

The Shaman as Psychologist

By

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I—Introduction

Twofold Meaning of "as"

The little particle "as" has a large load to carry. "As," as you know may mean at least two things: "thought to be or considered to be," for example when you say, "The psychologist *as distinct* from the sociologist;" or it may mean "in the role of, function or status of;" thus the expression, "He was appointed to act as chairman of this conference." But to go back to our title "The Shaman *as* Psychologist" may therefore mean at least these two: First, "The Shaman *Is Thought to Be, or Considered to Be* a Psychologist" or "The Shaman in *His Role or Function* of Psychologist."

Having stated these two meanings, at once various questions arise. If we take it in the first sense, namely: "The Shaman *Is Thought to be* a Psychologist," one can further inquire; "Who thinks he is a psychologist, himself or others?" By what right, especially in front of psychologists, has he to think he is a psychologist?" Or is it the others? and if so, who are the others? other shamans, or the non-shamans? And again, by what right do these others consider the shaman, a psychologist?

On the other hand, if we take the second sense, i.e., "The Shaman *In His Role or Function* of Psychologist," it seems the task may be easier. We simply presuppose that the shaman is a psychologist, and then proceed to describe how or when he functions as such. But even this is not quite simple. There are other questions that crop up: First of all, "What is a Shaman? Perhaps, for many, this is the first time the word is being bandied about. Then what do you mean by the clause the shaman plays the role of a psychologist? A theoretical psychologist? an experimental? a clinical? a psychiatrist? a therapist? etc., etc.

Moratorium

Perhaps if we ask too many questions, we might spend this session only in positing them; and if we try to answer all of them perhaps we shall have no more time to discuss the other more weighty topics of this seminar. So I propose we put a moratorium to this questioning, and, I beg of you, to allow me to just pick out a few items to discuss, and see if you will agree with me that in a very real way the shaman indeed not only plays the role of the psychologist, but also is, that *is*, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of the community wherein he works, a *psychologist*.

In order to keep our discussion within manageable bounds, with your permission, I would like to propose a hypothesis, and after giving you the needful definitions and explanations, I shall proceed to demonstrate the truth of the hypothesis.

The Hypothesis

The hypothesis is a complex one. It has more than one parts, and the divisions of this paper will naturally follow after them.

First, the shaman is a psychologist (a) on account of his knowledge of the mind, and of mental states and processes; or, which amounts to the same thing, because of his knowledge of human nature; (b) because he is a person especially sensitive to influences and forces that are extra-sensory, or, because he is psychic, even a "mystic in the raw," as Eliade would characterize him; and (c) because he was the psychiatrist in pre-literate society, in that he practiced the healing of mental diseases.

Psychologist

Now to our definitions. A psychologist, as we can gather from the standard dictionaries is a person who is knowledgeable of mental states and processes, one who had experience of psychic states or extrasensory perceptions, and is himself adept in the treatment of mental disorders. Our psychologists may cavil about this definition, because it is not scientific. But I think they will generally agree that this is a working description of him as a practising not merely a theoretical psychologist.

Shaman

A shaman on the other hand, to use a definition of Ursula Knoll Greiling (Honko, 35) is a person who, thanks to his specific status, is in a position to bring about an extraordinary condition (an ecstasy, that is, an altered state of consciousness), and, in cooperation with trans-

cidental powers (like spirits), to make pronouncements concerning tribal concerns (like sickness, the hunt, war, etc.); and to bring about a religio-therapeutic influence over the community, which influence is bound with the proper cultural framework of his tribe, and to perform for them an important social-psychological function.

Although the definition has many parts, we might reduce them to some three propositions or statements to be discussed below.

First, the special standing of the shaman in the community is due to his ecstasy which he has through his special relationship with the spirits;

Second, when in ecstasy, the shaman says and does things related to tribal concerns (sickness, the hunt, or war) and, given the particular tradition and culture of the group, he brings about a religio-therapeutic effect;

Third, the religio-therapeutic influence of the shaman results in an important socio-psychological function for the community.

II—Two Presuppositions: Conflict & Faith

Before discussing further the parts of the definition, let us at this juncture bring up two important *presupponenda* of shamanism.

First, in every community there are actual conflicts and roots of conflict; to disregard this social fact can have very serious consequences. Shamanism, it seems to me, is a very realistic coming-to-terms with the phenomenon within the social body. Nor is it only an unabashed *acknowledgement* of conflict. It is also a serious down-to-earth endeavor to *solve* the conflict to its roots, not by means which are obvious and within reach of every member of the tribe, but primarily by means which are often esoteric and beyond the cotidian capacity of all.

