hear it told in several ways. All stories relate to the same event, but the way of telling it is different, as though different witnesses related it, remembering or forgetting different details. It is as though an Indian, a Negro and a Frenchman would tell it, or as though I, my husband, Hivsu: Tupo: ma (burnt raw) or you were describing a car accident we witnessed.⁷

Shamans are people of action as well as knowledge. They serve the community by moving into and out of the hidden reality when asked for help. But only a few shamans become true masters of knowledge, power, and healing. There is typically a great deal of critical evaluation by the people in their communities as to how proficient particular shamans are, how successful they are in healing people. Shamans' "track records" are well known, and people decide which shamans to go to in matters of life and death. So, although many people can become shamans, only a few are recognized as outstanding.

The Shamanic State of Consciousness

The shaman operates in nonordinary reality only a small portion of his time, and then only as needed to perform shamanic tasks, for shamanism is a part-time activity. Among the Jívaro, the Conibo, the Eskimo, and most other primitive groups, the master shaman is usually an active participant in the economic, social, and even political affairs of the community. He is commonly an accomplished hunter or gardener, craftsperson and artist, thinker, and responsible family and community member. Indeed, the ability of the master shaman to operate successfully in two different realities is seen as evidence of power.

He follows the precepts of shamanism when engaged in that kind of activity, and follows the precepts of ordinary reality when not engaged in shamanic work. The shaman moves back and forth between the two realities deliberately and with serious intention. Whichever the reality, the shaman thinks and acts in the ways appropriate to it, and has as his

objective the mastery of both his nonordinary activities and his ordinary activities. Only he who successfully masters his actions in both realms is a master shaman.

Both personal realities of the shaman, the nonordinary and the ordinary, have their correlative states of consciousness. Each reality may be coped with successfully only when one is in the state of consciousness appropriate to it. Thus, if one is crossing a busy city street, the proper state of consciousness is different from that to be employed in entering the shamanic Lowerworld. A master shaman is fully aware of the appropriate consciousness for each situation with which he is faced, and enters into that state of consciousness as needed.

A perception of two realities is typical of shamanism, even though some Western armchair philosophers have long denied the legitimacy of claiming such a dual division between the ordinary world and a hidden world among primitive peoples, apparently assuming that primitives cannot distinguish between the two. As I earlier explained, the Jívaro not only make such a division consciously, but they ascribe much greater importance to the nonordinary or hidden one.⁸ I agree with Åke Hultkrantz when he says:

... If such [primitive] peoples do not consciously make such a dichotomy—which they sometimes do—they do in fact unconsciously order their cognitions according to this model. One proof of this is the shamanistic trance. The world of ecstasy is the world of supernatural powers and agencies, therefore the shaman dives into it. He exists in two worlds: outside the trance he lives the daily life of his tribesmen, inside the trance he is part and parcel of the supernatural world, sharing with the spirits some of their potentialities: the capacity to fly, to transform himself, to become one with his helping spirit, and so on.⁹

The emphasis I make here on drawing a distinction between the experiences one has in the SSC and the OSC, or that Castaneda makes between nonordinary reality and ordinary reality, is not a distinction that is usually noted in the conversations of shamans among themselves or even with Westerners. Thus, if you were to listen to a Jívaro shaman talk, you might hear in his everyday conversation accounts of experiences and deeds which could seem to you, as a Westerner, to be patently absurd or impossible. For example, he might tell you of splitting a large tree at a distance with his shamanic power, or that he saw an inverted rainbow inside the chest of a neighbor. In the same

breath, he might tell you that he is making a new blowgun, or that he went hunting the previous morning.

The problem is not, as some Western philosophers would have it, that primitive peoples such as the Jívaro exhibit a primitive "prelogical" mind. The problem is that the Westerner is simply unsophisticated from a shamanic point of view. For his fellow tribespeople, the Jívaro does not need to specify which state of consciousness he was in to have a particular experience. They immediately know, because they have already learned what kinds of experiences occur in the SSC and what kind occur in the OSC. Only the Western outsider lacks this background.

