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# SHAMANISM

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Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10-12

## Introduction

- Shaman are spiritual beings with the ability to heal, work with energies and 'see' visions. The essential characteristics of shaman are mastery of energy and fire as a medium of transformation, and an intimate knowledge of the spirit world.
- Shamanism is a range of traditional beliefs and practices that involve the ability to diagnose, cure, and sometimes cause human suffering by traversing the axis mundi and forming a special relationship with, or gaining control over, spirits.
- Shamanism is based on the premise that the visible world is pervaded by invisible forces or spirits that affect the lives of the living. In contrast to animism (the belief that non-human entities—such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects—possess a spiritual essence) and animatism (the belief that all things, even those considered to be inanimate objects, possess consciousness), which any and usually all members of a society practice, shamanism requires specialized knowledge or abilities.

## Etymology

The word shaman originated among the Siberian Tungus and literally means he (or she) who knows.

## History

- Dating back to the Neolithic period (a period of naturalistic history).
- Christians, however, can trace shamanism back to the tower of babel under Nimrod.
- Tibetan Buddhism is believed to have shamanic influence.
- Christianity has had a profound effect on shamanism
- As Christian influence spread with Spanish colonization, shamanism continued to decline.
- Today, shamanism, once universal, survives primarily among indigenous peoples. This is especially widespread in Africa as well as South America, where "mestizo shamanism" is widespread.
  - The practice is known as “Vegetalismo”. The shamans are known as “Vegetalistas”.
  - They are said to gain their knowledge and power to cure from the *vegatales*, or plants of the region.
  - Many believe to receive their knowledge from ingesting a hallucinogenic brew.
  - This practice combines catholic elements with the animistic religious beliefs common to indigenous tribes throughout this region.

## Hmong Shamanism

To understand Hmong culture, you need to learn about Hmong religion and kinship system first. These two are the pillars of Hmong society, and are not distinct spheres, but are highly interwoven.

## Tenants / Doctrines of Shamanism

### *Animism*

The belief that non-human entities—such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects—possess a spiritual essence.

### *The Calling*

Becoming a shaman is not just a job; it is a vocation. Usually, a young initiate must be "called" through a visitation of the spirits.

### *The Shaman's Roles*

To an outsider, the shaman might be perceived as a primitive medical doctor. In reality, he or she is a revered and essential member of the community, acting as physician, spiritual minister, dream interpreter, psychiatrist and elder statesman who serves as a bridge between the physical and spirit worlds.

### *Soul Calling*

### *String Tying*

### *The Trance*

A shaman is transported to another world via a "flying horse," a wooden bench usually no wider than the human body.

### *Animal Sacrifice*

### *Spiritual Tools*

The shaman uses several spiritual tools in the performance of his duties.

- *Altar* – To seek the help of, and acknowledge the spirits of his ancestors
- *Bench* – Signifying a horse which the shaman will use to travel to and from the spiritual realm.
- *Split Horns* – Used to communicate with the spirits, and to let the shaman know which direction the soul has wandered.
- *Spiritual Sword* – Used to fight the evil spirits.
- *A Spirit Rattle* – Used to bind everything together.

- *Finger Bells* – Used to heal the sick.
- *Gong and/or Cymbals* – used to call upon the healing spirits.

### *Hmong Funeral*

## Summary

Shamanism is an entire cosmology that give substance and meaning to all aspects of life. It isn't just one part of a whole, it binds the whole together. Shamans use familiar spirits and demonic power to perform acts that can appear to be very powerful. As Christians, though, they have no power or influence over us, and their healing rituals are no match for the healing that Jesus gives.