

A 'vision' of shamanism

Yves Kodratoff

There is not one but there are many shamanisms and I will present here one of them. I feel me belonging to it because I have been strongly inspired by Siberian shamanism (the one existing before the USSR). How can I claim such a thing? Trying to justify myself, I will need to briefly recall my shamanic route.

Why I was attracted to shamanism?

I am a scientist who spent 45 years of his life as researcher in the French Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). This long practice of the scientific approach, instead of ossifying my mind patterns, prompted me towards nonconventional attitudes. I explain it, perhaps in a somewhat over-confident way, by my belief that I would be able to spot the limit between a reasonably coherent unconventional statement and a delirious one.

From the very beginning of the Seventies, I joined these who engaged in ecology and the alternative medicines. I must say that, very soon, the facts showed me that the attitude of the scientists at this time, i.e. their unfaltering support to the existing system of thought, was perfectly opposed so what Science teaches, or should teach us.

I then started various attempts at joining some out-of-science trends of thought but, to put it nicely, they did not really convince me. However, I discovered **Shiatsu**, and later **Shamanism** and **Northern Germanic mythology** together with the mythology of the **runes**, I did not hesitate to get apart from scientific rationality in order to explore these fields relying on a less visible and more sensitive view of the world. They do have their but own logic, one based on premises different than the official scientific thinking.



This led me to live various experiments to the limit of, and even beyond, rationality though without ever using another type of 'drug' than meditation, dancing and singing, my scientific set-up prevented me to believe one of the existing and contradictory theories associated to the obviously 'irrational' myths that were inspiring me. Instead, all this made it mandatory for me to associate my personal life experiences with a stubborn study of the texts containing the original sources of these myths.



My shamanic route

It started in the United States, about thirty years ago, with Michael Harner's *Foundation for Shamanic Studies*. Its shamanic practice is much inspired by the Californian Hopi Indians. I followed the various training courses of this Foundation until the last, called "training to Harner's method." I then went to practice freely, in particular by organizing monthly 'shamanic circles' in Paris during 3 years. I also often worked within a group shamanic located in Austria.

All this obviously influenced me and brought me some basic knowledge upon which I gradually built my own approach to shamanism.

As a surface example of this influence, though it is remembered by all who practiced shamanism with me, is the one of the song "he ho" that we sing at the start of each séance and that learned through a cassette sold by the Foundation.

Moreover, two meetings, even though they had a short duration, counted more than the others. I spent only a few days with **Sandra Ingerman** (a Foundation representative) but her 'soft assurance' made me a very strong impression and I integrated it in my practice. I spent only a few hours with two Siberian shamans to practice with them without being able to communicate verbally, but their 'furious steadiness' meets the kind of odinic fury typical of the ancient Scandinavian civilizations that play a such significant role in my life. This shows well that this shamanism is far, very far, of a practice of our Western-type wisdom: it includes songs, dances, free expression of the emotions, sometimes shouting that would even exclude from an acceptable social behavior.

This when, a little more than fifteen years ago, that I met the runes and Old Norse mythology. I then began a parallel study of the two mythologies, the one of the Northern Western peoples and the Siberian one.

Scandinavian mythology often refers, always with very little operational details, to a shamanic-like practice, called *seiðr*. My thirst for this mythology and the associated religion thus fits well my study of Siberian shamanism. I then quietly piled up about all ethnological documentation existing on the Siberian shamanisms, especially in English and German, and in particular the one of the Palaeo-Siberians in Kamchatka and northern Siberia and, whereas more is known of the Neo-Siberians, that has been influenced by the Mongolian civilization and thus by Buddhism. All these readings influenced me to the point that I lived myself some of the experiences they report. I also like to integrate into my practice the reports of the formal ethnologists, such as for example the song of the 'golden leaved birch', published by Chernestov.



The Palaeo-Siberians are the inhabitants of Kamchatka, and Siberian Chuckchees. The territory of the latter includes the part of Siberia to the north of Kamchatka, up to the territory of the Siberian Inuits.