Secondly, shamanism is built upon a certain faith or view of the world. It is faith in the goodness of the world; so that despite the many evils therein, the universe as a whole is seen to be basically benevolent. And why? Because the universe is a created cosmos; it is an *ordered* whole coming as it does from the hands of Creator-god or gods who are both powerful and well-intentioned in regard to man. They are powerful because they overcame the forces of disorder and darkness when they fashioned the cosmos; they are well-intentioned because of their own accord they made man partaker of life. The shamanic trances are at once the shaman's personal witness to this belief, as well as an invitation

to the community to live out that belief. Shamanic ceremonies always end up in a festivity or celebration, characterized by feasting. It is well to recall what J. Pieper has written in connection with festivity, "... in its essential core, (it) is but the living out of this affirmation... the universal assent to the world as a whole." (*In Tune with the World, A Theory of Festivity*, p. 23).

III—Detailed Explanation of the Definition

(I) Now to our first propositions: Special Standing—*The special standing of the shaman in the community is due to his ecstasy which in turn is due to the influence of the spirits.*

The person of the shaman is a stand-out in the community where he operates. His services are sought out as a teacher, adviser, leader of sacrifice and healer or prophet and diviner. He is always within the circle of the leaders of the tribe when they deliberate on weighty matters that affect the tribe; he is recognized to possess certain powers which he alone and no other has; when he shamanizes he puts on a certain costume which heightens his status; in life as well as in death his special status is recognized. Even among the early Filipinos, a shaman is not meant to be buried under the ground. If his corpse is consigned to earth, then at least his head must not go underneath the sod. It is allowed to remain unburied and generally had some kind of a shed or leanto built over it as protection against the elements (Christie, *Subanun*, p. 31), if his bones are consigned to the caves, the shaman's bones occupied a level higher than those occupied by the remains of ordinary mortals.

Why?

The reasons for the privileged status of the shaman are manifold. First of all, a shaman by nature is a person with high qualities of mind and will. Not that from the very start he has these already developed. But at least that he has the high potential for development. Generally quiet and introverted, *mabait* in Tagalog or *buotan* in Cebuano, he has the earmarks of one not given to trivial matters. (He is what our old folks would call an "*hombre de fondo*"). Besides, he has high artistic potentials and may develop to be an excellent poet, singer, dancer or dramatic performer. Reports of investigators over a wide area of the world attest to the same qualities among shamans. (Eliade, *passim*; Lommel, *passim*).

Distinguishing Mark of the Shaman

Among the many definitions that have been advanced by scholars on shamanism, we can detect two positions which may be taken as representative of the rest. One is that propounded by Dr. Rudolf Rahmann in his article in *Anthropos* Vol. 54 (1959), 751. He defines shamanism thus: "Shamanism is manifested by the spirit's taking hold of the shaman as a medium, or by its entering into the shaman to invest him with higher knowledge and powers, above all, with dominion over (other) spirits." For Rahmann, therefore, the specific character of the shaman seems to be in his *mediumistic* powers, whereby he becomes possessed by the spirits and is become the unconscious tool through which they speak. On the other hand, Eliade and others believe that the shaman is to be singled out from the other "manipulators of the sacred" such as the priest, the head of the domestic cult, namely, the father of a family, or the medicine-man precisely because he is "the great master of ecstasy." In many places, Eliade tells us, the shaman is such because he can fall into a trance or ecstasy, *at will*. (*Shamanism*, pp. 4, 107). For Eliade, then the shaman is primarily an *ecstatic*.

Thus far we can say that the shaman has a special standing in the community because he has a special relationship with the spirits, and this relationship can result in either his becoming a medium as well as in his entering into ecstasy.

