

SHAMANISM

Shaman--a person who is able to perceive the world of souls, spirits and gods, and who in a state of ecstatic trance, is able to travel among them gaining special knowledge of that supernatural realm.

- The shaman--a combination healer-priest--is at home in both worlds and is responsible for maintaining the balance between the two.
 - The shaman takes the role of an active intermediary--a negotiator in both directions.
 - Adherents of shamanism believe that a continuum exists between the natural and the supernatural, and that the forces of the physical world and the spirit world exist in equilibrium.
 - The shaman is also the keeper of the tribe's tradition and lore, and as such offers guidance on proper spiritual conduct. But perhaps most important of all, the shaman is a powerful medicine man.
 - Since even the weather is believed to be under the control of spirits, the very survival of a tribe
- Disease--In the shamanic tradition, disease is thought to result from any number of causes, including the breaking of a taboo, the casting of a magic spell, the anger of the gods or disharmony between the physical and spiritual worlds.
- Some illness have readily identifiable symptoms and traditional cures.
 - But in cases that are serious or that resist treatment with plants alone, the shaman consults the spirit world to learn the origin of the disease and its cure.
 - Visiting the spirits typically involves entering a trance.
 - In Eurasia the trance is induced by ingesting the fly agaric mushroom
 - In some parts of Mexico the Indian healers eat Psilocybe mushroom
 - The Huichol Indian healers eat peyote (a tiny, bulbous hallucinogenic cactus).
 - Still other shamans enter an ecstatic state by dancing, chanting magical words and phrases, or beating rhythmically on a drum.

WHEN AND WHERE DID SHAMANISM ORIGINATE

- In about 4000 B.C. the Aryan peoples occupying what is now southern Iran developed a cult based on ritual consumption of a hallucinogenic mushroom called the fly agaric OR SOMA (*Amanita muscaria*).
- When descendants of these peoples invaded northern India two thousand years later, they carried their beliefs and customs with them.
- From India the cult swept eastward to the shores of the Pacific. In northeast Asia, it developed into a nature-spirit religion known as shamanism, with its own rites, traditions and worldview.

WHERE IS SHAMANISM FOUND NOW

North America--esp. the Pacific Northwest	Siberia
South America--	Tibet
Mongolia	Indonesia
Australia	

WITCHES AND SHAMANISM

Witches were in many ways the shamans of medieval Europe--plants played a central role in their cults.

THE FLY AGARIC (SOMA)

Description of the fungus

Amanita muscaria (named after Mt. Amanus) the first known habitat for this fungus) and its pesticide properties. It was used by ancient people to control fly populations by mixing it with milk to stupefy flies. The concoction did not kill the flies but once they were asleep, they could be easily disposed of.

Chemical properties--*Amanita muscaria* produces at least four substances that effect perception

1. Ibotenic acid
2. Muscimol
3. Muscarine
4. Muscazone

The Reindeer Connection--This type of intoxication was common among the tribes of Siberia, those of the Kamchatka peninsula and the Inuit tribes including the Eskimos and individuals of Russian descent. The tribes which have close relationship with reindeer, were aware that the reindeer also had an affinity for the mushroom. The reindeer had such a great taste for the mushroom that they would be seen consuming the

urine of other reindeer who had recently eaten a mushroom. If you wanted to catch a reindeer, all you had to do was to urinate and they would come running. The shaman would urinate and the followers would consume the urine.

•The consumption of the urine was a common practice for several reasons:

1. The mushroom was highly valued and expensive
2. The chemicals responsible for severe cramping were filtered out during the first metabolism (which made the drinking of urine popular).
3. Consumption of the urine also allowed the next person to experience a greater intoxication and permitted up to five people, each one drinking the last urine, to become inebriated with just one mushroom.

USE OF OTHER HALLUCINOGENS

Eventually the Soma ritual was gradually forgotten, although the Soma deity still exists in the Hindu religion.

As the population spread and was variously subsumed by other cultures, they began to substitute other hallucinogenic plants, and the identity of Soma was lost for 2000 years.

Teonanacotyl--Flesh of the Gods *Psilocybe* sp.

Mushroom stones dated as far back as 6,000 years ago indicate the existence of a mushroom religion in Mesoamerica at least that far back.

Peyote--*Lophophora williamsii*

The first hallucinogenic plant discovered by Europeans in the Americas. It is associated with the Huichol Indians of the Sierra Madre in Mexico, although it is also used by the Kiowa and Comanche and the more recently established Native American Church.

Morning-glory--*Rivea (Ipomea) corymbosa*

Known to the Aztecs, the seeds of this flowering vine contain ergot alkaloids related to LSD.

Banisteriopsis vine

A tree climbing forest vine *Banisteriopsis caapi* is the pre-eminent sacred plant of South America.

Datura 15 spp.

Has a long history in both hemispheres as a hallucinogen

Tobacco

Strictly speaking, tobacco is an intoxicant rather than a hallucinogen.

HALLUCINOGENS, SHAMANISM AND INTELLECT AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Some hypothesize that Christianity originated as a Soma fertility cult.

PERSECUTION OF SHAMANISM

Throughout history, cults with a knowledge of powerful plants and potions have been frowned upon, first by proponents of Christianity and later by the Western medical establishment.

The "success" of our society in eradicating these cultures and their practices can be measured in the shrinkage of the range they once covered.