

Shamanism without shaman: an exploration of altered states of consciousness using psychotechnological devices.

Hugo B. J. Soder

hugo@medirelax.com

Abstract:

This practical experiment induces a trance-like psycho-physiological state without any specific training or effort. By means of the technical resources of acoustical stimulation in a sensory protected environment, an ordinary man can easily enter into altered states of consciousness (ASC) and get access to the shamanic world. During this experiment, he will encounter and interact with diverse entities known as “spirits“ by the shamanic tradition. In order to facilitate the recognition and the description of these entities, their manifestations are expected under the shapes of animals, traditionally named “animals of power”. The statistical analysis of the results of 96 tests performed by 30 participants gives significant evidences in favor of this technical way of access to the shamanic world.

Keywords: altered states, animals of power, psychotechnology, shamanism, spirits, trance.

Introduction:

It is a commonplace to speak to an ordinary man about ordinary reality in an ordinary state of consciousness. The difficulties arise when one wants to describe a non-ordinary reality, as the shamanic world, perceived in an altered state of consciousness.

However, by learning to master the process of changing its own state of consciousness the ordinary man could discover the existence of the shamanic world, he could explore it, be aware of it and incorporate it as an extension of his own world, his ordinary reality should be now an augmented reality.

The issue:

Unfortunately the ordinary man tends to regard as totally impossible, therefore hallucinatory everything which does not fit within his everyday reality. His error is to reject the existence of another reality from the only data of its ordinary consciousness. He remains closed to the idea of exploring something that, according to his limited criteria, does not exist. Skepticism about non-ordinary reality is considered as quite normal by most people.

Yet there is no real opposition between ordinary and non-ordinary reality. Their apparent differences result mainly from our cultural and intellectual stand point and our experience being limited to our ordinary state of consciousness.

As explained by anthropologist Michael Harner, our stand point is directly dependent on our point of reference: “... the shamanic practice allows the passage from an ordinary state of consciousness (OSC) to a shamanic state of consciousness (SSC). The difference between these states of consciousness can be illustrated through a comparison with animals. The dragons, griffins and other animals that we would be considered as "mythical" in OSC are “real” in SSC. The idea that these animals are “mythical” is a valid and useful postulate in ordinary life, in OSC, but unnecessary and irrelevant in shamanic experiences in SSC. A person in OSC can speak of imagination and visions about experiences in SSC. Conversely a person in SSC may understand

OSC experiences as illusions in terms of SSC. Both positions are right, as long as being considered from the stand point of their respective states of consciousness.” (Harner : 1968)

The solution would be that a significant number of people become shamans, or at least have the opportunity to easily access the shamanic world.

The solution:

Technical resources and a methodology fitting within the constraints of ordinary reality allow to create the alteration of consciousness necessary to access the shamanic world. Its exploration is made possible for everybody, quickly and easily. This psychotechnological system will provide opportunities for practical experiences that will lead to the permanent awareness of the existence of non-ordinary reality. This also implies an increase of ordinary reality by acquiring information from the shamanic world.

Without claiming to compete with traditional practices and rituals tested for millennia, this will be an enlargement of human capacity open to everyone. This concept of use of technical means, to make a practical experience in one session of short duration and without effort, reassured the skeptics. It allows everyone without special constraints, a personal approach of the shamanic world and is also likely to arouse an interest in the traditional teachings.

The experiment:

To test the relevance of this concept, we present here an experiment of communication with the shamanic world, carried out from the 1st to the 20th of February 2009 by 30 participants, totaling 96 sessions. The analysis of results shows full consistency with the descriptions obtained during sessions of traditional shamanism and statistics highlight a very high percentage of success.

The purpose of this experiment is to induce a shamanistic trance using only technical means of psychotechnology. During this trance communication becomes possible with the entities defined as “spirits” in the shamanic tradition. At the end of the experiment, the information thus obtained is compared with the data known and described by tradition. To facilitate their recognition, these entities are expected in their animal form, commonly called animal of power.

The technology:

The technology used is essentially a sensory protection tank and a sensory stimulation acoustic device which allows listening to sound recordings (Soder : 2003). The sensory protection tank is a multimedia relaxation chair MEDIRELAX relaxOne, 2008 type with its audio equipment DENON RCD-M37, 2x 30 W and speakers FOCAL polyglass 165 CVX, 60-20'000 Hz, 93 dB. Sitting aboard the relaxation chair, the participant listens in a state of deep relaxation to an audio CD specifically designed for this experiment. This recording mixes the beat of a drum with a shamanic typical song. The drum induces and maintains trance, the song acts as a cultural reference to the tradition of Siberian Nenets.