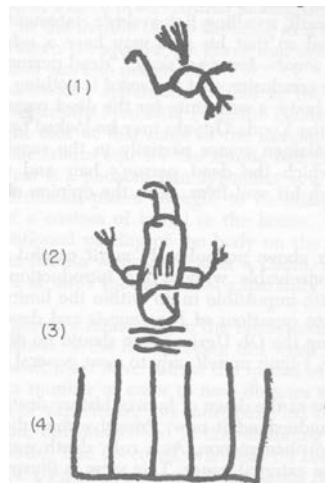
Visualization, ‘vision’ and hallucination

To help an Occidental mind to comprehend the way **Siberian shamans** practice, I generally start by an explanation of the difference between visualization, ‘*vision*’ and hallucination. These are nothing but words, but what is put behind these words is capital for the shamanic practice.

Let us first specify the difference between what I call ‘*vision*’ and **visualization**. To make it short, a **visualization** is a feeling, always a visual and self-made one, a kind of self-suggestion by which you make images appear in your brain. A ‘*vision*’ is an feeling, possibly a visual one, which strikes you without warning and without your will. A ‘*vision*’ always comes to you as a surprise, it brings into play your whole body, not only your brain, and it can relate to other senses than the visual one. It can be **tactile**, **odorous** or **gustatory**. It often reduces to less strong feelings, such as well-being, concern, heaviness etc. The beginner’s problem is becoming able to make the difference between a ‘*vision*’ and a visualization because we live in a civilization that favors visualization and is afraid of ‘*vision*’. When teachers in spirituality want to propose you a directed meditation, they most often suggest something starting with to: “Imagine a place with such and such detail, carry yourself in this location, etc.” It is an exact example of what I have just defined as a visualization. This way of doing has the advantage of being easy to teach and to be effective for all the techniques based on using your intellect, but it has the drawback of leading people to confuse their visualizations and ‘*visions*’. The Foundation for Shamanic Studies, for instance, does not particularly recommend visualization, but does not give precise instructions in order to avoid it. It naturally follows that most people trained by this Foundation work with visualization. I

avoided this trap thanks to the teaching of my Shiatsu master, **Sasaki sensei**, who would so often insist on the need to “*go down to your hara.*” This is why I now try to ‘forbid’ visualizing to beginners. This is not because visualization is ‘bad’ *per se*, but because it is opposed to the primitive shamanism that I try to practice. This request very often gets in the way of beginners because they need a large amount of time to become aware of the subtle body feelings that open the door to ‘*vision*’. There is a long way to learn how to recognize a stable ‘*vision*’ such as the first nonvisual ‘*visions*’ obtained by ‘going down’ in the belly and to putting aside the ceaseless and feverish thinking of the brain. Shamanism teaches to draw a clear line between ‘*visions*’ and visualizations.

Lastly, psychotic **hallucination** is very similar to a ‘*vision*’ but hallucinating people are unable to understand that their hallucination, which they describe it as being a ‘*vision*’, belongs to them alone, that nobody needs to share the same hallucination. In other words, a ‘*vision*’ is acknowledged by the ‘visionary’ person as being an experience of a different nature than ‘ordinary life’ experiences, while this is not accepted by the ‘hallucinatory’ person. There is obviously a continuum between ‘*vision*’ and hallucination and shamanism teaches to control ‘*visions*’ so that they do not become hallucinations. This might become a problem for people who have a natural tendency toward psychopathy.



Siberian representation of the guides who lead the souls to the country of the dead.

Explanation provided by a Shaman: “the soul goes to the sea on the back of duck, towards the cold sea.”

1. the duck, 2. the dead one, 3. a pillow under the head of dead one, 4. a hut

According to **V N Chernestov**, in *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*

What is shamanic work?

Shamanic work, for an apprentice as well as for a trained shaman is always explicitly connected to **death**. Since our society specializes in forgetting that death exists, it causes nowadays both repulsion and fascination. The shamanic formation, obviously with all its course of backward turns, wavering and recovering from false tracks, is intended to lead the apprentice **to know his/her own death**. This condition is a part of many other techniques for acquiring an initiatory knowledge giving access to other states of consciousness. The goals of this self-initiation are, almost as a secondary effect, that he/she becomes able to take care of the dead clan members souls and he/she can fearlessly accommodate death when his/her own hour will ring.

