

The Esoteric
Symbolism of
Shamanic Trance
and Altered States
Phenomena

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By

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INTRODUCTION

The origin of shamanism lies in the archaic technique of ecstasy, which is used as the means of connection with spiritual beings and the other world.¹ This eye-catching characteristic of shamanism is so strong that we can positively underline the definition of Mircea Eliade – that the shaman and only the shaman is the ultimate master of ecstasy. Shamans are chosen because their life and activities belong to the sphere of the sacred, which is unachievable for other members of society, as they are marked by an intensity of their individual religious experience. That chosen mystical elite rules the religious life of the primeval society – taking care of the soul, knowing its form and predestination.²

Ecstatic practices are characteristic of the shamanic ritual, although a great deal of ethnographic data, prove the fact that the shaman was able to fulfill his duties while in an ordinary state of consciousness. While ecstasy is often considered as the essential aspect of soul journeying, this was not entirely true in the archaic epoch, insofar as, in archaic performance, there was no difference between the supernatural and the mundane, between the sacred and the profane.³

For primitive consciousness, there is no such thing as a purely physical fact. Products of primitive perception are determined by a complex state of consciousness characterized by collective representations. Primitive people observed their world with the same eyes as modern man, but perceived it with another consciousness. Complex perception was not yet developed in primitive minds, and, for that reason, their thinking process was purely mystical. Primitive men associated themselves with all-natural elements that provoked feelings and with secret forces and their magical characteristics, perceiving them as having a soul or a life source. According to C. Levi-Strauss, primitive societies based their conceptions

¹ S. A. Tokarev, *Rannie Formy Religiyi* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1990), 269.

² Mircea Eliade, *Arhaicheskie Tehniki ekstaza* (1964), 138, 1964. accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/shamanizm_arhaicheskie_tehniki_ekstaza.html

³ T. I. Borko, “Ekstaz Shamana: Na Puti k Religioznoy Vere ili kak Udostoverit’sya v Real’nosti Mifa”, *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta*, Vol. 3 (Moscow: Vestnik Moskovskogo Universtiteta, 2006): 73.

on animistic beliefs.⁴ The archaic man tried to go beyond the limits of the ordinary far from the influence of time into eternity. The normal tendency of archaic people was to transform the physiological act into a cultural ritual, by giving it a sacred value. All performances and actions in primitive societies were organized according to transcendental principles.⁵ What for us is called perception, the primitive man considered as being communication with spirits or souls, the invisible and secret powers that rule fate.⁶

In archaic societies, material objects from the visible world didn't have any real importance. Objects and actions were accorded importance only if their reality was considered as being transcendental. All actions with some special aim or purpose were sacralized. For primitive men, reality was seen to be an imitation of the heavenly archetype.⁷ Even simply, gazing at the sky represented a religious experience for the primitive consciousness.⁸

This idea was also well known to Hindu yogis, as shown by a citation from the Tantric text *Vijnanabhairava* (meaning "Divine consciousness"): "Only by fixing his gaze on the sky, in that very moment, could a yogin achieve the state of liberation". Concentration on the sky places the observer into a state of infinity because the sky itself represents infinite space.⁹ Primitive people received intuitive knowledge about the sacred with the help of emotional perception, achieved through mystical experiences.¹⁰ Due to their exceptional development of cognitive abilities, primeval shamans were able to reach a higher unity of mind, body, and

⁴ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Pervobytnoe Myshlenie* (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/levistros_klod/pervobitnoe_mishlenie.html

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Ocherki Sravnitel'nogo Religiovedeniya* (1999), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/ocherki_sravnitelnogo_religiovedeniya.html

⁶ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Pervobytnoe Myshlenie* (Moscow: Respublika, 1994), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/levistros_klod/pervobitnoe_mishlenie.html

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Mif o Vechnom Vozvrasheniya* (1947), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/mif_o_vechnom_vozvrashchenii.html

⁸ S. Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religions* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), 13.

⁹ J. Singh, *Vijnanabhairava or Divine Consciousness* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1979), 80.

