



## CHAPTER 2

# The Shamanic Journey: Introduction

Shaman (pronounced SHAH-maan) is a word from the language of the Tungus people of Siberia, and has been adopted widely by anthropologists to refer to persons in a great variety of non-Western cultures who were previously known by such terms as “witch,” “witch-doctor,” “medicine man,” “sorcerer,” “wizard,” “magic man,” “magician,” and “seer.” One of the advantages of using the term is that it lacks the prejudicial overtones and conflicting meanings associated with the more familiar labels. Furthermore, not every kind of medicine man or witch doctor is a shaman.

A shaman is a man or woman who enters an altered state of consciousness—at will—to contact and utilize an ordinarily hidden reality in order to acquire knowledge, power, and to help other persons. The shaman has at least one, and usually more, “spirits” in his personal service.\*

As Mircea Eliade observes, the shaman is distinguished from other kinds of magicians and medicine men by his use of a state of consciousness which Eliade, following Western mystical tradition, calls “ecstasy.” But the practice of ecstasy alone, he properly emphasizes,

\* For simplicity, I shall hereafter use the male pronominal form in referring to the shaman or the patient, with the clear understanding that shamans and patients may be of either gender.



does not define the shaman, for the shaman has specific techniques of ecstasy. Thus Eliade says: “Hence any ecstatic cannot be considered a shaman; the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld.”<sup>1</sup> To this I would add that, in his trance, he commonly works to heal a patient by restoring beneficial or vital power, or by extracting harmful power. The journey to which Eliade refers is especially undertaken to restore power or a lost soul.

The “ecstatic” or altered state of consciousness and the learned perspective that characterize shamanic work may be usefully termed the Shamanic State of Consciousness (hereafter referred to as the SSC). The SSC involves not only a “trance” or a transcendent state of awareness, but also a learned awareness of shamanic methods and assumptions while in such an altered state. The SSC contrasts with the Ordinary State of Consciousness (OSC), to which the shaman returns after engaging in his distinctive work. The SSC is the cognitive condition in which one perceives the “nonordinary reality” of Carlos Castaneda, and the “extraordinary manifestations of reality” of Robert Lowie.<sup>2</sup>

The learned component of the SSC includes information about the cosmic geography of nonordinary reality, so that one may know where to journey to find the appropriate animal, plant, and other powers. This includes knowledge of how the SSC provides access to the shamanic Lowerworld.

This knowledge includes an awareness by the shaman that he must have a specific intended mission while in the SSC. Nonordinary reality is entered not for play but for serious purposes. The shaman is a person with work to do in the SSC, and he must know the basic methods for accomplishing that work. If, for example, he wishes to recover a patient’s guardian power animal from the Lowerworld, he must know the technique for reaching the Lowerworld, entering it, finding the power animal, and bringing it back safely. Subsequently, in the OSC, he must know what instructions to give the patient.

In the SSC, the shaman typically experiences an ineffable joy in what he sees, an awe of the beautiful and mysterious worlds that open before him. His experiences are like dreams, but waking ones that feel real and in which he can control his actions and direct his adventures. While in the SSC, he is often amazed by the reality of that which is presented. He gains access to a whole new, and yet familiarly ancient universe that provides him with profound information about the

meaning of his own life and death and his place within the totality of all existence. During his great adventures in the SSC, he maintains conscious control over the direction of his travels, but does not know what he will discover. He is a self-reliant explorer of the endless mansions of a magnificent hidden universe. Finally, he brings back his discoveries to build his knowledge and to help others.

The shaman is an accomplished seer who works typically in the dark, or at least with the eyes covered, in order to see clearly. For this reason, shamans usually engage in their practices at night. Some kinds of shamanic seeing can be done with the eyes open, but usually that kind of perception is of a less profound nature. In darkness the distractions of ordinary reality lessen their impingement on consciousness, making it possible for the shaman to focus on the aspects of nonordinary reality essential to his work. But darkness alone is not enough for shamanic seeing. The seer must also enter the SSC, often assisted by drumming, rattling, singing, and dancing.

*Shamanic enlightenment* is the literal ability to lighten the darkness, to see in that darkness what others cannot perceive. This may, in fact, be the most ancient meaning of "enlightenment." For example, the special ability of the Iglulik Eskimo shaman to see is called his *qaumanEq*, his "lighting" or "enlightenment," "... which enables him to see in the dark, both literally and metaphorically speaking, for he can now, even with closed eyes, see through darkness and perceive things and coming events which are hidden from others; thus they look into the future and into the secrets of others."<sup>3</sup>

Aua, an Iglulik Eskimo shaman, described his shamanic enlightenment thus:

... I endeavored to become a shaman by the help of others; but in this I did not succeed. I visited many famous shamans, and gave them great gifts. ... I sought solitude, and here I soon became very melancholy. I would sometimes fall to weeping, and feel unhappy without knowing why. Then, for no reason, all would suddenly be changed, and I felt a great, inexplicable joy, a joy so powerful that I could not restrain it, but had to break into song, a mighty song, with only room for the one word: joy, joy! And I had to use the full strength of my voice. And then in the midst of such a fit of mysterious and overwhelming delight I became a shaman, not knowing myself how it came about. But I was a shaman. I could see and hear in a totally different way. I had gained my *qaumanEq*, my enlightenment, the shaman-light of brain and body, and this in such a manner that it was not only I who could see through the darkness of life,

but the same light also shone out from me, imperceptible to human beings, but visible to all the spirits of earth and sky and sea, and these now came to me and became my helping spirits.<sup>4</sup>