I am unable to verbally explain what meaning is hidden in these last sentences, as it is impossible, according to the joke, to explain to an Inuit the taste of an orange. This is why I cannot do better than describing some characteristic shamanic features which, without being really common, are widespread enough to be directly understood: the out of the body experience, and the contact with 'superior' entities, called Spirits by the shamans, including the famous animal Spirits ("power animals") that fill such an amount of place in the e-lists related to shamanism. I will then be better able to bring up what has been and can still be the social function of shamanism, the difference between shamans and shamanesses, and the role of the gender in shamanic practice. Lastly, I will be able to reconsider the central subject to the shamanism: death.



Goya and **Manet**

Two visions of death

The out of the body experience

Most people believe that this phenomenon is nothing but product of a slightly insane imagination. There are however also some persons, much less numerous ones, for whom leaving their body is a too much easy. Either they are able to hide this feature, and they have a difficult but a seemingly normal life, or they are unable to and they are considered as being psychotics. Before describing what is the shamanic out of the body experience, here are some examples of similar experiences happening during the course of an ordinary life.

Such experiences do not need to be traumatic and they then look very much like a kind of natural shamanism. For example, each night, when we dream, we naturally leave our body. Who did not became once brutally awake in start? This happens when we abruptly come back to our body, which had been temporarily left to draw from our nightly 'visions'. Who did not

at least once felt being foreign to his/her body, almost forgetting its existence, to look at the clouds and suddenly to see the world from their heights, or to communicate so intensely with other people that we get the feeling we are inside them? Thus, seek in your past to make sure you that you never had the strange feeling to become foreign to yourselves, as when you drink a bit too much alcohol, though without drinking. You perhaps rejected this feeling once or several times, and of course, it never came again.

Most of the out of the body experiences, however, are of a traumatic nature. Violence may be inflicted to you by accident, voluntarily by other people, or you may inflict it to yourself by using drugs. In both cases, your only protection is to flee from feeling the brutality you are undergoing. The vital functions are no longer at ease in this mistreated body and tend to disconnect of what is happening to it, as if they would want to become foreign to the violence they undergo¹. This is obviously even truer when the mistreated person is still a child

All that would deserve longer developments, but my purpose here is limited to show that the shamanic out of the body experience is not as surprising as it could seem². What comes as a surprise is the possibility to learn how to practice it without suffering damage and to come back to one's body with the "soft certainty" taught by Sandra.

According to what I explained at the beginning, we can see that the shamanic out of the body experience is neither a visualization, nor a hallucination but a '*vision*'. It is a very soft feeling, a whisper of the body compared to which a visualization has the intensity of a scream. Therefore, to learn this form of '*vision*', the very first thing is **avoiding to visualize the 'self' placed out of its body**, but rather to feel how the conscience can move in the body, how it is possible to feel our own presence in the various parts of our body. The basic exercise to learn how to leave its body is practiced in a group. People who worked with me know that we form a circle, holding our hands and that I advise the participants to forget their bodies except their hands, then to forget their own hands to become aware of the hands they hold, and nothing else. This is one of the many exercises that can be carried out to learn how shamans leave their body. It is obvious that the beginner does not know well if he/she succeeds or fails in leaving his/her body. By practicing with other people more familiar with this feeling, beginners will learn to recognize the feelings that correspond to being out of the body. Lastly, the shamanic experience depends on the place where the soul exits the body. To go out by the belly, the chest, the head, or the whole body, belongs to various kinds of shamanism.

¹ While he strictly keeps the point of view of an ethnologist, **Saladin d'Anglure** (see the bibliography) gives us two examples of Inuit myths that describe a mistreated person leaving his/her body. Page 215, he even comments these experiences as follows: "When a human person used to be subjected to ill treatments, he/she could also cross the border [*as shamans do*], which parts the human world from mythical reality, and he/she would become able to visit the dead or the great spirits, or to pass in the animal world."

