

Drug-Free Shamanism

By Jim PathFinder Ewing (Nvnehi Awatisgi)

Shamanism seems to always need a qualifier these days. More and more, I am receiving emails from people who equate taking psychotropic drugs with shamanism. Since this is not the form of shamanism I practice or teach, I am prompted to publish my position.

Many people are associating shamanism with the use of psychotropic drugs – I believe a trend that those in the shamanic community should seek to offset, or at least educate, in order to prevent unwanted associations and potential dangers.

The rationalization for drug-induced ‘vision-questing’ may stem from a misunderstanding of the early teachings of Don Juan Matus as told by Carlos Castaneda in his books (“A Separate Reality,” etc.). Don Juan was reported in the later books as having told Castaneda that people don’t need drugs to journey shamanically. He had Castaneda take a hallucinogen because he was so stubbornly insensitive to non-ordinary reality that extreme measures were necessary. Indeed, after his initial drug-induced journeying, Castaneda regularly accessed non-ordinary reality without using drugs.

Even though it appeals to our culture of instant gratification, the truth is, one cannot merely take a drug and be transformed into a shaman.

This issue is addressed in “Reiki Shamanism: A Guide to Out-Of-Body Healing,” Findhorn Press, Scotland, 2008, that all the chemicals one needs to journey shamanically are already in the human body.

Excerpt from “Reiki Shamanism: A Guide to Out-of-Body Healing,” by Jim PathFinder Ewing (Nvnehi Awatisgi), Findhorn Press, Scotland, 2008, strictly copyrighted; used by permission:

Shamanic healing doesn’t need drugs

The healing aspect of shamanism, and as a guide for personal spiritual development, uses a natural, non-drug induced, altered

state of consciousness brought on by rhythmic percussion and ritual to facilitate health in self and others.

One does not need drugs of any kind to achieve the shamanic state, it's natural, as natural as dreaming at night or day dreaming. All the "chemicals" one needs are already in our bodies, as Candace Pert, the neuroscientist who discovered the opiate receptor, the cellular bonding site for endorphins in the brain, and others have proven.

Indeed, outside chemicals only interfere, either by blocking access to the sensitivity needed to "see." Or, in the case of strong psychotropic drugs, "blowing off the doors" of the ability to discern reality from nonreality.

People come to me who have had experiences with shamans in Central and South America who use psychotropic drugs in their traditional rituals, and have lost the ability of discernment. It is usually either the result of someone who took part in one of these rituals without proper guidance, or lacked the proper training to keep balance.

There should be great caution here. In recent years, taking ayahuasca (Quechua, pronounced aye-yah-waska), a psychoactive brew prepared from the Banisteriopsis vine native to the Amazon, has become quite popular among some groups, particularly young people, who believe they can be magically transformed into becoming "shamans" by taking the drug.

As a shamanic practitioner of nearly 40 years, I can attest that it is inappropriate and dangerous because not only is the informing/balancing/grounding context of the ritual missing – which is a way of life – but also the plant is not native; therefore, people outside the area where it grows may have no affinity for it or relationship with it.

It is a Western way of thinking, like taking a vitamin C pill rather than eating an orange, that shamanism can be learned by simply taking a drug.

Even with vitamins, we now understand that their context, the food, is important to the way the vitamin works, and that isolating the "active ingredient" is misguided. For example, as with ayahuasca

and its proper and carefully controlled use among South American shamans, in the Native American Church, where peyote is taken as a sacrament, the context within which the drug is taken very nearly negates it as a drug per se. It becomes instead an enhancement of the spiritual vitality and force of the ceremonial prayer in the context of honoring the Earth and all beings. Peyote in this context is a spiritual being who joins in the ceremony and allows a deeper experience of song and prayer. Without the church ceremony, the songs, the leaders and the communal gathering, or the sacred context, if you will, taking peyote would be simply abusing a drug.

Discernment is the first rule of shamanism, being able to discern who, what and how things are around you, and how you fit within the energetic scheme, knowing exactly where your energy – seen and unseen – is going. It's a constant test.

Discernment can be seen as a very definition of shamanism, one who can see in nonordinary reality but cannot cope in what is considered ordinary reality is not a shaman but a lunatic. One must be able to “walk between the worlds” with ease, able to ground fully and use five-sense perceptions in the 3-D world and step into nonordinary reality and back again in order to truly master the craft of shamanism.

Use of drugs to obtain the shamanic state can destroy this ability of keeping discernment and maintaining harmony and balance that mark the shaman, though it may be regained, with great effort.

Many young people have come to me after taking drugs thinking it would enhance their perception, turn them into shamans, but they have had to learn the rudiments of grounding, centering and shielding from the beginning, starting all over again just to regain normal functioning. It's a long and arduous process to rebuild the foundations of perception that can be shattered so easily by ill-advised use of drugs.

Using drugs to attain a “shamanic” state can also become a crutch that limits shamanic ability – the freedom to choose that comes from discernment, unfettered by attachments to the material world, in this case, physical or psychological addiction to a drug. It can prevent those just starting out from developing their own personal power and limit their ability to explore various avenues of

perception that are available only by being fully aware and unclouded by physical and psychological effects.

Through use of the drum or in nightly dreaming, shamanic ability is naturally obtained and sustainable without the use of any outside drug.