Special relationship with the spirits

Spirits in connection with shamanism may mean in its most general sense, "powers," particularly magical powers. But other authors have further specified these spirits to mean, first, the spirits of the dead, particularly dead shaman ancestors, or the nature spirits of trees and rivers and mountains, or the gods and goddesses of the sky and the heavens, or the supreme god or gods. In many instances, a would-be-shaman is placed in contact with the "spirits" by dead ancestors, particularly, if these had been themselves shamans. (Eliade, *Shamanism*, 72 ff.) In this case then these spirits of the dead may be termed, for want of an establish term, as "intermediary spirits" between the shaman and the spirits other than the spirits of his dead ancestors. Again the shaman-to-be could be invited by a nature spirit like the *ayami* of the Goldi of Siberia who appeared to a candidate in a dream and offered herself to be his wife and he to be her husband, informing him beside that she had been the *ayami* of other past shaman relatives of his. Here, the *ayami* is

equivalent to a tutelary spirit. The tutelary guardian spirit could be a tiger or any other animal-spirit of one who may have been formerly a shaman himself. In this case, too, the animal-spirit would be a tutelary spirit who will aid and guide him in his work as shaman. Or else the spirits could be what is generally called the helping or assistant spirits. These generally come in the shape of animals also, particularly of birds, doves, or any other, or else in the form of dogs, etc. These spirits are the ones who carry the shaman on their wings as he goes journeying to the sky or down into the underworld. (Eliade, *Shamanism*, 72-73).

Ecstasy

It is about time now to say a few words on the ecstatic ability of the shaman, since this seems to be a very vital element in his function in the community.

Etymologically, ecstasy means the state of "being carried outside of oneself." (Eliade, *Shamanism*, 221 ff, 243 ff; *passim*). The reports of shamans or people close to them the world over, including the Philippines, indicate that in ecstasy, the soul of the shaman is absent from his body which may be lying rigidly on a mat on the floor or ground. Generally, although there are exceptions, the shaman in ecstasy is conscious. He hears and sees spirits and follows their lead and counsel. In ecstasy, the shaman is not possessed (although there are also exceptions, particularly in Indonesia and Polynesia as well as in the Philippines), nor dwelt in by the spirits as a medium, so that he is no longer himself speaking but someone else: either a soul of the dead, a spirit or a god. Rather, as Eliade puts it, in ecstasy, the shaman possesses his helping spirits, he operates aided and supported by their magical powers. Ecstasy and trance are synonymous. (Eliade, *Shamanism*, 5)

When does the shaman experience ecstasy? During his journeys to (1) the sky to meet the heavenly god face to face in order to present an offering on behalf of the community (*ibid.*, 76 ff., 119 ff., 135 ff; 139 ff; 194 ff; 198 ff); (2) the underworld or elsewhere in the universe in search of the soul of the sick person which has gone astray, usually being decoyed by deceased relatives (*ibid.*, 200 f.); (3) the underworld again in order to accompany the soul of the dead to the land of the spirits in order to learn broader and deeper truths by conversing with these higher beings. (Eliade, *Xalmoxis*, 273-273).

How the shaman enters into ecstasy is quite immaterial. What is important is that he enters into it. He can fall into trance whether through severe sickness, through a dream, through actually meeting a

spirit or *diwata* or *anito*; or through an exciting experience like being hit by lightning and coming off alive. Or else his first ecstasy could be induced by severe fasting, bodily laceration, or by meditation joined with ascetical practices; or, again, by drinking narcotic drinks like tobacco or hemp or mushroom juices, or nipa, coconut or rice beverages. Again ecstasy may be brought about through the use of music like the beating of drums or gongs, bells or cymbals, or by striking shells on porcelain dishes as do many of our own Philippine shamans or by chanting *kata-kata* like the Bajaus, or dancing unto exhaustion (Nimmo, 4 ff.).

(II) Now to our second proposition: *When in Ecstasy, the Shaman Says and Does Things Related to Tribal Concerns, and, Given the Particular Tradition and Culture of the Group, Brings about a Religious Therapeutic Effect.*

The Call to Shamanism

The call to shamanism by the spirits could come in many ways: directly, through a sudden fit of trembling and insanity or near insanity, as in the case of the shamans among the early Bisayans (Eliade, *Shamanism*, 33 ff; Alzinas, *Historia* 122-23; 216-217); or during a long period of sickness or depression, when, they claim, a *diwata* or *anito* or spirit calls on them to become his friend, promising himself to be his familiar spirit; or by a vision, as in the case of the Goldis and their ayamis, or of a Subanun who, having been in the forest for a number of days, and finding himself short of food, suddenly "saw" a *diwata* riding a boat, who promised to become his guardian spirit. (Christie, *Subanuns*, p. 4). Or through dreams, waking visions, or harrowing experiences like being hit by lightning and coming through unscathed, or drowning and being revived; or dying and eventually resuscitating; or physically disappearing for three or more days and eventually being found either on top of a tree, usually, a *balete*, or he is found sitting beneath it, or on the rafters of a house, or in the basement or the cellar, with a stranger and far away look, usually oblivious of the persons and things around him, and, in many case with a strength beyond the normal.