This explains why the modern 'shamans' prefer the less painful method of drug-taking. It seems to me that both methods are traumas for the individuals who are submitted to them. This is why I prefer to go through a work on '*vision*' even if it requires much tenacity.

² It can always be claimed that an ethnologist has been influenced by the shaman's speech he is describing and believed that the shaman uses a metaphor when he says he leaves his body behind him. With no reference to ethnology, **Dillmann**, in the work cited in the bibliography, studies the whole of Old Norse literature referring to witchcraft. He notices that all wizards described in this written culture share the common feature of being able to go out of their body. Here, we meet a testimony provided by a whole group of writers who all seemed to believe, implicitly or not, in the reality of the out of the body experience.

The contact with the Spirits, 'speaking' to them

"Everyone can see that you never spoke with a Spirit. You can never draw clear information from them. They speak wrongly and through. These ghosts appear to doubt their own existence more than we do ourselves of theirs."

Franz Kafka, from a fragment entitled "One day when I was unhappy" given in (French) Pléiade edition, p. 133

There again, it is possible to doubt the mental health of people who 'speak to the Spirits' and it will be more difficult for me to give ordinary life examples of this behavior. The reason of this difficulty is easy to explain: entering in contact with the Spirits can only happen by leaving one's own body. Since most of the ordinary exits of the body happen through pain, the mistreated person has other things to deal with than the Spirits. In addition, the non controlled out of the body experiences are indeed connected with a psychosis. The difference between a sick and shamanic such experiences parallels the difference 'vision'/hallucination. A mentally sick person is unable to realize that his/her feelings are purely personal and he/she hopelessly seeks to convince other people of their urgent need to feel the same things. Conversely, the shamans are well conscious that their 'visions' are personal and that even another shaman should not necessarily share the same 'visions'. As a consequence the social behavior of shamans stay mostly in accordance with the one of 'normal' people, with large but hidden discrepancies. In our present day society, where each one dreams to be different from the different others, and the shamans become absolutely 'normal' in some sense.

Iceland is a country where a strong minority of people do not smile mockingly when someone says he/she meets spirits. Icelanders know two main forms of spirits of the rocks. A friendly one is called *Álfr* (elf) and a dangerous one is called a Troll. It is striking that tourist folders show the places inhabited by elves in Reykjavik and that the layout of certain roads has been modified, at their request to not disturb them.

As opposed to many reports and beliefs, shamans should not directly call the Spirits. They feel when the Spirits are still present in some places and try to communicate with them. The Spirits decide to answer or to remain quiet. This communication can be done by speaking a human language, but it is again of the nature of a 'vision'. In fact the whole body feels and addresses the Spirits. This is why it is so significant that this communication is not limited to spoken word. The whole body is committed and various sounds, songs, dances are part of the communication with the Spirits. These behaviors, except if they are part of a professional performance, are often deemed ridiculous and this indicates that our civilization has been able to cut the links between our 'selves' and the magic of our natural environment, and this job is done during the children early life. I claim that a deaf person emitting nothing but throaty sounds can sing the Spirits much better than an opera singer, and paralytic in his wheelchair can dance the Spirits much better than a ballet dancer.

I often saw friends, who were sensitive to the mystic of the trees, take trees in their arms and to remain stuck to them in a quiet communication. I never saw anyone, except during shamanic ceremonies, to sing and dance a tree. This is yet another role of shamans to sing and dance the Spirits of Nature, including trees, rocks, rivers, wind etc.