Among the Wiradjeri of Australia, the shamanic neophyte becomes "enlightened" by being sprinkled with a "sacred powerful water" that is considered liquefied quartz. Eliade observes, "All this is as much as to say that one becomes a shaman when one is stuffed with 'solidified light,' that is, with quartz crystals. ..." He suggests, "they feel a relation between the condition of a supernatural being and a superabundance of light."<sup>5</sup>

The perception of the shaman as one who is giving off light, particularly in a "crown," an aura from the head, is also true of the Jivaro. The halo, which is multicolored, forms only when the shaman is in an *ayahuasca*-induced altered state of consciousness. It can only be seen by another shaman in a similar state of consciousness (see Plate 1).

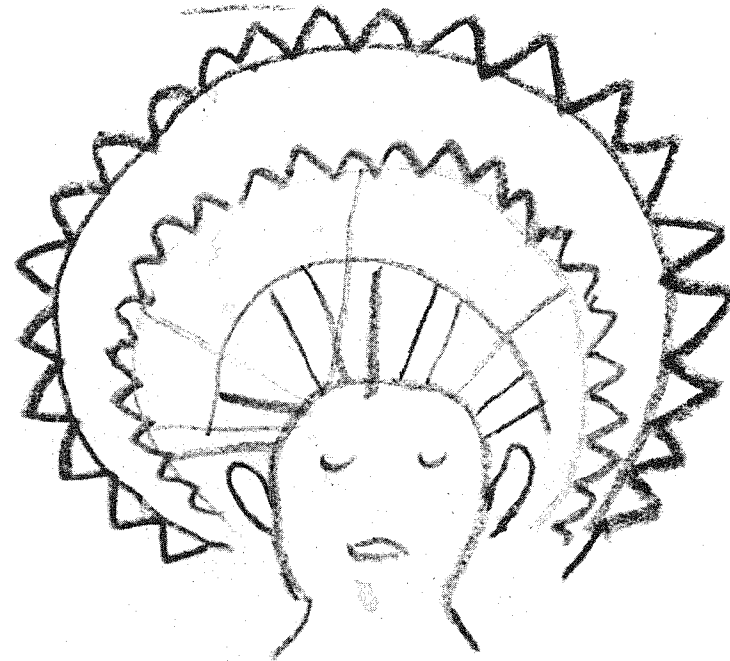


Plate 1. Golden halo around the head of a Jivaro shaman in an altered state of consciousness. Drawn by another Jivaro shaman.

At the same time that the Jívaro shaman is radiating light, he is able to see into the darkness and even through ordinarily opaque material. As I have described it elsewhere:

He had drunk, and now he softly sang. Gradually, faint lines and forms began to appear in the darkness, and the shrill music of the *tsentsak*, the spirit helpers, arose around him. The power of the drink fed them. He called, and they came. First, *pangi*, the anaconda, coiled about his head, transmuted into a crown of gold. Then *wampang*, the giant butterfly, hovered above his shoulder and sang to him with its wings. Snakes, spiders, birds, and bats danced in the air above him. On his arms appeared a thousand eyes as his demon helpers emerged to search the night for enemies.

The sound of rushing water filled his ears, and listening to its roar, he knew he possessed the power of *Tsungi*, the first shaman. Now he could see.<sup>6</sup>

Shamans often work in a house plunged into total darkness, or they may allow a small fire or lamp to burn; but sometimes even a small amount of light can interfere with the shamanic seeing. Thus, among the Chukchee of Siberia, the shamanic session:

... began, as usual, in the dark; but when the shaman suddenly broke off beating the drum, the lamp was again lighted and the face of the shaman immediately covered with a piece of cloth. The mistress of the house, who was the wife of the shaman, took up the drum and began to beat it with light, slow strokes. This lasted the entire time. . . .<sup>7</sup>

Personally, I usually leave a candle burning somewhere on the floor of the dark room when entering the SSC and then, when I lie or drop down on the floor, I simply cover my closed eyes with my left forearm to exclude all light.

When the shaman either slowly or suddenly drops to the dirt floor of the house, the Chukchee say "he sinks," which refers not only to his material act, visible to the others in the house, but also to "the belief that the shaman, during the period of ecstasy, is able to visit other worlds, and especially that underground."<sup>8</sup> In a related fashion, the Eskimo shaman about to make the journey is referred to as "one who drops down to the bottom of the sea."<sup>9</sup> He not only drops to the floor of the house (OSC), but drops into an oceanic Lowerworld (SSC).