¹⁰ E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1965), 20-21.

emotions, in the form of self-realization, by balancing the harmony between nature and the Cosmos. Today, the evolution of humanity and the development of cognitive abilities has led to the separation of mind and emotions resulting in the fact that earlier human cognitive perception has lost its meaning.¹¹ Modern shamans communicate with spirits by inducing an ecstatic state during ritual behavior. Ritual is a way of communicating with spirits, where the latter possess the shaman's body - while his or her soul goes for a journey into the spiritual realms.¹²

To be in a state of trance means to be possessed by divinity with the understanding that, while the spirit enters the body, the individual self has to disappear, because it is not possible to be human and spirit at the same time. The main characteristic of a trance is the disintegration of worldly things. The border between time and space disappears, while causal relationships are perceived as being beyond time. It is the state close to enlightenment – the mystical union (Lat. *unio mystica*).¹³ Shamanic enlightenment means the ability to see light in the darkness, to see a reality that cannot be seen by other people.¹⁴ A shaman is capable of dealing with specific work through a spiritual journey into the lower world of subconscious reality or of achieving knowledge through a soul flight into the upper world of the supernatural.¹⁵

Elements related to the trance represent transcending the borders of individuality, leading to a state of spontaneity and freedom. Time jumps from one scene to another – time being the object of perception. At the same time in the trance, there occurs a void; a nothingness; a non-I; a space without time, where the frightening and the sublime both unite in the transcendental level of consciousness with the body being merely an instrument. The Cosmos becomes a symbolic system, and trance is considered as being a means for solving its riddles. This demands renouncement from cultural norms, worldviews, and systems; trance represents a state of consciousness, where the human has to address their inner essence.¹⁶

¹¹ N. Havh, "Filosofskiy Pothod k Izucheniyu Shamanizma", *Central'no-aziatskiy shamanism: Filosofskie, istoricheskie, religioznye aspekty* (1996): 123.

¹² S. A. Tokarev, *Rannie Formy Religiyi*, 288.

¹³ H. Kahlweit, *Shamany, Tselitel'i, Znahar'i* (Moscow: Sovershenstvo, 1998), 53.

¹⁴ Michael Harner, *Put' Shamana* (1996), accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/harner_maykl/put_shamana.html

¹⁵ Kenneth Medouz, *Shamanskiy Opyt* (1999), accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/medouz_kennet/shamanskiy_opit.html

¹⁶ H. Kahlweit, *Shamany, Tselitel'i, Znahar'i*, 57.

Other worlds are as real as physical reality is, and emotions felt during ecstatic experiences are even more intense than those in ordinary life because everything that is perceived in such a state of consciousness has a special meaning. Time is not constant; it is filled with elasticity, meaning that it can be compressed and stretched. Every situation is filled with deep sense and each detail can serve as a point of reference, for informed action based on meditative imagination or controlled fantasy. Spiritual experience is a process similar to electrical stimulation based on the organic, molecular, and cellular levels.¹⁷

Trespassing into such consciousness gives rise to a feeling like that of the soul ascending from the heart at the same time, a sensation starts in the brain, before descending through the spinal column.¹⁸ The body starts to shake and the adept loosens control of his movements. After this, a feeling of flying above the earth begins, producing a shivering sensation in the spine. The whole body feels waves of heat, and, in the end, consciousness departs from the body. There is a feeling of enormous power, while “white darkness” enlivens the body, ascending to the top of the head (almost as if swallowing the body). After the trance, there remains a feeling of complete calmness, and the head remains empty. During an embodiment of the spirits, there is no loss of energy. The arousal of subjective representations enhances the consciousness of one’s own body, and provides a feeling of an ability to pass through physical objects. The path to the inner world opens up, stimulating an interest in music and rhythm. Inner bodily structures are perceived on a cellular level, with the adept experiencing a state similar to death. The death of the ego demands a renouncing of all limitations. It comes together with a widening of consciousness, endowing an individual with a high sensory potential. Emotional excitement enhances the unity of conscious and unconscious processes, intensifying the activity of deeper layers of the psyche. Those who have survived this alternation of consciousness do not fear having lost motivational control of the conscious ego and they are not afraid of the unknown and death. Factors related to the renouncement of self by receiving the situation as it is, and by being ready to die are considered to be the driving forces for surrendering consciousness to fate, as no identification with self-existence is left.¹⁹

In the altered state of consciousness, it is possible to perceive the spiritual planes and to experience encounters with other forms of life.