Circumventing the Rational Mind

The essential technology of shamanic healing is the drum, which allows the practitioner to enter nonordinary reality and effect healing. It does so by circumventing the rational mind. Even how the drum accomplishes that fact remains a mystery.

It's certain that the rhythmic beating of the drum – about 70 beats per minute – can induce a trance state. That's the rational mind speaking. But matters of the heart lack force and power when filtered through the rational mind and things aren't always what they seem.

Often, what seems true is only partially true. We do know that the ability to see nonordinary reality has been around for thousands of years and somehow that ability has been discounted or all but lost.

“Inducing a trance state” doesn't come close to explaining the power of the drum or the ability to enter nonordinary reality. Ancient humans knew there were many ways to access the divine, or at least get a glimpse that transcended the repetitive chatter of the rational mind (the left brain, or rational portion), the “little mind,” to perceive that which is greater, or the Great Mind of God.

Today, we know that chakras or energy centers in the body do exist because they can be scientifically measured. Three thousand years ago, in Eastern cultures, it was a reality because those who could ascertain the vortices of energy emanating from the human body could perceive them by techniques that circumvented the chattering mind. Those techniques, or ancient technologies, are available to us today. And many of them are still being practiced on the American continent by people who have retained this knowledge for thousands of years, despite centuries of persecution.

Shamans still practice and are important parts of their communities in South and Central America, often in remote regions. The closest we can come to shamanism in its purest form in North America is through the philosophy of traditional Native Americans in general and the practices of medicine men and women in particular.

It is a powerful teaching and way of looking at the world equal to any of the ancient cultures in China, Egypt, India, Tibet or other parts of the world.

In fact, the indigenous people of the pre-Columbian Americas were among the few peoples of the Earth who had a civilization that ancient Buddhists in Tibet considered enlightened.

In The Tibetan Book of the Dead, devout Buddhists were taught more than 1,000 years ago how to choose a body for reincarnation. These choices were divined by seers adept at spiritual body travel and only a very few places were listed as suitable for reincarnation.

Although most of the world according to these seers was not recommended for soul recycling, a few geographical locations were listed as areas where souls could find peace, long life and comfortable prosperity, including China, Egypt, Asia, the Mideast and the Indian subcontinent. These seers also described the Americas, which they named "Kuru," as having "lakes" of "cattle," that were, no doubt, buffalo dotting the Great Plains, and "evergreens," probably referring to the land of the Eastern Woodland Indians, possibly the land of the Iroquois and Cherokee. Europe 1,000 years ago was not recommended.

There was a reason for the suitability of being reborn in the Americas in the thinking of these seers, as distinguished from European societies. Native Americans were adept at right-brain thinking, as were pre-and early Christian societies in the Mideast – the type of consciousness that accommodates shamanism. They were able to tap into what Carl Jung called the collective unconscious, the archetypes of dreams and actually perceive (if not enter) that non-ordinary reality.

Shamanic journeying, using the drum, is nothing more than dreaming, except it is directed by the mind and more easily retained than in the nighttime dream state. It is available to

everyone and as natural as sleeping – or, perhaps more accurately, maintaining that state between full waking and slipping into sleep.

**** (End Excerpt)

Training is widely available.

We've taught hundreds of people how to journey without the use of any drug, using only the cadence of a drum (see: Healing The Earth/Ourselves www.blueskywaters.com).

Our experience is not unique, but is shared by many other teachers, groups, and organizations that teach basic shamanism using the drum, and as a way to see or pray by indigenous peoples (See: "Drumming As a Form of Prayer," <http://www.blueskywaters.com/articleshome.html>).

We have two books published that explain how to achieve altered states of consciousness, and fully access Dreamtime, or non-ordinary reality without the use of drugs:

"Healing Plants & Animals From a Distance: Curative Principles & Applications" (Findhorn Press, Scotland, 2007)

"Reiki Shamanism: A Guide to Out-of-Body Healing" (Findhorn Press, Scotland, 2008).

I have a MySpace page, called "Clear Eyes Shaman," dedicated for display on other MySpace pages indicating they support drug-free shamanism.

See: <http://www.myspace.com/shamanwhomakesrain>

To link up with others of like mind, we also invite you to join:

Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/JimPathFinderEwing/19604582873>

Twitter: @reikishaman

LinkedIn: Reiki Shamanism

Jim PathFinder Ewing (Nvnehi Awatisgi) is an internationally recognized author of books on shamanism and energy medicine, with books published in English, German and Russian. He has written four books and numerous articles on Shamanism, Reiki,

Native American Spirituality, Sacred Ceremony and Energy Medicine;
for more, see his Web site, Healing The Earth/Ourselves,
www.blueskywaters.com

PathFinder's books:

"Clearing: A Guide to Liberating Energies Trapped in Buildings and
Lands" (Findhorn Press, Scotland, 2006);

"Finding Sanctuary in Nature: Simple Ceremonies in the Native
American Tradition for Healing Yourself and Others" (Findhorn
Press, Scotland, 2007);

"Healing Plants & Animals from a Distance: Curative Principles and
Applications" (Findhorn Press, Scotland, 2007).

"Reiki Shamanism: A Guide to Out-of-Body Healing" (Findhorn
Press, Scotland, 2008)