The Jívaro sophistication is far from unique; in fact, it is probably true throughout virtually all of the shamanic cultures. Unfortunately, Western observers, lacking extensive experience with altered states of consciousness, altogether too often failed to inquire as to the cognitive state in which their native informants were when they had "impossible" experiences. As the Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner properly observes:

It is fatally easy for Europeans, encountering such things for the first time, to go on to suppose that "mysticism" of this kind rules *all* aboriginal thought. It is not so. "Logical" thought and "rational" conduct are about as widely present in aboriginal life as they are on the simpler levels of European life. . . . And if one wishes to see a really brilliant demonstration of deductive thought, one has only to see [an aborigine] tracking a wounded kangaroo, and persuade him to say why he interprets given signs in a certain way.¹⁰

In other words, the limitations are not those of primitive peoples, but our own in understanding the two-tiered nature of their experiences and the respect they accord them. Because our Western culture is not shamanic, it is necessary in teaching shamanism to make clear the distinctions between the SSC and the OSC, or between nonordinary reality and ordinary reality, as Castaneda does. When and if you become a shaman, and if there are other shamans with whom you can converse, you will find it no more necessary than a Jívaro or an Australian aborigine to specify the state of consciousness you were in when you had a particular experience. Your audience, if composed of persons of knowledge, will know.

The altered state of consciousness component of the SSC includes

varying degrees of trance, ranging from essentially light (as with many North American Indian shamans), to very deep (as among the Lapps, where a shaman may temporarily appear comatose). Indeed, this entire range is reported for Siberian shamans. As Hultkrantz points out, "Pronouncements to the effect that the shamanic trance is invariably of the same depth are therefore misleading."¹¹ Similarly, Eliade observes: "Among the Ugrians shamanic ecstasy is less a trance than a 'state of inspiration'; the shaman sees and hears spirits; he is 'carried out of himself' because he is journeying in ecstasy through distant regions, but he is not unconscious. He is a visionary and inspired. However, the basic experience is ecstatic, and the principal means of obtaining it is, as in other regions, magico-religious music."¹²

What *is* definite is that *some* degree of alteration of consciousness is necessary to shamanic practice. Outside Western observers have frequently failed to be aware that a shaman was in a light trance, precisely because they were external observers lacking personal shamanic experience. Hultkrantz quite properly notes:

A shaman may seem to act in a lucid state when, in actual fact, his mind is occupied with interior visions. I have myself witnessed a North American medicine-man operate during curing in a twilight context not easily discovered by an outsider; and his testimony to me afterwards of what he saw during his curing stressed the fact that he had been in a light trance.¹³

At an earlier, critical point in his life, before taking up shamanism, the shaman may have entered this altered state of consciousness very deeply, although there are many individual and cultural exceptions. Sometimes such an experience occurs in an intentional vision quest to get guardian spirit power. Other times it occurs at the climax of a serious illness, as among some North and South American Indians, as well as in native Siberia. Such a radically profound and revelatory experience often encourages the individual to take up the way of the shaman. My own first psychedelic experience among the Conibo Indians in 1961 is a personal example.

The word "trance" will be generally avoided here, because our Western cultural conceptions with regard to this term often carry the implication that it is a nonconscious state. Reinhard similarly avoids the use of "trance," noting, ". . . what we are really trying to establish is that the shaman is in a nonordinary psychic state which in some cases

means not a loss of consciousness but rather an altered state of consciousness."^{14*}

It is in the SSC that one "sees" shamanically. This may be called "visualizing," "imaging," or, as expressed by Australian aborigines, using "the strong eye."¹⁵ Although such *seeing* is done in an altered state of consciousness, it would be an unempirical prejudgment inimical to achieving firsthand understanding to dismiss such visions as hallucinations. As the distinguished Australian anthropologist A. P. Elkin observes, the vision of an aborigine shaman "is no mere hallucination. It is a mental formation visualized and externalized, which may even exist for a time independent of its creator. . . . While the person is experiencing the vision, he cannot move, but he is conscious of what is going on around him. As one [shaman] of the Kattang tribe, N. S. W. [Australia], told me . . . he could see and know what was happening, but was as one dead, feeling nothing."¹⁶

The SSC normally permits full recall later of the experience when the shaman has returned to the OSC, unlike the characteristic trance of the Western spirit medium or of the participant in Caribbean or Javanese spirit possession dances.¹⁷ In other words, the SSC does not typically involve amnesia. In the SSC, part of the shaman's consciousness is usually still lightly connected to the ordinary reality of the physical or material environment where he is located. The lightness of his trance is a reason that a drumbeat often must be maintained by an assistant to sustain him in the SSC. If the drumming stops, he might come back rapidly to the OSC, and thus fail in his work.