The shamanic journey is one of the most important tasks to be undertaken. The basic form of this journey, and the one usually easiest to learn, is the journey to the Lowerworld. To undertake this, a shaman

typically has a special hole or entrance into the Lowerworld. This entrance exists in ordinary reality as well as in nonordinary reality. The entrance among California Indian shamans, for example, frequently was a spring, especially a hot spring. Shamans were reputed to travel hundreds of miles underground, entering one hot spring and coming out at another. Australian shamans of the Chepara tribe were similarly believed to dive into the ground and come out again where they liked, and those of Fraser Island were said "to go into the earth and come out again at a considerable distance."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, a !Kung Bushman shaman in the Kalahari desert of southern Africa recounted:

My friend, that's the way of this n/um [power]. When people sing, I dance. I enter the earth. I go in at a place like a place where people drink water [a waterhole]. I travel in a long way, very far.<sup>11</sup>

Another entrance used by California Indians was a hollow tree stump. Among the Arunta (Aranda) of Australia a hollow tree was an entrance to the Underworld.<sup>12</sup> The Conibo Indians taught me to follow the roots of the giant *catahua* tree down into the ground to reach the Lowerworld. In the SSC, the roots were transformed for me and my Conibo friends into black serpents down whose backs we slid to reach lands of forests, lakes, and rivers, and strange cities bright as day, lit by a sun that had disappeared from the ordinary world above—for these journeys were taken at night.

Other shamans' entrances into the Lowerworld include caves, holes of burrowing animals, and even special holes in the dirt floor of houses. Among the Twana of the Northwest Coast of North America, for example, the surface of the earth floor was reportedly often physically broken open for the descent.<sup>13</sup>

Entrances into the Lowerworld commonly lead down into a tunnel or tube that conveys the shaman to an exit, which opens out upon bright and marvelous landscapes. From there the shaman travels wherever he desires for minutes or even hours, finally returning back up through the tube (henceforth called the Tunnel) to emerge at the surface, where he entered. A fine description of a shaman using this classic and widespread method is given by Rasmussen for the Iglulik Eskimo of Hudson Bay:

... For the very greatest [shamans], a way opens right from the house whence they invoke their helping spirits; a road down through the earth, if they are in a tent on shore, or down through the sea, if it is in a snow hut on the sea ice, and by this route the shaman is led down without

encountering any obstacle. He almost glides as if falling through a tube so fitted to his body that he can check his progress by pressing against the sides, and need not actually fall down with a rush. This tube is kept open for him by all the souls of his namesakes, until he returns on his way back to earth.<sup>14</sup>

When the Eskimo shaman returns from his journey to the Lowerworld, the people in the tent or igloo "can hear him coming a long way off; the rush of his passage through the tube kept open for him by his spirits comes nearer and nearer, and with a mighty 'Plu—a—he—he' he shoots up into his place behind the curtain."<sup>15</sup>

Most of us who are engaged in shamanic work do not find the Tunnel at all constricting. Usually it is spacious and provides ample room for movement. Sometimes obstacles in the Tunnel may obstruct the passage, but one normally can find a crack or opening to go through. With patience, one usually succeeds in passing through it without having to give up the journey and return home.

Sometimes, when the shaman enters down through the hole, he finds himself ascending or descending a stream or river which may or may not be clearly part of the Tunnel. Thus a Tavgi Samoyed shaman, recounting his first journey through the entrance to the Lowerworld, said:

As I looked around, I noticed a hole in the earth. . . . The hole became larger and larger. We [he and his guardian spirit companion] descended through it and arrived at a river with two streams flowing in opposite directions. "Well, find out this one too!" said my companion, "one stream goes from the centre to the north, the other to the south—the sunny side."<sup>16</sup>

Outstanding shamans not only see in the SSC, but hear, feel, and even experience communications or sensations beyond the usual senses. Thus this Samoyed shaman heard his guardian spirit, and thus a Pomo Indian woman shaman in California told me how she felt a gigantic power animal move under her as she traveled inside a mountain through the Tunnel.<sup>17</sup>

Among the Bellacoola Indians of the Northwest Coast, each house reportedly had a hole in the earth floor which was used as the entrance into the Lowerworld:

The world below us is . . . called Asiutā'nEm. Descriptions of the [Lowerworld] are principally obtained from shamans who believe they

have visited that country during a trance. According to the statement of an old woman who believed that as a little girl she had visited the [Lowerworld] during a trance, the entrance . . . is through a hole situated in each house, between the doorway and the fireplace.<sup>18</sup>

In a remarkably similar fashion, the entrance to the Underworld in the circular *kivas* (ceremonial chambers) of the Zuni Indians in the American Southwest is a hole located in the floor. The main contrast with the Bellacoola is that the hole, called a *sipapu*, is in the floor between the fireplace and the wall (the doorway is in the roof).<sup>19</sup> Such *sipapu* holes were common in prehistoric *kivas* of the Puebloan peoples, but absent from those of some of the present-day Pueblos. Interestingly, at Zuni, where the *sipapu* survives in the circular form of *kiva*, so do the shamanistic medicine societies.<sup>20</sup> Although I have no hard evidence, I would not be surprised if the members of the medicine societies at Zuni used the holes to enter the Lowerworld when in trance. The orthodox ethnological view, however, is that the *kiva sipapu* is merely "a symbol representing the mythical opening into the underworld through which the ancestors are supposed to have reached the world."<sup>21</sup> The Puebloan Hopi, unlike the Zuni, do not have *sipapu* in the floors of their *kivas*.<sup>22</sup> However, they believe a peculiar rock formation located some distance from them, which has a hole in its top, is the original *sipapu*, or entrance into the Lowerworld (see Plate 2). That the Hopi