The shaman candidate generally gets over this initial onslaught of madness or psychosis. He gets cured, and then his initiation into the ranks of shamans begins. (Note well: it is possible, as in the case of Eskimos & American Indians, for a man to voluntarily go off into the desert or woods in search of a vision, and to experience a call to shamanism which is signalled often by the appearance of a spirit either in human

form or in animal form.)

The Initiation Proper: Departure

Shamanic initiation like any initiation on the primitive level consists of at least three stages: departure, transition and incorporation. Central to the idea of initiation is that of growth or maturity. This in turn is based on an ancient belief which finds verification not only on the personal but also on the collective and cosmic levels, that one must die in order to live again. This is the law that lies at the base of all existence as we know it in the world. The phenomenon of seizure or "an overpowering mental crisis" which is characteristic of shamanic call documented all over the world, is actually the beginning of the initiation, and can be likened to the stage of departure from one's wonted and accustomed way of life. It matters not whether this seizure comes spontaneously or has been deliberately brought about. What is important is that it *happens at all*. And still more important, that the shaman candidate is cured of this mental illness, generally through his own efforts and that of the spirits. The very name of the shaman in many Philippine tribes, namely, *baylan*, *balian*, *ballyan*, which is rooted on the Sanskrit word *ba-di* meaning "a fit of sudden and inexplicable trembling attributed by the peoples of the Malay peninsula to supernatural agency" (Christie, *Subanuns*, p. 2 n. 1) serves notice of this mental seizure as typical of this stage of shamanic consecration.

Transition

The next stage is the passage or transition from a way of life which was unproductive in terms of service to the community to one of intense social or community consciousness. The concrete realization of this stage is again manifold. But the end envisioned is clear: it is to gradually familiarize the future shaman with the burdens and boon of his new status.

Under the wise tutorship of the initiation masters, whether these be human or spirits, the shaman candidate little by little gets inured to the spiritual heritage of the group: its myths, legends, beliefs; the wealth of symbols and images stored in the memory of the race which he now begins to make his own and which in turn make him their lodgment for the spiritual sustenance of the group. It is at this stage that the future medicine-man's initial and momentary ecstatic experience is transformed into a permanent condition in which it is possible for him to "see spirits," i.e., to share in their spiritual nature.

Tinguian

Among the Tinguians, once the candidate is sure that the spirits are calling him, he approaches an elder shaman and undergoes an apprenticeship. He learns the details of the various ceremonies, the gifts suitable for each spirit, the chants and the *diams* (myths) to be used for specific times and situations. He learns all of this by rote; for the ceremonies must be conducted as perfectly as possible according to the teachings of the spirits "to the peoples of the first times." It is only after several months of training that the candidate receives his *piling* (Cole, 1915 p. 302).

Goldi

Again the Goldi and the Yakut shaman after the first encounter with the *ayami* reports "she has been coming to me ever since, and I sleep with her as with my wife, and we have no children." (Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 72-3). During the course of his initiation, the young man is subjected to various tests. At one time the *ayami* appears to him like an old woman, at another like a wolf with terrible visage. Sometimes she comes like a winged tiger. Thus she gradually strengthens his psyche for the terrible experiences he has to undergo as a shaman. Often she transports him to the land of the dead, where there are only young people who all look like Goldis and speak their language. Towards the end of his training, she comes to visit him less frequently. But she furnishes him with helping spirits and animals who are his assistants. They appear at his summonses and serve him.

Familiarity with the Sacred

Eliade believes that this continual instruction and tutelage is part of the process of a progressive entrance of someone withdrawn from profane life to an active share in the sacred. For as we shall see below, it is a fearsome thing to be called to become an instrument for the manifestation of the sacred.