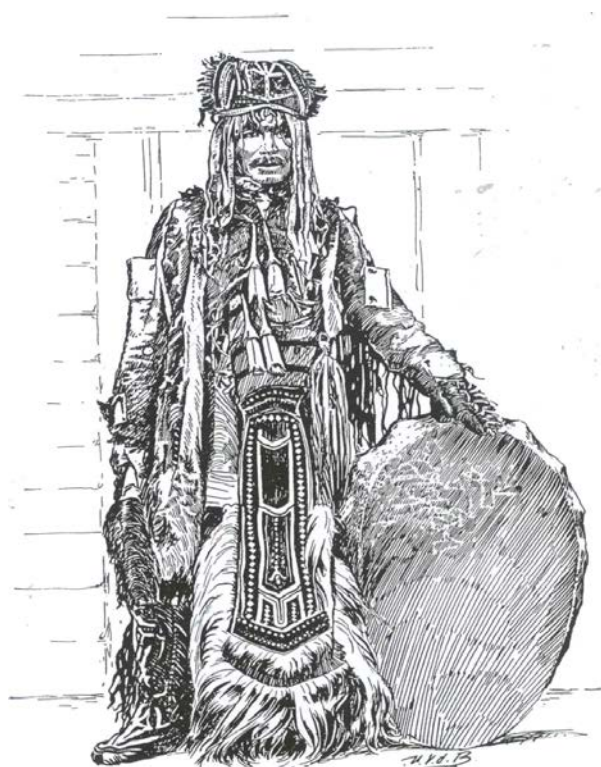
The Spirit animals ('power animals')

Very many people, who can or not practice shamanism, feel themselves mysteriously attracted by a specific animal. They quite naturally use it to protect themselves from the external aggressions or to find the strength they need at the moment. This deep contact with an animal constitutes what I already called a 'vision'. This feeling, at least in the beginning, seizes your whole body but, if you are used to visualizing, its presence is likely to move your body towards your intellect. In this way a deliciously alive feeling of your youth can become a trite memory, after some year. Inversely, the practice of thinking with your entire body may help you avoiding this loss of sensitivity.

If you really wish to go to shamanism, I need to make precise a point of vocabulary. The Foundation, as almost all the English-speaking persons, calls these spirits: "power animals." I do not feel at ease with this way of speaking. If you seek 'power', you have better to drop shamanism. In the Neo-Siberian civilization, at least, shamans had a significant temporal power, but this was associated to a particularly difficult and dangerous life. In our civilization, expect to raise more irony than awe.

Another point is that I often heard these spirits called "totem animals" which erroneous. A totem is indeed a Spirit, but it is common to a clan, it never belongs to one lone person. Well ... if you think of making a clan by yourself alone, then you may have a 'totem'.

This is why I did not find anything of better than to call them "Spirit animals."



A TUNGUS SHAMAN IN CEREMONIAL DRESS.

From **Czaplicka**, *My Siberian Year*

Once you will have learned to receive 'visions' that dwell within your whole body, to leave your body, then you will no more have problems for meeting 'your' Spirit animals. It always happens that we meet them before being really ready for it, and the apprentice shaman has to solve this problem. The best advice I can give to beginners is to do the contrary of what

most people think being good when they say: “Come and meet your power or totem animals.” I tell them to place themselves in a state where that can accommodate a ‘*vision*’, and to wait until the ‘*vision*’ of an animal or of any other natural phenomenon, joins them. In other words, **you will not seek** ‘your’ Spirit animals, **they shall seek you** if they will. During this process, be also conscious that they are likely to solicit you with discretion. If you reject their shy overtures, be convinced that they will not be adamant! I have quite an experience of people who do not dare to do what the Spirits ask them to do, and who then need work at length in order to correct this error.

The work of the shamans

In ancient societies, the social role of the Shaman very important, but it has not been always so honorific as it might be believed, as we shall see in next paragraph. What I want to underline now it is that, in our current civilization, the role of the shaman is almost akin to the one of a clown. The success of Mircea Eliade’s inappropriate formulation he used as title for his book: “*Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*,” induced the idea that shamanism produced ecstatic states, which is nonsense ... as to Siberian shamanism. People are interested, they read some bits of information on shamanism and they wish “to see what is it.” When they are able to, they attend a ceremony shamanic in a state of curiosity and, by their attendance, they disturb these who wish to perform serious work. It follows that the séance they attend confirms their presumptions: shamanism is a sham! That happened to me so often that I feel no longer able to practice under such dishonoring conditions. I am thus obliged to accept participants only under conditions, although this aspect selection is not very pleasing them, nor to me.