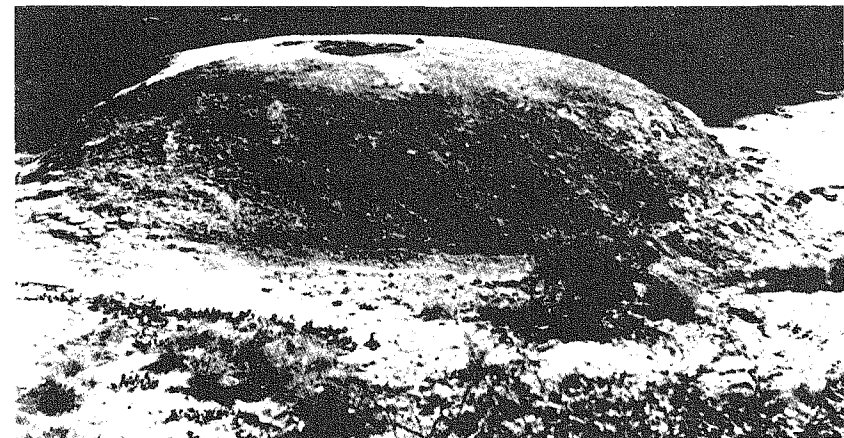


Plate 2. Sepapu [sipapu]. Entrance to the Hopi Lowerworld. Located in the Grand Canyon west of the Hopi villages. Source: Center of Astrogeology, U.S. Geological Survey.

may use it in shamanistic visualizations for journeys to the Lowerworld is an unproven, but distinct possibility. Since medicine society work is highly secret among the Puebloan peoples, non-Hopis may never know for certain. A recent painting by a Hopi artist, titled "Se Pa Po Nah" [sipapu-nah] is highly suggestive, however, of the mandala-like Tunnel experience (see Plate 3).

Incidentally, the concentric circles of a mandala often resemble the ribbed aspect that the Tunnel frequently presents, and meditation with the mandala can lead to an experience resembling the entrance into the Tunnel. As Joan M. Vastokas has perceptively observed in her discussion of certain aspects of shamanic art, "... the concentric motif

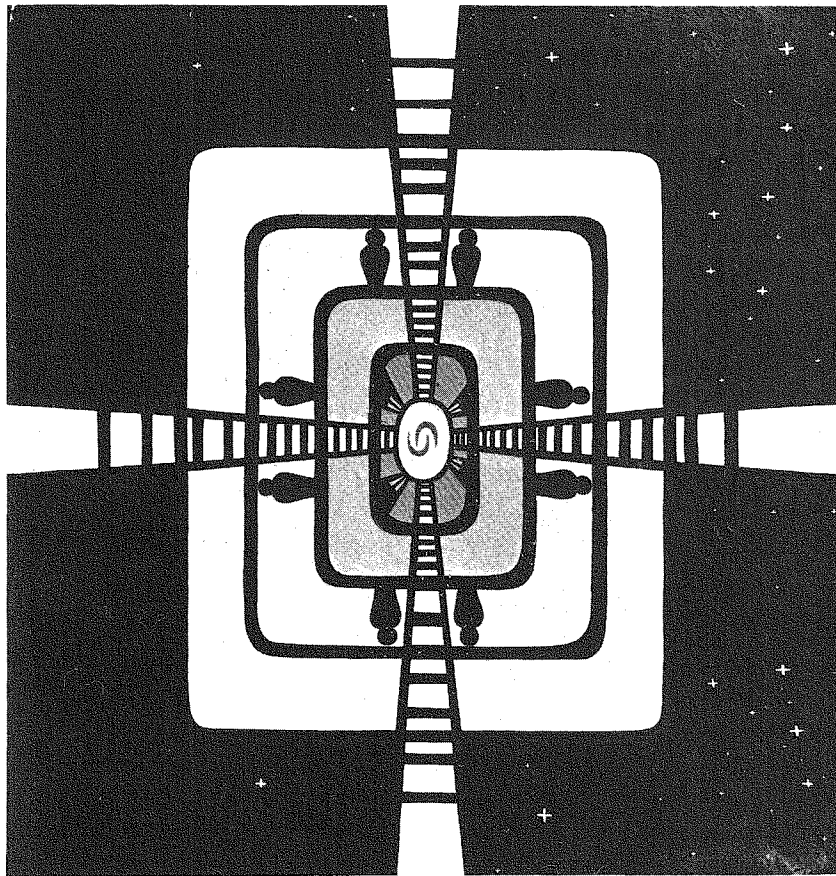


Plate 3. Se Pa Po Nah [sipapu-nah]. Contemporary painting by the Hopi artist Milland Lomakema (Dawakema). Source: Hopi Painting: The World of the Hopis, by Patricia Janis Broder. New York: Dutton, 1978.

seems characteristic of the visionary experience itself and stands for the aperture through which the shaman penetrates the Underworld or Sky, by means of which he transcends the physical universe."<sup>23</sup>

Thus, as she points out, Alaskan Eskimo shamans' masks sometimes have the form of "concentric circles radiating from a central void." An example of one such mask, which bears a startling resemblance to the ribbed Tunnel, may be seen in Plate 4. Similarly, in Tibetan Buddhism, which was heavily influenced by shamanism, a very complex mandala