Basic tools for entering the SSC are the drum and rattle. The shaman generally restricts use of his drum and rattle to evoking and maintaining the SSC, and thus his unconscious mind comes automatically to associate their use with serious shamanic work. The beginning of the steady, monotonous sound of the rattle and the drum, which has been repeatedly associated with the SSC on previous

* Probably the most commonly accepted definition of an altered state of consciousness is by Arnold M. Ludwig, who describes it as "any mental state(s) induced by various physiological, psychological, or pharmacological maneuvers or agents, which can be recognized subjectively by the individual himself (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a sufficient deviation in subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms for that individual during alert, waking consciousness." (Ludwig 1972:11.) A problem with Ludwig's definition is that it may carry the implication that an "alert, waking" state may not characterize an altered state of consciousness. While the shaman is occasionally sometimes neither alert nor waking in the SSC, commonly he is very alert even if not in a fully waking state; and very commonly in the SSC he is both alert and waking. Katz (1976a: 282-283), in his study of !Kung Bushmen trance-healing, also expresses some reservations about Ludwig's definition.

occasions, becomes a signal to his brain to return to the SSC. For an experienced shaman, accordingly, just a few minutes of the familiar rattling and/or drumming is usually sufficient to achieve the light trance in which most shamanic work is done.

The repetitive sound of the drum is usually fundamental to undertaking shamanic tasks in the SSC. With good reason, Siberian and other shamans sometimes refer to their drums as the "horse" or "canoe" that transports them into the Lowerworld or Upperworld. The steady, monotonous beat of the drum acts like a carrier wave, first to help the shaman enter the SSC, and then to sustain him on his journey.

The importance of the drum as a "mount" or "steed" is illustrated by these shamanic verses from the Soyot (Tuvas) of Siberia:

Shaman Drums

Oh! My many-colored drum
Ye who standeth in the forward corner!
Oh! My merry and painted drum,
Ye who standeth here!
Let thy shoulder and neck be strong.

Hark, oh hark my horse—ye female maral deer!
Hark, oh hark my horse—ye bear!
Hark, oh hark ye [bear]!

Oh, painted drum who standeth in the forward corner!
My mounts—male and female maral deer.
Be silent sonorous drum,
Skin-covered drum,
Fulfill my wishes

Like flitting clouds, carry me
Through the lands of dusk
And below the leaden sky,
Sweep along like wind
Over the mountain peaks! ¹⁸

Laboratory research by Neher has demonstrated that drumming produces changes in the central nervous system. The rhythmic stimulation affects the electrical activity in "many sensory and motor areas of the brain, not ordinarily affected, through their connections with the sensory area being stimulated."¹⁹ This appears to be due in part to the fact that the single beat of a drum contains many sound

frequencies, and accordingly it simultaneously transmits impulses along a variety of nerve pathways in the brain. Furthermore, drum beats are mainly of low frequency, which means that more energy can be transmitted to the brain by a drum beat than from a sound stimulus of higher frequency. This is possible, Neher states, because "the low frequency receptors of the ear are more resistant to damage than the delicate high frequency receptors and can withstand higher amplitudes of sound before pain is felt."²⁰

Recent research on the shamanistic spirit dances of the Salish Indians of the Northwest Coast supports and expands Neher's findings on the capacity of rhythmic drumming to induce an altered state of consciousness. Jilek and Ormestad found that drum beat frequencies in the theta wave EEG frequency range (four to seven cycles per second) predominated during initiation procedures using the Salish deer-skin drum. This is the frequency range, Jilek notes, that "is expected to be most effective in the production of trance states."²¹

It is hoped that such research will eventually be accompanied by the telemetering of the EEG of shamans while they are engaged in SSC work. It seems likely that this kind of investigation will lead to the finding that the SSC commonly involves the theta level as well as the less-deep alpha level.