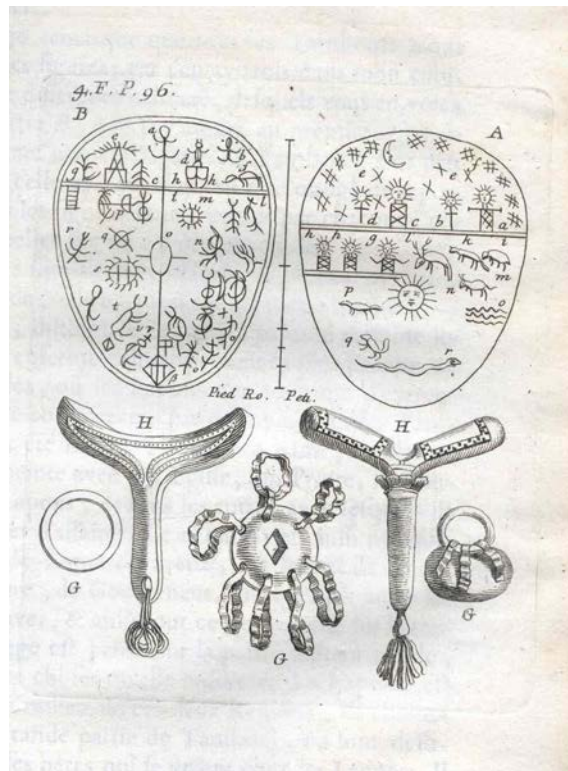
Let us thus speak about the work of a shaman in a primitive civilization. The American way to call shamans of the medicine-men supported the belief in their healing role. It is not false, but not precise enough when one thinks of the Siberian clans.

As I already made it clear it to you, their principal role is to protect the clan from the dead souls that remain stuck in their old environment. This may happen either because they refuse to leave it or because they are unable to realize what happened. The shaman is in charge of helping these lost souls, wandering around or rebelling to join what we call “the land of the dead.” This way speech covers a ‘*vision*’ that I am unable to share with you verbally.

In everyday life, the shamans are storytellers who keep alive the memory of the clan and who iare able, in a difficult situation, to adapt a situation lived in the past to solve a present problem. They are also these who can feed the clan while respecting of game, and who carefully take care that the souls of the killed animals cannot find their way to the place where the clan dwells. They also, obviously, know the curing herbs and, in that respect, they does act as doctors of the body and the soul.

The magic which they use is always operative, they act for the well-being of their clan. The forecast of a Siberian shaman always has the character either of a blessing or of a curse, it is thus operative. Prophecy is another technique of ‘*vision*’, foreign to Siberian shamanism³.

³ I refer here only to rather old testimonies as given in the bibliography. Outside of Siberia, oracular shamanism abounds. For example, Charachidzé gives us a detailed description of Georgian shamanism, done by shamans called *kadag*, whose active role in Georgian civilization is attested until 1946. Just like Saladin d'Anglure with the Inuit, Griaule with the Dogon, these are testimonies done by acknowledged ethnologists, using accounts made by the shamans themselves or direct witnesses of shamanic meetings.



Lapp shamanic drum
 From Scheffer, *Histoire de la Laponie*, page 96 bis

The shaman and the shamaness

Among the Neo-Siberians, the shaman's social status of is the one of a leading member of the clan. It thus attracts candidates and more often of the men than of the women. There nevertheless exists a primary difference between shamans, known as black or white shamans, which has nothing to do with what we call black or white magic. The white shamans play a kind of soothing function, they are confidants of each one's sorrows. Their position is thus very limited, comparable to the one of a psychotherapist in our civilization. The black shamans are these who are in contact with the Spirits and who are in charge of the responsibility I have described in the paragraph before. The men are shamans of the two kinds.

There is a number much smaller of shamanesses but it seems that they all are of the black kind. In other words, there are no pseudo shamanesses like there are pseudo shamans. They fill without problem the same role as the men, except perhaps in hunting. I did not find any precise description of a case where the clan was to adapt to this situation.