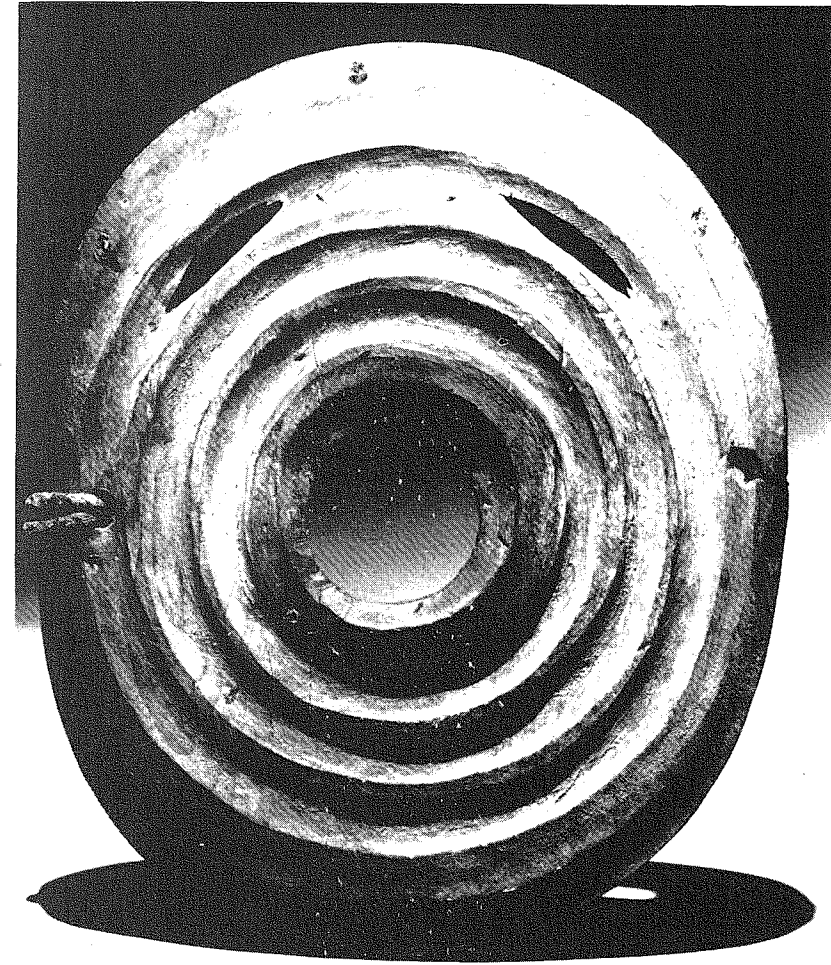


Plate 4. Eskimo shaman's mask. Nineteenth century, from the Lower Yukon River. Source: National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. Photo: Victor E. Krantz.

may have the tunnel-like circle only in the center to serve as the entrance place to the worlds of the gods and spirits represented around it (see the Tibetan tanka in Plate 5; also note its remarkable similarity to the painting by the Hopi artist of the entrance to the Lowerworld in Plate 3). With the aid of darkness and drumming, the shaman does not focus on a mandala, but moves directly into the Tunnel and then beyond.

### First Journey

Now you are ready for your first experiential exercise in shamanism. This will be a simple journey of exploration down through the Tunnel

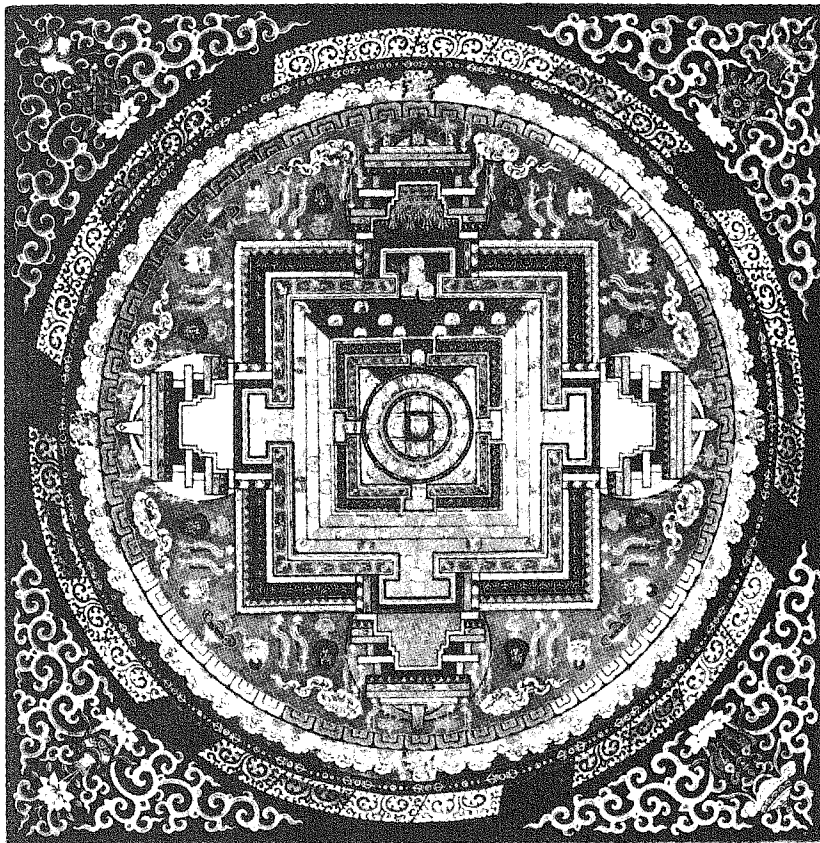


Plate 5. Mandala of Kunrig. Tibetan Buddhist tanka on cloth, ca. fifteenth century. Source: The Royal Ontario Museum.

into the Lowerworld. Your only mission will be to traverse the Tunnel, perhaps see what lies beyond, and then return. Make sure you thoroughly understand these instructions before you begin.