The total duration of recording is 15 minutes. The rhythm of the drum is regular, an average of 260 bpm, or about 4.3 Hz. It accelerates for giving a call back signal 90 seconds before the end of the session. Volume is set at a listening level of 74 dB, +/- 1 dB near the ear. The song starts after 45 seconds and then is repeated once and fades gradually to the indistinguishable level of - 70 dB. From the 4th minute it runs in a loop at this level until the call back signal of the drum.

The sessions:

For each participant, the experiment took place in three sessions lasting 15 minutes each. At the end of each session the participant's experience is described on a questionnaire and/or accompanied by a sketch. After resetting the CD, the second session takes place, and similarly for the third session.

The participants will look for the most comfortable position in the relaxation chair. The cushion should support the neck. The legs are not crossed. Forearms and hands are placed flat on the armrests in order to perceive tactile sound vibrations. The elbows are drawn back slightly to free the chest and relax the abdominal muscles. The eyes are closed and the facial muscles relaxed.

At the beginning of each session and already sitting in the relaxation chair, the participant must express very briefly but firmly sotto voce or mentally his intention to meet the animal of power. Then he lets himself be carried away by the sound while letting his imagination wander and waits for the manifestation of the entity.

It is recommended to maintain a contemplative attitude, without any effort and concentration just to stay open and attentive to information that appears spontaneously in the field of his consciousness. This information is manifested in various forms that can be perceived visually, aurally and mentally. They can be very complex and structured as in a dream scene. It is possible that several different entities appear during the same session or that the manifestations obtained during a meeting evolve during the next one.

Participants:

Thirty volunteers participated in this experiment. These are eleven women and nineteen men, aged twenty-two to fifty-seven years, middle class, most with an educational level above average. Eighteen were of European origin, one African and one from the Middle East. None but three of them had had any contact with the shamanic tradition before the experiment. All these people have agreed to participate voluntarily, their main motivation was the curiosity to "see if it works".

Results:

Eight categories of manifestations were selected, here are the results based on a total of 96 sessions for 30 participants, some have done more or less than 3 sessions:

1. Total absence of manifestation: 25

Among these, 3 persons have seen nothing during their 3 sessions.

2. Manifestations of animals : 114

16 eagles = 14% ; 10 horses = 8.7% ; 7 bears = 6.1% ; 6 wolves = 5.3% ; 5 tigers = 4.4 % ; 5 snakes = 4.4% ; 5 deer = 4.4% ; 4 lions = 3.5% ; 4 dogs = 3.5% ; 4 cats = 3.5% ; 3 dolphins = 2.6 % ; 3 rabbits = 2.6% ; 3 bats = 2.6% ; 3 mythical animals = 2.6% ; 18 birds of various species = 15.8% ; 18 other animals = 15.8% Overall a majority of 37 flying animals = 32.5%

3. Transformations into animals: 8

6 transformations into eagles, 1 into a wolf, 1 into a dolphin.

4. Sensations of flying: 17

After transformation into a bird, riding a bird, raised by a bird.

5. Perceptions of tunnels, tubes: 8

Rising skyward or deeper underground.

6. Perceptions of passages, openings, tearings: 6

All are open on a bright prospect.

7. Perceptions of vortex and circular movements: 9

Giving a feeling of aspiration.

8. Visions of meetings in a circle: 9

Characters sitting around a fire, round dancers, animals around the observer.

Comment :

Apart from 10 % of the 30 participants, all have achieved excellent results. These 27 people have experienced during 87 successful sessions not only 114 (131%) manifestations of animals of various species, most of which having a strong symbolic or mythological meaning, but also 57 (65.5%) perceptions typically related to the shamanic world, particularly the changes into animals (9.2%) and the sensations of flying (19.5%).

Excerpts

3.2 # N “I see a fire in a tent. Indians formed a circle around him. In the fire, overlay, I see a pelican ... a bear paw tears the fabric of the tent, through the opening shows a large ice surface with a bear and Eskimos.”