The third phase which is incorporation into the realm of the spirits is reached in varying degrees of speed or slowness. Its characteristic is the phenomenon of "seeing spirits." This vision of spirits is not exactly identical with the initial vision which characterized the original call or vocation. For that was a sudden and often unforeseen event. Even when it had been prepared for by fasting and discipline, still the vision

was sudden in coming as well as in leaving. This last stage of the initiation is indeed a new rung in the process of making a shaman. For through it one acquires magical powers. Among the Menengkabau of Sumatra, the *dukun* (shaman) completes his instruction in solitude, or a mountain; there he learns to become invisible and, at night, see the souls of the dead which means that he has become a spirit, that he himself has died. (*Shamanism*, pp. 85–86). Even among the Bukidnons in Kibawe, Malaybalay, there are still cases of prayer-leaders who claim with all seriousness that they can see the dead coming to join the living who are either gathered to bury another relative or who are kneeling in prayer for him during the 9 days of the novena. And, even if these *mangalabtans* were not yet around when the dead was being waked or buried, they can usually through clairvoyance describe with detailed exactness the dress, the bodily posture, and the facial expression of the dead. To the amazement of the relatives. (Reported by Christian Aguado, Graduate Student of Philippine Studies, XU, Nov. 1, 1975). This final stage of initiation characterized by the acquisition of magical powers and picturesquely described as the state of “seeing spirits” is the determining sign of shamanism. By it he is incorporated into the company of the spirits. Thus he becomes a wise man, because having died he receives the teachings of the dead. And the dead know everything. (*Shamanism*, 84).

The outward acceptance of the community, and their consequent patronage of an individual as a shaman is important, but it would not come about unless the shaman has first of all earned this acceptance through unmistakable proofs of his having died and been reborn to community service.

Context of Culture: World View

Now we shall discuss how it is that the shaman in ecstasy, in the midst of the community with its particular tradition and culture is able to bring about a religio-therapeutic effect. As we mentioned above, shamanism is based on a vision of the world, on a faith; on a faith in the basic goodness of the world despite all the ills and conflicts therein found. Basic to this faith is the conviction that life and death are two sides of the same reality; human existence, or being human, or a being-with-nothingness. That life is not altogether lost in death, nay, rather that death is but a prelude to another birth of life, a fuller life.

Ancientness

This world view in the past found its highest elaboration among the Hindus in their doctrine of the transmigration of souls through the cycle of *samsara*, and *nirvana*; also in the doctrine of immortality through starification or becoming a star among some of the philosophers of the West, particularly the Pythagoreans and the Stoics among the Greeks and the Romans, also among the ancient Egyptians who tried to secure immortality for their kings and queens through mummification or entombment in the great pyramids. (Ostrander and Schroeder, *Psychic Discoveries*, 366 ff.) With the coming of Christianity, with its doctrine of personal resurrection, this same world view has persisted and was not heavily challenged until the 20th century with the rise of the secular city and its message of the death of God. Yet, today, after the disillusionment of the secular city, and the demise of the death of God movement, the same world view, with greater depth and Christian orientation, since the days of Vatican II and the openness of Christianity to the modern world and its challenges, to other families of faith, Christians or non-Christians, openness to the ever-growing consciousness of peoples of their own innate dignity as persons, and their fundamental rights to respect, to growth in human spirit and to concern for justice on all levels—this same world view today still holds sway over the minds of large segments of peoples: Christians of many colorings, Muslims, Buddhists, Ananda Margists, etc. Particularly among the Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians, their whole sacramental and theological systems are permeated with the same spirit of hope in the continuance of life after death: *vita mutatur, non tollitur* (“life is changed, not taken away”—from the *Preface* of the Mass for the Dead).

Bone and Seed

It is clear then that the structure of the shamanic initiation is built around this ancient faith which dates back to the paleolithic and which has perdured through the neolithic, although expressed in quite different terms. Among the paleolithic hunters the continuity of life seems to have been centered around the bone, it being that part of man or animal which resists the ravages of time and elements. Like the rocks or the stones which are the “bones” of the earth, the human skeleton, is, itself, a symbol of durability and permanence. Life can be reassembled around it, and the dead given back breath. Among the neolithic farmers, however, with the experience of the cycle of life through the discovery

of agriculture, man has obtained a further insight into death as like the falling of seed to the ground where it dies and decays only to spring forth to life again, to bear fruit, and finally undergo decline, death and decay, only to brought back to new life once more. The various elaborations of the same ideology: life springing from death and death giving birth to life during the historical periods need not detain us here.

Perhaps you may be wondering why the shaman is effective in bringing about a therapeutic effect on his community. It goes without saying that he effects his cure or strengthening of the psychic fabric of his audience precisely by affecting their emotions. In this regard I might quote a paragraph from Bromberg:

Patient Heals Himself

“The actual forces utilized in bringing about changes in emotions or feelings are basically few. It is a truism that although the techniques for mental healing have often involved *doing* something to the sufferer, the medium through which a mental cure is achieved is the psychological apparatus of the *recipient*. Whether mental healing is applied through magic, prayer, medicine or psychological analysis, the essential mechanics involved are those of penetration of the patient’s feelings, thoughts and attitudes by an external influence and the patient’s absorption of this influence.” (Bromberg, *Man Above Humanity*, p. 9–10).