To carry out the exercise, you will need a drum (or a cassette recording of shamanic drumming) and someone to assist you by beating the drum.\* If you do not possess a drum or stereo cassette player, you might have someone tap rapidly with a tablespoon on a hardcover book close to your head. This is only a stopgap technique, however, and normally is much less effective than drumming.

Wait until you are calm and relaxed before undertaking this or any other shamanic exercise. Avoid psychedelic or alcoholic substances during the preceding twenty-four hours, so that your centeredness and power of concentration will be good, and your mind clear of confusing imagery. Eat only lightly or not at all during the preceding four hours. Choose a dark and quiet room. Take off your shoes, loosen your clothing, and lie comfortably on the floor, without a pillow. Take a few deep breaths. Relax your arms and legs. Lie there a few minutes and contemplate your forthcoming mission. Then close your eyes, placing a hand or forearm over them to keep out any light.

Now visualize an opening into the earth that you remember from some time in your life. It can be an opening you remember from your childhood, or one you saw last week, or even today. Any kind of entry into the ground will do—it may be a hole made by a burrowing animal, a cave, a hollow tree stump, a spring, or even a swamp. It can even be a man-made opening. The right opening is one that really feels comfortable to you, and one which you can visualize. Spend a couple of minutes seeing the hole without going into it. Note its details clearly.

Now instruct your companion to start beating the drum in a strong, monotonous, unvarying, and rapid beat. There should be no contrast in intensity of the drum beats or in the intervals between them. A drumming tempo of about 205 to 220 beats per minute is usually effective for this journey. Allow yourself about ten minutes for the journey. Instruct your assistant to stop the drumming at the end of ten minutes, striking the drum sharply four times to signal to you that it is time to return. Then your assistant should immediately beat the drum very rapidly for about a half a minute to accompany you on the return journey, concluding with four more sharp strikes of the drum to signal that the journey is over.

When the drumming begins, visualize your familiar opening into the

\* See Appendix A for information on drums and cassettes.

earth, enter it, and begin the journey. Go down through the opening and enter the Tunnel. At first the Tunnel may be dark and dim. It usually goes underground at a slight angle, but occasionally it descends steeply. The Tunnel sometimes appears ribbed, and often it bends. Occasionally one passes through the Tunnel so fast it is not even seen. In following the Tunnel you may run up against a natural wall of stone or some other obstacle. When this happens, just go around it or through a crack in it. If this fails, simply come back to try again. In any case, do not exert yourself too hard in making the journey. If you do this work correctly, it will be relatively effortless. Success in journeying and seeing depends on an attitude that lies between trying too hard and not trying hard enough.

At the end of the Tunnel you will emerge out of doors. Examine the landscape in detail, travel through it, and remember its features. Explore until you are signalled to come back, and then return up through the Tunnel the same way you went down. *Do not bring anything back with you.* This is only an exploratory journey.

When you have emerged, sit up and open your eyes. Do not be discouraged if you did not succeed the first time. Try it again, with the drumming at a slower or faster beat. Different persons require a different tempo on different occasions.

When you complete the exercise, describe to your companion what you saw so that you will not forget the details of the experience. You may also write them down or dictate them into a cassette recorder. The act of remembering these experiential details is the beginning of your accumulation of SSC knowledge.

Some of the people in my workshops have been kind enough to provide me with accounts of their experiences during this first exercise. You may find it instructive to compare your own experience with theirs. Here are a few of their accounts, prefaced by my comments. You will notice that they sometimes mention my calling them back from the journey. This is something I usually do in group sessions, simply to coordinate the participants.

### Journeys

Following are firsthand accounts of the experiences of persons undertaking the journey into the Lowerworld for the first time, as related by them afterwards. The narrators are mainly middle-class Americans from a variety of backgrounds. In their descriptions, you

may note the absence of any qualifying expressions such as, "I imagined that . . ." or "I fantasized that . . ." Carried along by the drum and using the simple method just described, they had experiences which they found to be real in a new way, and which they often described afterward as among the most profound in their lives. You should be able to have a comparable experience by using the simple method just outlined.

The first account provides an excellent description of the frequent concentric circle appearance of the walls of the Tunnel.

When the drum began to beat, I sought out in my mind places I had known which might provide the access I was looking for. I visualized a couple of places that had been important to me and which I thought might work . . . but neither seemed right; then there was a high cave at Pyramid Lake in Nevada, mysterious and with a grand view, but it seemed like an awfully long tunnel I would have to travel from up there; finally there was a majestic cave from my childhood, one of those tourist places; was it called "Ruby Cave"? It was somewhere in the South, maybe Georgia, or North Carolina.

Anyway, it was full of stalactites and stalagmites—a REAL cave. I moved off into a dark and narrow area and found, not the cave of my childhood fantasies with animals and dragons and beasts of every kind, but a new kind of cave. Concentric rings of light and dark opened up around me and seemed to carry me along them. It was not so much a sense that I was moving through the tunnel but that it was moving along me. At first the rings were circular, but they changed shape and became vertical ellipses, always concentric and always moving. The alternating patterns of dark and light were faintly reminiscent of a glow caught between the ridges of a corrugated pipe.