3.3 # N “I see a fire. In the volutes of its smoke is a pelican. He is as big as me. I hang on his legs. We take off and soon land in the middle of a vast forest. We leave flying to the North and land again but this time in an arctic landscape.”

4.2 “... I also see a fire burning in a tent in the center of a circle of musicians.”

6.3 “... I am beginning to transform myself into a bird, feathers cover my body, I am afraid but I grow wings, they open and I fly up to the sky. I became an eagle. I’m flying and dominating the landscape, I’m seeing as an eagle.”

7.1 “A brown bird is on my right, he is very close, I can see his head and body, he is a raptor. Suddenly I find myself flying over a wide valley where a river flows in the distance I see low mountains, rather hills covered with short grass. This area is uninhabited. I gained the vision of the bird, I see through his eyes.”

8.3 “An eagle appears, it is a bald eagle. He looks at me and I feel having to be in his eyes. I find myself in the process of gliding over a forest of trees.”

11.1 “I am lying on the ground at night in the middle of a clearing. Around me, at a distance, people are sitting in a circle, motionless.”

11.1 “A bald eagle flies over me coming from the right. He draws near me and I can see his eyes watching me. He invites me to accompany him. I see through his eyes, I fly, I hear the whistling of the wind and I glide without effort in the daylight.”

14.3 “... a second eagle landed on my right shoulder, the two birds take off and I fly with them up to the sky, hold by their claw. They carry me to a very rocky mountain, its base is covered with vegetation and interspersed with waterfalls.”

16.2 “I stand in the middle of a vast plain covered with snow. A huge eagle comes from the right side. He is so big that I can ride him. I take off sitting on his back and fly over vast plains.”

20-1 “I feel the air vibrate, it is very hot. I want to be a panther, but an eagle takes its place and I turned into him, I'm in his place and I fly over high cliffs.”

24.3 “I get out of a tube similar to a large roll of waves. I see the top of a tree. I am in a large forest beside a river. I am transformed into a wolf. I feel the tip of my ears. I begin to scratch the ground and I see my paws in front of me. I walk through the forest. I see a high rock and want to climb on it, but at this time the wolf separates from me and I can see him climbing on the rock. He comes back and I turned into him again. I return to the river and draws near it, it is very blue.”

Comparisons:

The quotes that follow provide evidence of a similarity between the results of this experiment and testimonials gathered during the traditional shamanic practices.

The initiation of Sioux Lame Deer: “I was alone at the top of the hill. The night was coming ... I perceived a voice that wanted to communicate with me. It was the cry of a bird ... I was at once carried up in the air among the birds. I could look down to see the stars and the moon to my left.” (*Lame Deer & Erdoes* : 1972)

A Winnebago Indian at a meeting of adepts of peyote: “... I started with no feeling. I watched the peyote when an eagle with outstretched wings appeared. The bird stared at me ...” (*Radin* : 1920)

A participant to the studies of Felicitas D. Goodman on religious trance: “It was dark and I felt a sort of sucking on my forehead. Suddenly my forehead became the head of a black bird. I took momentum and flew for a long time over the surrounding countryside. I finally land on a tree. Indians danced in a circle around it. I watched them ...” (*Goodman* : 1977)

First shamanic experiment of a student: “... I was greeted by a gray wolf ... I grasped firmly by his tail and we entered the cave and then we followed a long winding gallery. We emerged on the side of a hill overlooking a narrow valley. It was late and it was almost night. A big fire was shining below us and dancers were dancing around it.” (*Stevens & Sedletzky* : 1988)

Conclusion:

This experiment has highlighted the efficiency of a relatively simple psychotechnological system for accessing the shamanic world. From the first sessions, this system enables to get in touch and interact with the spirits to obtain new sources of experience and information.

“A lot of spirit helpers are animals that have not only a soul, but also valuable qualities missing to the man. The spirit helper provokes the first experiment and remains thereafter a concentrate and a reminder of that experiment. It is not unusual that the identity of the shaman mixes strangely with that of the spirit helper. Getting support from an animal or riding it are means to capture its qualities by creating a way of thinking and feeling similar to its own. These properties are still outside the shaman, but he has only to take a step for becoming an animal by appropriating its qualities.” (Vitebsky : 1995)

It has now become possible for the ordinary man to take this step ahead by using a simple technical tool in perfect harmony with the shamanic tradition.

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