Culture Mediates Healing

Thus the shaman working within the tradition and culture of the people, consciously and unconsciously, transmits to others his own experiences during the trance. For this transmission he employs a variety of artistic expressions: pictorial representation or symbols, colors in clothing, masks or carefully worked out theatrical performances, dramatized portrayals of a myth, legend or the like. Nor is the shaman busy at artistic creation only while under ecstasy: he also paints, draws, and composes poetry. Thus, because he is the repository of the wealth of the tradition and wisdom of the race, he is able to affect a change in the depths of his audience. For in witnessing the trance of the shaman, they never remain mere onlookers. They are stirred to the depths by the shamanistic trance. They experience a process of transformation—a catharsis—a purification and ordering of the psyche, an increase in self-confidence and security. And this renders them better able to stand up to the dangers of everyday life. (Lommel, p. 106). Because the shaman is an adept at mass communication, he is able to put his message of

hope and faith in the orderliness of the cosmos across so that they absorb the influence and appropriate it to their very souls.

(III) We now come to the third proposition: *The religio-therapeutic influence of the shaman results in a socio-psychological function for the community.*

Concretely in what does this socio-psychological function consist? It is no other than the psychic equilibrium and peace, or the resolution of conflict, through the forthright acknowledgement of its presence as well as of the roots of conflict.

Faith in Creators

As we mentioned in the beginning among the presuppositions of shamanism are the following: the acknowledgement of conflict and its roots, a faith in the ultimate goodness of the universe, despite the presence of evil; and this goodness is premised on the further belief that the cosmos is an ordered world, coming as it is from the hands of the creator god or gods, the source of existence for the lesser gods and men and animals, the protector of the weak, the source of morality, the punisher of the wicked and the rewarder of goods. Also included in this constellation of belief is the other belief that the created cosmos is subject to the universal law of decay, and the need to constantly renew the energies of the cosmos, through the creative action of gods and of men, especially the shamans. If men and the lesser gods fall under the curse of decay, the ancient Creators do not. For they are the source of life and existence for the ordered world or cosmos which they above all maintain in existence. Their superiority has been demonstrated by their victory over the primordial chaos and the forces of darkness and decay. In many myths the Creators first had to reduce these under their feet before they could build the world into a cosmos. (Eliade, *Patterns*, 41 ff.)

Loss of Closeness

In the past, mankind was very close to the Creator gods as well as very dependent on him. Through the shaman, this very ancient community had access to the Creators, and man acknowledged the holiness of the cosmos which these gods had created. In the course of time, however, there came about a loss of this closeness between the Creators and mankind. Graphically, this human condition is symbolized in the myths of man's "fall" from a favored familiarity so common the world over, as well as the raising of the sky to its present height from an

original closeness when, as in the Greek myth, the earth and sky embraced each other, or in the Philippine myth, the first people could touch the sky with their pestle in the act of pounding palay. This loss of familiarity coincided with the development of culture through man's acquisition of control over the external world, and the corresponding preoccupation of man with the sacredness of life and the forces that produce and sustain life: sexuality, food production, community living, etc. even to the devaluation of the sacredness of the cosmos and the Creators of the cosmos. (Eliade, *Patterns*, 46, 50 ff.)

Shaman Focus on Closeness

Yet, despite this loss and devaluation of faith in the holiness of the Creator gods and the cosmos, mankind was not without the means of recapturing it. For the shaman has kept alive the memory of this within his soul, and, through his trances could communicate it to his group. The shaman alone through his initiation and consecration, could approach the supreme gods in times of urgent social calamity and present the case of the community. And because of his achieved spirit-existence and the help of his guardian and assisting spirits, the shaman could obtain from the Creators themselves a fresh release of the primordial creative forces which set the cosmos in motion with the fullness of energies in the original days of creation. This, the shaman achieves during his trances and ceremonies. The reactivation of the creative springs of the cosmos was especially called for when the very underpinnings of human life and the very existence of the universe was in jeopardy: in times of floods, famine, plagues, wars and invasion; when an individual is seriously sick, when the group was attacked by the demon of insecurity, and tension, for instance in times of inter-family feuds, inter-tribal strifes, vendetta and so on. At such times the lesser gods whose province was limited merely to cultural activities were of no avail. Mankind had to appeal directly to the more ancient, more powerful, more benevolent Creator gods, original sources of life, benefactors of mankind. This is signal service to the well-being of the entire group.