From time to time I became impatient that the tunnel seemed to go on and on; then I would remind myself that, although it would be nice to experience whatever was beyond the tunnel, it was enough that I was experiencing the tunnel. The vertical ellipses shifted and gave way to horizontal ones which, after a time, opened up gradually along the horizontal axis and began to break up, giving way to a gray and dimly lit landscape—an underground sea—which I passed over for a long time, closely watching the waves rise, gather and move away beneath me.

The tunnel which brought me to this place had been at a slightly downward angle of perhaps fifteen degrees; but now the darkened sky over this underground sea directed me into another tunnel which took an immediate and downward turn of ninety degrees and I was again being carried through it, by it. Its walls were once again the by now familiar concentric circles of light and shade, almost pulsing me through; there

was no sense of falling but of quite *deliberate* movement.

I was surprised to hear myself being called back, and reluctantly I allowed myself to return, somewhat disappointed at not coming to the end of the tunnel and, at the same time, amazed at the experience. The return itself was quick and easy. The sense of discovery and of awe remains.

The second person also used a cave as an entrance into the earth, and noted having experienced a sleep-like state of consciousness.

I chose a cave that was familiar to me. I've been to it four or five times. It's in a wooded forest and the entrance is about four feet in diameter. You go down into a large room with several passages. It continues down into a mountain. I had to go over some crevices that were pretty deep, and there was one spot where I got to a place where you literally have to squirm your way through—very difficult to do it just by yourself.

I went on down, to the deepest part of the cave that I've been in. I had never really been any farther than that. But I just kind of went even further and came out at another entrance or, in this case, an exit, and I came out onto a tropical island with a nice big shore, just tropical birds and a lot of tropical vegetation. A run-of-the-mill paradise!

Then I came back. It was almost as if I had been sleeping, but I know myself well enough to know when I'm sleeping; and I wasn't sleeping.

The next case is another example of using a cave as the entrance:

I seemed to take a long time getting started. I finally focused in on a cave that I had visited in France where primitive people had lived. I walked in and kept walking and walking. It never seemed to get much smaller than maybe my height, so I didn't have to crawl. So I just kept walking along. Eventually it widened into a large opening. I walked out and there was a cliff. I walked around it and climbed up the hill so that I was sitting over the opening. I enjoyed the view, which was very deep and broad. Then I came back.

Persons with unusual shamanic potential may, even in this first experience, not only *see* but feel, hear, and smell in their experiences. In the following example, the person felt the sensation of climbing on hands and knees, the sensation of sliding, and the coldness of water, in addition to simply seeing.

I started out in a little spring that's on the property where I now live. I

felt myself getting very small as I went under a big rock. I entered a tiny little wet channel and it went uphill for quite a while. I felt myself climbing on my hands and knees. It was very dark in there. It got very dark as soon as I couldn't see the opening any more. Then it started a very sudden descent and I didn't know where it was going. I felt myself sliding down on the wet rocks and ending up in a very big space where there was a pool of water. The water was very cold.

Across this water was a tiny light and I felt there must be something beyond or outside, so I went through the water and had to partly wade and partly swim. I remember the sensation of being very cold. Then it was a very steep climb up a little channel, like in a cave. I came out into a meadow that was very green and shaded by a huge oak tree. I sat down under the oak tree and discovered that I had leather clothes on, like Indian leggings and an Indian shirt.

I was feeling very comfortable under that tree when it was time to come back. I felt annoyed at having to come back, but being a good student, I followed the instructions and got to the area where I had to climb back out of the pool. I discovered I didn't have the leggings on any more, I just had blue jeans and my climbing boots. Then I came out into the little spring again. The sky was kind of gray, overcast. It felt like home, like I was back where I belonged.

In the case below, the journeyer not only felt a "cool, moist soil," but heard also the babbling of water, and felt the wind while standing on a hilltop in the Lowerworld.

I had a little bit of a problem getting started because, when you told us to choose an opening to enter, I had two images in my head. I tried out one first that was just a sort of a cave in the side of a hill that a bulldozer had chopped that way. I climbed up into the cave and it didn't go anywhere—I couldn't make it open up for me visually.

So I went to the other place, which is a hollow tree trunk on some property that belongs to a friend of mine—I was there maybe a month ago. So I crawled in there and went down through a small opening just barely big enough for me. I crawled through on my stomach. It wasn't an unpleasant feeling like mud, but just sort of a cool, moist soil. I could hear a babbling at one point. On this particular property I'm talking about there's a creek that runs over it. I could kind of hear water, like I was going under the creek. I crawled for a long distance and then came out on a hilltop.

I had really good feelings looking out from the top of the hill in all directions. As I was standing there I could feel the wind coming through behind me. It was kind of like the wind filled me up with a really nice feeling.



Then when you told us to come back I got back on the ground and started coming back. I got kind of anxious when the drum started getting faster, like my heart started beating faster, it was like I wasn't sure I was going to make it back in time. In fact, I was trying to get back, but it was a small opening. Then finally when you hit the drum the last time I had kind of a flash of light.

In the next example, the person not only had the experience of smelling, but found a new entrance underground through which to return to the surface.

I started off swimming in the ocean. Then I went into an enormous whirlpool, hundreds of feet across or more. It just spun me down and down and down and down. That lasted most of the journey. I kept thinking, how am I going to land safely? I finally broke through and I fell onto this enormous daisy. It was big enough to cushion my fall. It smelled pretty good. Then you said come back and I found a cave, a system of caves, and I just whooshed back up through them.