During a shamanic séance, the *kadag* is as possessed by a divine entity, the *Xat'i*, and he/she vaticinates by reporting what the *Xat'i* say(s), as the ancient sibyls did. Their role is significant in many fields and, as Charachidzé reports it (Ch. 4, Social functions of the *kadag*, p. 173): "...the *kadag* conducts ... a shamanic séance, during which he ... reveals the future of the community for the year coming. This is his most popular activity there, one for which all are impatiently waiting, because **the *kadag* is more appreciated as a prophet than as healer**. Upon these annual predictions, (the Georgian people) will base their regulation of the agricultural problems, to sow earlier or later, etc."

As for the Palaeo-Siberians, the priests are always men, and no woman is a priest. But the shamanesses have a social condition radically different from the shamans.

All shamanesses are free women born in the clan. All shamans are male slaves, used as sexual slaves by the free men. This ethnological fact evokes the famous sentence of Snorri Sturluson, describing in *Ynglinga saga* the practice of Scandinavian *seiðr*: “*seiðr*, when it is carried out to perfection, is followed by such a large propensity to *ergi* that it is said that it is a shame for a man to practice it. This technique was taught by the priestesses.” The word *ergi* indicates precisely what happened to the Palaeo-Siberian male slaves. Thus, for the Palaeo-Siberians, shamanism, as for Scandinavian *seiðr*, was reserved to men used as sex objects by other men. In both cases, the mistreated men, in spite of their facility to enter other states of consciousness, were looked upon as castoffs of humankind of which we can say that they had no social status at all.

As a consequence, we cannot think that the shamans’ status is always the one of a leader, in spite of their abilities. In the social groups where the shamans received a strong social recognition, then the status of the shamaness is equivalent to the one of a shaman. In some American Indian tribes, recent ethnological results⁴ report of cases where a woman *medicine-man* does not change her sexual status: she is married and has children. Her social gender is however changed: she is looked upon as a man. It is quite possible that the ‘old style’ ethnologists who studied the Siberians between the 18th and the beginning of 20th century have been unaware of this phenomenon because of the existing prejudices of their times. An amusing example of such a behavior is that we have no information relative to women freedom in the Kamchatka ancient civilization. The only hint that we know of is Georg Steller’ complaint, in the years 1740: he reproved that the women who accepted to sew up his clothing would claim sexual services in return. Except this quasi accidental testimony, the image of the Kamchatka woman we have is the one of a person without any special feature, and we know nothing of their way of practicing shamanism.

The feminine/masculine in shamans

Rather than the feminist aspect of the facts that I have just reported, more significant for me is to insist on the importance attached to the Palaeo-Siberian and Scandinavian shamanesses.

As a fact, ethnologists report many stories of shamans who swallow burning coals, and other silliness. The curse uttered by a shaman and described in detail by Czaplicka is an exception. When they describe the behavior of a shamaness, however, they report almost systematically that she was “a great shamaness.” This remark led me to pay attention to the behavior of the persons with whom I practiced shamanism, according to their sex. Besides Sandra’s influence I noted that male beginners are as if ‘stuck’ inside their body and they have an incredible hardship to feel their ‘visions’. I cannot draw any well-shaped theory out of it, but it seems to me that shamanesses have a ‘greater power’ than shamans. In particular, when we go to operative magic, which thus reaches more than a psychological effect, I often felt that the power of female beginners exceeds my own. They seem to act instinctively, so to say, although they still need many working years to become real shamanesses.

I also noticed in the ethnologists’ reports that they insist on two points when they describe sex related facts relative to Siberian shamans.

⁴ This idea is clearly expressed in Buckley’s book who reports an unexpected way of speaking of such a medicine-‘man’: “She is a perfect gentleman.”

The first point is that they noted male shamans wearing typical woman clothing and that the shamans often live a marital life opposed to usual one in the clan: male shamans may live with another man and shamanesses with a woman.