The shaking of the shaman's rattle provides stimulation to higher frequency pathways in the brain than does the drum, reinforcing the drum beats and further heightening the total sonic effect. While of a higher frequency, the sound of most rattles is of a sufficiently low amplitude as not to cause pain in the ear receptors.

While the shaman may beat the drum himself when entering the SSC, his full arrival there requires an assistant to take over the task of maintaining the drumming, as among the Tungus of Siberia, so that the shaman's altered state of consciousness will be maintained.²² An alternate technique among the Tungus is to let all the drumming be done by an assistant, even before the shaman enters the SSC. This is the method I prefer, since otherwise the physical demands of beating a drum can interfere with my transition into the SSC. The shaman should, however, still regulate the speed of the drumming, for only he can sense the appropriateness of the tempo. In the techniques I have adopted, I shake a rattle, typically starting at a slow tempo and increasing it as I feel the need. The sound of the rattle not only provides the lead for the drummer, but also supplements the sonic drive of the drum with a higher frequency input. When the shaman using this

method finally enters the SSC, he is no longer able to shake the rattle, so the drummer carries on for him, continuing the drumming in the tempo last heard from the rattle.

When the Tungus shaman's assistant does all the drumming, however, the shaman does not use a rattle. Instead, he sets the tempo by dancing, the rhythm of the bells and iron trinkets on his costume leading the drum and supplementing it with higher frequency sounds.²³ This is a technique which provides a body motion input into the shaman's nervous system that matches the sounds since, as Shirokogoroff observes, "... the 'dancing' is partly called forth by the necessity of producing rhythmic sounds."²⁴

The change into an SSC is also helped by singing. The shaman typically has special "power songs" that he chants on such occasions. While the words may vary somewhat from shaman to shaman in a particular tribe, usually the melody and rhythm of the songs are not the invention of the individual shaman but are shared in a particular tribal region.

The songs tend to be repetitive and relatively monotonous, mainly increasing in tempo as the shaman approaches the SSC. They may have the latent function of affecting central nervous system activity in a manner analogous to yogic breathing exercises, although I know of no research carried out to determine this. The shaman is often helped into the SSC by the members of the audience, who join him in the singing. The words help evoke the SSC, tending to refer to the shaman's spiritual guardians and helpers, and to reaffirm his power.

The learned component of the SSC includes the ascription of full reality to the things one sees, feels, hears, and otherwise experiences in the altered state of consciousness. These firsthand, empirical experiences are not viewed by the shaman as fantasy, but as immediate reality. At the same time, the shaman recognizes the separateness of the SSC reality from that of the OSC, and does not confuse the two. He knows when he is in one or the other, and enters each by choice.

The learned precepts used while he is in the SSC include the assumption that animals, plants, humans, and other phenomena seen in an altered state of consciousness are fully real, within the context of the nonmaterial, or nonordinary, reality in which they are perceived. The shaman enters the SSC to see and interact with these nonmaterial forms. Such forms are not visible to the shaman or others when in the OSC, and do not constitute part of ordinary reality.

The learned aspect of the SSC involves a deep respect for all forms

of life, with a humble awareness of our dependence on the plants, animals, and even inorganic matter of our planet. The shaman knows that humans are related to all forms of life, that they are "all our relations," as the Lakota Sioux say. In both the SSC and the OSC the shaman approaches the other forms of life with familial respect and understanding. He recognizes their antiquity, relatedness, and special strengths.

The shaman accordingly enters the SSC with a reverence for Nature, for the inherent strengths of the wild animal and plant species, and for their tenacious abilities to survive and flourish through eons of planetary existence. Approached in an altered state of consciousness with respect and love, Nature, he believes, is prepared to reveal things not ascertainable in an ordinary state of consciousness.

