

ASTRO*SHAMANISM - PART 2
Shamanism In Astrology
July 18, 2010

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

In this material, I am not going to try to pursue shamanism as it relates to personal totems, power animals, or to any of the more exotic practices that we might read about in books like those of Carlos Castaneda, and other worthy writers, although these are, of course, very legitimate interests. I am not going to skin animals, dig (or take) herbs, draw magic circles, or perform any of the many rituals that you might find in a book on traditional shamanism.

Here we are looking at shamanism within the tradition of astrology itself, in particular the role of the modern astrologer as a ferryman or guide to the inner states of the mind and life.

In this sense, most astrologers perform (at least to some degree) this function of the shaman, that of the ferryman from one phase to another. Because of this fact, the counseling astrologer may find shamanic astrology of particular interest.

The shaman helps others to accept their changes or deaths on one level and obtain rebirth and develop familiarity on other and new levels. It is written that the shaman restores the road between earth and heaven, a road that has been temporarily lost or has become unclear or uncertain. Another way to say this is that the shaman knows the way from one state of being or chakra to the next state, and is able to guide or prepare the initiate for that journey. The shaman often guides the would-be-initiate from an unstable or dangerous state of mind to stability and future productivity.

In the esoteric literature, the shaman traditionally escorts the souls of the dead away from their corpses and dying places, and on into the next world. The shaman is capable of entering and holding an altered state of consciousness at will, and can act as an intermediary between the known world of the would-be initiate, and the supra-natural or "next" world.

The shaman does not have to enter an altered state, as in 'somehow' going there. His or her experiences are forever fresh in their mind and they react spontaneously to the psychological distress signals coming from any person they encounter. It is automatic, and does not require any ritual or preparation. It just happens. A shaman can appear to those in need at one moment, point out the way, and be transparent or invisible the next, as if nothing ever took place. This happens all the time, and we may find ourselves shaking our head to make sure we saw what we did see.

By knowing both worlds, the shaman is able to predict or control the future of the would-be initiate, who does not yet know their way around these future worlds. This is a fancy way of saying the shaman can converse or reach one who is lost in an unconventional state of mind, make contact, and guide that person out of their situation to higher ground, so to speak.

Dead and Alive

The shaman is said to be dead in the land of the living, but alive in the spiritual worlds, and therefore knows the future for those living now, who must one day make the same transformation (or death) that the shaman has already taken. The shaman has, in some sense,

gone to the next plane or world before other members of their society, and can reveal that world to those who themselves are about to cross over to it, or who are crossing now. The shaman is, therefore, above all, a guide to these other worlds. The shaman has a certain power over time, actually possessing the ability to “make time,” and to penetrate between the seconds of clock time to touch on the timeless or eternity — the space beyond or within time.

To repeat: the shaman is one who has already gone beyond, who has him or herself crossed over into the next world or level, and has returned with knowledge of these adjacent or other worlds. He or she can then instruct or prepare others for their forthcoming initiation into these other worlds. Above all, shamans mediate between the world of the living and the dead, between one phase or level and the next one. Those with a propensity for shamanism (out of body experiences) often apprentice themselves to an accomplished shaman, through the process of mentoring and initiation. The shaman is an initiate and thus an initiator. This, then, has been a brief introduction to the traditional nature of the shaman. Sound a little familiar? It should, because most counseling astrologers practice the shamanic techniques we will be presenting below.

Out-of-the-Body Experiences

Before we turn to looking at astrology and shamanism, let us be clear about what we mean by ecstatic or out-of-the-body experiences, which is the especial province of the shaman. Shamans, as part of their initiation, are by their own life experiences somehow thrust out of the body of normal conventional societal experience into an altered state of consciousness, what can only be called unconventional. Because these altered states are unconventional, then, by definition, they will not be understood or easily grasped by conventional means and conventional minds. These have been called altered states of consciousness or out-of-the-body experiences.

Everyone, each of us, has out-of-the-body experiences all the time. Consciousness is not some static state, but ebbs and flows, constantly. We are always going out of the body and back into it. However, what is missing for most of us is the awareness of this process. We tend to ignore and not recognize what our mind is doing, and don't often register when we are more in or more out of our body. Instead, we assume our consciousness is stable and more or less the same each moment. In fact, most of us struggle to keep it stable. We don't want to or are afraid to go out of the body. We don't want to be that different. When the waves of change wash over us, most prefer to take a little nap and just ignore what is happening. Usually we are not willing to witness our own birth and passing on the various planes. That is mostly left to the role of the shaman.