Hierophantic realization

The shaman could be the healer, the adviser, the peace-maker, the prophet forthrightly speaking to the tribe in behalf of the Creator gods, making known their wills and desires because he is one "who has gone ahead or before" the rest of the community. He has crossed the threshold of life and eath. The shaman is one who because of the gifts of his

mind, his initiation and constant exercise of his craft, has been struck and absorbed by the force of what Campbell calls a "hierophantic realization;" the realization of the sacred character of the world and the entire universe. This realization strangely enough comes about outwardly at least as a rupture with society and the world. As we have seen, through his initiatory experiences, the shaman is sped out of the world and brought into the realm of spirits. Yet, on an even deeper plane, shamanism is not a rupture with society and the world. Rather, it is "an overpowering realization of their depth, and the rupture is with the comparatively trivial attitude toward both the human spirit and the world that appears to satisfy the majority." (Campbell, *The Masks of God*, 252-254.)

From Split World to a Harmonious One

Eliade who disclaims any facile assimilation of shamanism to any kind of mental disease yet suggests a point "to which the psychologist will always be justified in drawing attention: like any other religious vocation, the shamanic vocation is manifested by a crisis, a temporary derangement of the future shaman's spiritual equilibrium." This derangement, Eliade goes on to say, shows us, "in actual process as it were, the repercussions, within the psyche, of what we have called the 'dialectic of hierophanies'—the radical separation between profane and sacred and the resultant splitting of the world. . . ." (*Shamanism*, xi-xii).

He further points out that in both archaic and primitive man, the desire to enter into contact with the sacred is counteracted by the fear of being obliged to renounce the simple human condition and become more or less pliant instrument for some manifestation of the sacred (gods, spirits, or ancestors)." (*Ibid.*, 22-24). And the shaman with his magicoreligious powers has willingly, of course, under the invitation of the spirits, allowed himself to become the pliant tool for the manifestation of the sacred in the community. That psychic maladies always appear in relation to the vocation of the shaman does not surprise Eliade because "Like the sick man, the religious man is projected unto a vital plane that shows him the fundamental data of human existence, that is, solitude, danger, hostility of the surrounding world." And being a man who has gone before the others, the shaman can strengthen the psyche of his group precisely because he himself has experienced the fundamental condition of human existence. He has tasted solitude, faced danger, and struggled with hostile forces in the world.

The shaman may indeed start out as a sick man. But he does not

remain sick. He is above all, the sick man who has succeeded in curing himself. Generally when his vocation is revealed to him through an illness, the shaman's initiation is equivalent to a cure. Arlo Nimmo related his own experience of the making of a Sulu shaman who was sick. His initiation brought about his healing. (Nimmo, 6-8).

Externally, it is easy to note numerous resemblances between the epileptoid cases and the Siberian shaman's trance, for instance. But the essential fact remains his *ability to bring on his epileptoid trance at will*. Still more significantly, as has been pointed out above, the shaman for all his apparent likeness to an epileptic or hysterical person, shows proof of more than normal constitution: he achieves a degree of concentration beyond the capacity of the profane; he sustains exhausting efforts; he has perfect control over his ecstatic movements. (Eliade, *Shamanism*, p. 29.)

So finally what begins for a shaman as a world split between the profane and the sacred becomes through his trance and his spirit powers a world wherein the profane and the sacred, in the person of the shaman, and, through him, in the psyche of the community, are brought into a harmony. Thus psychic equilibrium and peace are established, and the community surges forward as a unit, despite the possibilities of future conflicts.

At long last we can return to our original complex hypothesis and demonstrate its validity.

Shaman Knows Human Nature

First, the shaman is a psychologist because he is knowledgeable of the mental states and processes of people; or, briefly, because he knows human nature. To be sure, the archaic shaman did not know the human mind with the same degree of sophistication and accuracy as do our august listeners. Yet his knowledge of the human mind and its state was very real and very effective. We might liken it to what philosophers call knowledge by connaturality, or knowledge through actual experience. Having been sick himself, he knows what it is to be sick; having cured himself, he understands the hows and wherefores of healing. Besides, his own psychic experiences and wide and deep knowledge of the heritage of the group, of their symbols and images, even the most primordial and archetypal, and his wisdom which he acquired by achieving new levels of consciousness, and realizing thereby the insights and meanings buried in the ore of the group's lore—all this makes him understand intimately the human nature of the people among whom and for whom he works.