The following case illustrates how the person in the SSC learns new abilities, such as how to "swim through the earth." Thus occurs the experiential accumulation of shamanic knowledge as to how to do things that would be impossible in ordinary reality.

I went down to the bottom of a tunnel and then I came to water at the bottom. I was entering through the water but I had to play around there for a while to try and find the cracks in the rock, and I really couldn't see how to travel in the rock. But then I found if I spread my limbs out and made myself a little bit flatter I could swim through the earth.

Similarly, the shaman in the SSC learns how to metamorphose himself into other forms of matter, as happened in the following case. Note how this person, in the midst of such a radical transformation, was simultaneously aware of the existence of ordinary reality. This is common in shamanic work, with a small portion of one's consciousness remaining in the OSC to monitor ordinary reality and thereby to provide a bridge for a relatively rapid total return to the OSC.

I went through a clearing in the woods that I remember when I was very young. Going through, I was very aware of how small I was, how everything was so much bigger than I. It was as though I were in a tunnel.

I was very aware of sounds, the smell of the woods and my size.

I just got into a cave, but it was not too deep. I just all of a sudden dissolved myself, I became water to get into the cracks, just lying down. I was very much aware of what was going on here in the room also, hearing you beating the drum. So I was simultaneously in two realities. Then I came back the same way.

Occasionally in traversing the tunnel, one loses track of direction or gets "boxed in." This sometimes happens even to experienced Jívaro shamans. If you cannot find a way out, just relax and wait a while. You will come back effortlessly, even if somewhat slowly, as in the following case.

Once I saw these ground squirrels when I was camping, their holes were all over. So that's where I went down; through one of their holes. At first I started going through these small little tunnels. Then all of a sudden I reached a point where a tunnel was straight down and I started traveling real fast straight down. I couldn't see the end and it went on for quite a while. I just couldn't stop and I didn't know where I was going. It was all black. I got a little disoriented in there for a little bit. I didn't come back up as fast as I went down, but I eventually came up, although I didn't come back the same way.

Even an experienced shaman may be unsuccessful in penetrating an obstacle in his descent. Then there is simply nothing to do but return, as did this person:

I went down through a hot spring in the middle of a river. It kind of erupts from the bottom. I went down and I sort of visualized what it's like, no colors or anything. Then I ended up at a sheet of lava or magma. I didn't know how to penetrate it so that I could travel along it. I was just stuck there and I didn't know what to do. Then you beat the drum for us to come back up and I returned.

Even on the first journey a person of unusual shamanic potential may encounter animal, plant, or even human forms, as in the next case. This particular person's potentialities are further suggested by the fact that he flew in his first experience. Note also how, like the Eskimo shaman referred to earlier, he had to struggle to pass down into the earth. Even for those with considerable potential, shamanic work is sometimes difficult.

I entered some large caverns that I know. I remembered there was an area they haven't explored yet, so I went down in there. It was very narrow for a long time, and I had to really squeeze and push to get through. Then it suddenly opened out into a really large area. It went for a long, long way and I was traveling, traveling, traveling. I realized that I had a long way to go, so suddenly I just started to fly.

I was just moving very quickly, flying all the way through. When I got to sort of the center, there were all these nature spirits, very ethereal-type bodies everywhere. At first they were just standing around and then they all started dancing to the beat of the drum. They were all going the same way at the same time and I was seeing different ones. There was a frog one that had big eyes and looked really strange, and a tree one that was very tall. They were all moving to the drum beat. Then I just returned when you said to come back.

Animals were encountered in the next case, too. This person encounters a "pterodactyl-bird," and with appropriate shamanic confidence senses that it is nothing of which to be frightened:

I went down an old abandoned mine shaft and when I got in there it turned dark. Somehow I couldn't really begin the journey. Then a platform appeared with wheels on it and it started taking me off down this shaft. Pretty soon the shaft got lighter and lighter, and very yellow. There were individual little chambers. Each one of the chambers had an animal in it, some type of prehistoric animal. Each was doing something, I don't know what they were doing, but they were moving in incredible agitation.

Then the platform began to slow down. The shaft was still yellow. As I turned to look at the animals, a thing came out of the wall like a red and black pterodactyl-bird. It was hooded and flapping its wings at me. I wasn't frightened; it seemed more playful than anything. Then you called us back. As you called us back, it acted as if it wanted me to stay there. The platform began moving back toward the opening, and I came back.

In our final example of a first journey, the person sensed that he had brought back a beneficial or beneficent entity. This is a classic kind of shamanic work that the person had simply stumbled on involuntarily in his first experience in the SSC. I asked him if he had already known what I did in my workshops, since that might account for his experience. He, however, replied, "No, I tried to find out something about the workshop and I never did." Presumably this person has considerable shamanic potential.

I started off in a spring. I jumped into the spring and followed the water through the tunnel. Then I came out where another spring was flowing out into a clearing on the side of a mountain. I was facing northwest—for some reason I knew it was northwest. I sat down with the spring on my left and the forest on my right. It felt perfect. No other place in the area felt right, but that spot felt perfect.

Then I came back. I just jumped into the spring and swam back to the opening where I began. The strange thing was that when I got back and had gotten out, I had the distinct impression that something had come back with me. It was right behind me. It was beneficial or benevolent; it was not bad.