If we have not, as have traditional shamans, been forced to look at our mind from an altered state, then, if we want to learn something more about shamanistic states, we will have to study and become familiar with learning to recognize the various states of our mind, the map of our mental states. This is part of what we will look at here. Lacking life experiences that force us into an altered view of life, one can learn about the mind through various forms of meditation, in particular, what is called insight meditation or Vipassana meditation. There is not room to go into that here, but there are many books and teachers available on this topic.

The Astrologer as Shaman

Astrology can also be used — and often is used — as a shamanic tool. In other words, astrology is used to guide individuals who are lost or stuck in one area of their lives, introducing

them to the next or to a different realm. This is a common practice. How that can be done is what will be presented here.

This material could be presented in a wide variety of ways. Here we will present it as this writer (and his teachers) understands it. It should go without saying that from these descriptions, each of you will find your own way of understanding this, and fashion your own shamanic astrological coat. In no way is this author trying to be dogmatic. It is just the only way I know of this knowledge. You will find your own words, please.

Are Astrologers Shamans?

This blog is about the use of astrology in a shamanistic way, not how to become a shaman. True shamanism, as pointed out earlier, is an inner calling, not an avocation, and requires sensitivity gained from life experience not found in the average person. That being said, any astrologer with a successful counseling practice is probably performing some shamanic activity, and has had experiences in his or her own life that were preparations for the better understanding of others.

It is my belief that most astrologers already have some form of heightened sensitivity or they would not be pursuing the study of astrology. As mentioned, any counseling astrologer is, to some degree, probably already performing a shamanic function to one degree or another. This blog may help you become more aware of what you are already doing.

What I hope to do here is to point out to you how astrology can be used as a shamanistic guide. It will be up to you to determine if there is a connection and if what is written here makes sense and is useful to you.

Seeking The Shaman

The shaman, unlike the priest, does not seek out or try to share his spiritual knowledge with the general community. Members of the community who are suffering in one way or another seek out the shaman, who then agrees to see and work with them. This is not much different from the way the average astrologer receives clients, often by word of mouth.

There is much written about the shaman taking special herbs or substances to enter into a heightened state in order to communicate with the client, but this is not often necessary. The shaman already exists in an altered state, one altered by his or her own internal experiences. The shaman does not need any mental enhancements; he or she already has them.

In astrological shamanism, the shaman, who has previously had initiations or personal life experiences related or synchronous with the client, is able to reach and connect with the client by virtue of already having knowledge of the general psychological landscape the client is going through. The shaman is able to attract and flag down the attention of the client, establish communication, and provide the client with signs that the client will recognize, signs that signify to the client that the shaman has had similar experiences; that is, that the shaman knows where the client is at through personal experience. Once mutual trust and recognition are established, clients allow the shaman to guide or lead them out of the situation they are stuck in and on to another area of the mind, what amounts to their next or future stage of life.

Altered States

The shaman, who, through virtue of his or her personal experience in altered states, can somehow speak the language of the client, can converse and establish communication. The shaman, due to having had a similar experience, is able to answer questions the client may ask, and satisfy the client's fear of being misled by someone who does not actually understand their state of mind.

In summary, the shaman is able to get the attention of the client by displaying signs of experience that the client can recognize and acknowledge as true. Once clients understand that he or she is not alone, and that the experience of the shaman in fact encompasses their own experience, they can submit to allowing the shaman to lead them out of their current predicament and on toward another place, one hopefully more comfortable for them. The act of realizing that they are not alone, and that someone else has had similar experiences, is often a key step for clients in this process.

Beyond Convention

The client, typically, has somehow wandered into a state of mind that effectively isolates him or her from the rest of the society, if only temporarily. Their society has no answers for them and, by definition, cannot but exclude them from their own consciousness. The isolated person thus is cut off from the nourishment of the community until they can resolve their unrest, and stop disturbing society. This is where the shaman comes in and why they are sought out. In many societies, any person with mental instability or a wavering consciousness is told to seek out a shaman, either to be cured or to take up shamanism themselves.

The shaman, who is already permanently outside of the conventional community in some sense, is capable of grasping the degree and nature of the suffering of the client. He or she already has this experience of isolation, and can measure the degree of separation of the client from the community, and guide the client to make adjustments.

The shaman calms the client, assists in his or her stabilization, and eventually restores the client back to the community as whole and usable once again. The role of the shaman is to guide the client from one state of mind to the next obvious state, and help him or her to stabilize. As astrologers we do this all the time. This blog will present a variety of esoteric shamanic techniques of interest to the astrologer.

Let me know if you are still with me and I will continue.