Thus he knows the "nature" of man, what it means to be "human" within the context of his group's ways of living, feeling, thinking, interacting, in short, their total culture. Finally through his artistic talents in clothing these insights in vivid imagery and symbol, the shaman can influence, in some case, even control, the thoughts and emotions of his group.

Shaman a Psychic

Second, the shaman is a psychologist because he is a person especially sensitive to extrasensory forces and influences; or, because he himself is what moderns call "psychic." This is clear from the fact that the shaman by nature and by profession is indeed very liable to forces beyond the ordinary reach of the people. The very process of becoming a shaman is crowned with his ability "to see spirits." He begins with a mental seizure or abduction by the spirits; followed by a period of initiation, either ecstatic or tradition, i.e., conducted either by spirit masters or older shamans; then the investment of magical powers like clairvoyance and divination as well as the power to fly which he derives either from the spirits of the dead or his helping spirits, especially the birds, as well as from his ingesting rock crystals or magic stones with their uranian powers. All this shows that the shaman is indeed an extremely psychically sensitive person.

Shaman a Healer

Thirdly, the shaman is a psychologist because within the context of the culture and tradition of his group, he could actually cure mental disorders. We have already seen that the shaman's ability to heal mental disorders stems from his own intimate personal experience of having himself been a victim of such illness, and his having cured himself. His own past and ever renewable struggle with loneliness, dangerous situations and hostile foes which he experienced in his original call and subsequent initiation and which he relives in every seance makes him a very credible teacher and adviser whose instructions carry the weight of personal experiences. And so his efforts to help people cure themselves were very often crowned with success. He utilized all the forces at his command in building up the psychic health of the community: good sense, knowledge of human nature, and magical powers. In the words of Bomberg, "... The wizard or shaman of preliterate groups was not, in the words of Opler, 'a credulous dupe of his own supernaturalistic claims.' The Apache shaman (and we should add, also the Filipino

baylan) was far from an inspired automaton, but rather a 'circumspect and careful worker, a good judge of his fellowmen and of the ills to which humankind is heir.' The prehistoric as well as the primitive, medicine-man undoubtedly added native psychological wit to magical science in his utilization of supernatural forces in healing." (*Man Above Humanity*, 17.)

In both preliterate and developed societies, there is the phenomenon of life-maiming neuroses. But only in the ancient world such neuroses are not confused with shamanism. For the neurotic is a weakened, helpless, characterless individual, useless to the community, incapable of undertaking hard strenuous psychic and physical labors. But the shamanic crisis, if properly fostered, yields an adult not only of superior intelligence and refinements, but also of greater physical stamina and vitality of spirit than is normal to members of his group.

V—Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I would like to borrow a page from Lommel:

The Shaman's experiences give him special abilities which afford him his social status. Not simply the experiences, of course, but their artistic transposition into dramatic action. The shaman is not merely the 'socerer' who influences the fortune of the chase, but also the poet and artist of the group. It is he who moulds the spiritual world of his group into impressive images, and gives ever-renewed shape and fresh life to the images that live in his group's imagination—the myths, the religious superstitions. To accomplish this he puts himself in a trance and lets his community take part in this trance. The trance is, so to speak, the plane of communication—or communication is achieved through the trance. The religious or artistic rapture, essential to communication of the images, is possible or difficult to achieve in a state of normal waking consciousness. In the trance the shaman is helped by the group's labile psychic equilibrium, its particular psychic structure, the so-called dreamlike atmosphere.

The shaman is able to influence the psyche of his group, to give it fresh life, to render it creative and restore its healthy, productive equilibrium, more effectively than any modern psychotherapist, artist or man of the theatre, and also more effectively than the celebrant priest.

Although we can 'understand' from without the psychic processes leading to a man becoming a shaman, we cannot experience them ourselves—which would be the only way of gaining true understanding.

Nevertheless we can clearly see the particular form taken by this first 'spiritual' man from the primordial epoch of humanity, and the nature of this combination of artistic, psychotherapeutic, magical and histrionic abili-

ties; thereby, we gain an insight into the early mental life of mankind, which reveals an astonishing complexity, a complicated psychic structure so modern in appearance that we are reluctant to credit so-called primitives with such minds (p. 140).

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