Many North American Indian tribes still preserve an essentially shamanic view of reality as, for example, in this statement by a Hopi:

To the Hopi all life is one—it is the same. This world where he lives is the human world and in it all the animals, birds, insects, and every living creature, as well as the trees and plants which also have life, appear only in masquerade, or in the forms in which we ordinarily see them. But it is said that all these creatures and these living things that share the spark of life with us humans, surely have other homes where they live in human forms like ourselves. Therefore, all these living things are thought of as human and they may sometimes be seen in their own forms even on earth. If they are killed, then the soul of this creature may return to its own world which it may never leave again, but the descendants of this creature will take its place in the human world, generation after generation.²⁵

Even in broad daylight, one can learn to see shamanically the nonordinary aspects of natural phenomena. For example, the following is a method of *rock-seeing*, a technique I learned from a Lakota Sioux medicine man. First decide upon a problem for which you wish an answer. Then simply walk through a wild area until a two-fisted-size stone on the ground seems to attract your attention. Pick it up and carry it to a spot where you can comfortably sit down with it.

Place the stone on the ground in front of you, and pose the question to which you want an answer. Carefully study the upper surface of the stone until you are able to see one or more living creatures formed by its lines, crevices and other irregularities. It may take a few minutes.

When you are satisfied that you have discerned one or more animals,

plants, insects, faces, human forms, or other entities on the stone's surface, then think about what the stone is trying to tell you about the problem you have posed. Fix your conclusion in your mind and then turn the rock over. Repeat the same process of seeing and thinking using the new surface. If the stone is thick enough, you can repeat the process again with the remaining two sides of the stone.

Next, quietly contemplate how the individual communications from each of the four sides can be put together to form a message that constitutes an answer to your question. Then respectfully, and with thanks, return the stone to the position and place where you found it.

Once you have gained enough shamanic experience, you can use this technique to help another person. Have the person go through the same steps as above. The difference is that you both participate in seeing the answer to his problem. As each side is viewed, let him first describe and analyze what he sees. Then you, as the shaman, supplement his observations and analysis with your own. On the basis of your greater experience, you may be able to suggest how what you see fits in with what he sees. Then turn the stone over and repeat the process for all four sides. Finally, the person makes his own synthesis of the four sides into a general answer to his problem.

Obviously, there are similarities and differences between this shamanic approach and a Rorschach test or psychoanalytic techniques of free association. But the fact that there are differences does not make the shamanic technique operationally inferior. From the shaman's perspective, there *are* animals and beings in the stone. The concept of fantasy has no place in the shaman's world. For him, all of nature has a hidden, nonordinary reality. That is something one learns to see in following the shaman's way.

This free adaptation by David Cloutier of a shaman's poem from the Chukchee tribe of Siberia illustrates what I am talking about:

Things a Shaman Sees

Everything that is
is alive

on a steep river bank
there's a voice that speaks
I've seen the master of that voice
he bowed to me
I spoke with him
he answers all my questions

everything that is
is alive

Little gray bird
little blue breast
sings in a hollow bough
she calls her spirits dances
sings her shaman songs
woodpecker on a tree
that's his drum
he's got a drumming nose
and the tree shakes
cries out like a drum
when the axe bites its side

all these things answer
my call

everything that is
is alive

the lantern walks around
the walls of this house have tongues
even this bowl has its own true home
the hides asleep in their bags
were up talking all night
antlers on the graves
rise and circle the mounds
while the dead themselves get up
and go visit the living ones²⁶



CHAPTER 4

Power Animals

Shamans have long believed their powers were the powers of the animals, of the plants, of the sun, of the basic energies of the universe. In the garden Earth they have drawn upon their assumed powers to help save other humans from illness and death, to provide strength in daily life, to commune with their fellow creatures, and to live a joyful existence in harmony with the totality of Nature.

Millennia before Charles Darwin, people in shamanic cultures were convinced that humans and animals were related. In their myths, for example, the animal characters were commonly portrayed as essentially human in physical form but individually distinguished by the particular personality characteristics possessed by the various types of animals as they exist in the wild today. Thus Coyote is distinguished in the stories by his mischievous behavior, and Raven often by his unseemly dependence on others to kill game for him. Then, according to various creation myths, the animals became physically differentiated into the forms in which they are found today. Accordingly, the myths explain, it is no longer possible for humans and animals to converse together, or for animals to have human form.

While the mythical paradise of animal-human unity is lost in ordinary reality, it still remains accessible in nonordinary