The second point is that they believe to have good grounds to claim that these unusual behaviors in the Siberian civilization are not at all comparable with an acceptance of the opposite sex component in oneself. That a Siberian shaman(ess) might include and grow the component of the opposite sex in him/herself appears impossible them. But how do they validate such a fine analysis⁵? From my personal experience and through the various exchanges which I had with other shaman(es)s(es), I quite naturally tend towards an opposite position. Here a rational presentation of this experience.

We can know agree together that shamanism leads us to come into contact with Spirits of various kinds. The most distant from us are the Spirits of the rocks, which Icelanders name elves or trolls. These contacts, however, resulting from subtle but deep feelings, we called 'visions', cannot happen without a sincere respect for the Spirits and those carrying them, rocks, trees or animals. It is then quite natural that this sensitivity is extended to the beings who are dear to us, whatever their sex. In such a case, 'heart to heart' contacts exist, why would such people refuse to acquire what they admire in another person? This simply explains why the sensitivity associated to shamanism necessarily leads shamans of both sexes to accept their own component of the other sex. Rendered in modern language, this describes the shamans as people who completed their individuation process, as Karl Jung puts it. It is also obvious as this process take place as a process parallel to our own libido, but is not dependent on our libido.

This remark, together with the social status of the shamans, explains in a very simple way the ethnologists' observations. In such a way, a Siberian shaman can wear a woman's dresses and remain manly: he displays the fact that he is a shaman as good as a woman can be. In the same way, since the social status of the men is often higher than the one of women, the shamanesses have the possibility of stating that they belong the male social kind. As for these who have a homosexual libido, they are able to assert it without fear.

Death

⁵ Such an analysis was provided by **Marcel Griaule** in his book quoted below. This ethnologist has been accepted as a 'wise one' by an African people, the Dogons, and he received the initiation reserved to Dogon wise ones. His description of Dogon's cosmogony and the creation of the humankind comprises a complex succession of bisexual creatures, of merging and separations of female and male souls. This shows that this 'primitive' people were totally conscious of the problem of the component of the other sex of each one of us.

Inuits have a mythology which includes episodes similar to those of the Dogons. You can find them in the excellent presentation of **Bernard Saladin d'Anglure**.

Czaplicka, who could not know of Karl Jung, is the first one to suggest the existence of a "third sex." She says (*Aboriginal Siberia, Shamanism and Sex*, p. 253): "Socially, the shaman does not belong either to the class of male or to that of females, but to a third class, that of shamans. Sexually, he may be sexless, or ascetic, or have inclinations of homosexualistic character, but he may also be quite normal."



FIGURE 5. Figurines representing the dead.

A Siberian 'vision' of death.

From **V. N. Chernestov**, in *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*

There are two reasons why I cannot describe in detail what is death from a shamanic point of view. One is that it is a 'vision' and its contents are not transmissible by the language to a person who did not already share this 'vision'. The second reason this 'vision' is one of the goals of the shamanic teaching. My 'vision' of death is only mine, and I do not wish to influence whoever by disturbing his/her own 'vision' of death.

I can nevertheless tell you that what I lived reflect rather well the ethical behavior of the dead followed during their life. It seems to me that the religions which followed shamanism and rejected it so strongly, actually integrated that very feature into their beliefs. They however added the idea of reward or punishment to a belief much older than theirs: our fate in death reflects, to a certain extent, our behavior in life. Since our youth, each day, we make choices in the way of carrying out our life. These choices prepare our old age and influence our fate after death. Each one to acquire this knowledge for him/herself and to do the best possible of it!

Conclusion

As a conclusion, here are a few aphorisms that summarize the whole of this paper, although they split ideas that are actually dependent from each other.

- Do not shamanize with your head, nor your belly or any other part of it, shamanize with your whole body.
- Your brain, if you use it, should be used only to scrutinize your 'visions' instead of causing them.

- Sing, dance and howl if you want, but do not become hysterical.
- Memorize in your body rather than in your head, as you may memorizes a trail you often follow.
- Do not seek your ‘spirit-animals’, wait until they seek you.
- There are good and bad shamans, there are the great and small shamanesses.
- Our parents gave us life, but bequeath us also death in heritage.
- “All considered, the worst that can happen to me is to die!”



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