¹⁷ Kahlweit, 66.

¹⁸ Edward Taylor, *Mif i Obryad v Pervobytnoy Kul'ture* (Smolensk: Rusich, 2000), 153.

¹⁹ H. Kahlweit, *Shamany, Tselitel'i, Znahar'i*, 66.

During ecstasy, the eyes should be shut, because the shaman sees with inner eyesight and hears with inner hearing.²⁰ During a trance, and as in all psychic experiences, time slows down. All shamanic consciousness is based on concentration on one single point. In situations close to death, consciousness separates from the body. A proprioceptive feeling of one's own body almost completely disappears. The shaman being in this state feels free from worldly bondage and loses connection with the outer reality. Trance represents inner freedom from the infinite flow of outer disturbances and thought mechanisms.²¹ Objects, seen by physical eyes, are mere energetic structures, interpreted as material objects or as organic matter. Humans are connected with the surrounding waves of light energy, based on electric impulses, which our brain then interprets as visual objects. Sources of energy, vibrating on faster or slower frequencies, are found to exist beyond our physical imagination. A shaman can feel these secret energies and interpret a reality imperceptible to other people. Shamans understand that the spirit, as the individual life force, exists in all physical and subtle forms and lies at the fundamental source of all phenomena. Such understanding transcends the abilities of the intellect, so this kind of knowledge can only be achieved by spiritual means.²²

Religious culture as the whole system of worldviews based on faith in the supernatural or subtle world relates to the phenomena of mystical or religious experiences.²³ It is not possible to explore such experiences as objects of emotional and rational perception, because these kinds of experiences demand expression in symbolic form, as they are always connected with personal worldviews. In most cases, they have personal character; and their content is often colored with psychological traits. According to its nature, this kind of experience is purely individual, although there are collective examples, too. Inner mystical experience, which is without form and which is followed by insight, lies at the essence of all religions. It has its origin in shamanic types of experiences, which left traces in many world religions. Such types of mystical or religious experiences have an exclusively esoteric character because they represent

²⁰ Kenneth Medouz, *Shamanskiy Opyt*, accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/medouz_kennet/shamanskiy_opit.html

²¹ H. Kahlweit, *Shamany, Tselitel'i, Znahar'i*, 69.

²² Kenneth Medouz, *Shamanskiy Opyt*, accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/medouz_kennet/shamanskiy_opit.html

²³ N. Angaraeva, *Put k Devyati Nebesam Yuhen Huhe Tengeriin Hargy* (Ulan-Ude; Centr Narod. Trad. Baykal, 2000), 43.

necessary food for religious faith.²⁴ Altered states (according to shamans) such as, for instance, the ritual spirit embodiment induced by trance enable the shaman to fulfill their spiritual service to their society, during which they completely identify themselves with the spirit and God. This represents the purely esoteric characteristics of such experiences.²⁵ Shamanic esotericism (from the Greek. *esoterós*, meaning – “inner; secret”) is poorly investigated in scientific studies. According to the Buryat scholar on shamanism, M. Zomonov, the concept of esotericism or esoteric culture is mistakenly understood as being secret teaching. It, rather, means the inner experience, related to an inner or transpersonal experience.²⁶ Religious facts rely on intuition and emotions as do, for example, primitive religions that show a natural tendency towards mysticism. Science follows statistical and quantitative methodological approaches, but God represents the exception to this, as He is not a product of generalization. Each human is an individual, and the individual is truly unpredictable. Scientific education in general, is based on statistical truth and abstract knowledge, and for that reason, it transcends a rational product of the unrealistic worldview, in which the individual, as a more marginal phenomenon, does not play any role. However, the individual as an irrational phenomenon is the only true bearer of reality.²⁷

All forms of religious experiences represent timeless, so-called Jungian archetypes of the human mind. Many traditional epics are the product of ecstatic trances of shamans, who described their journeys in other realities. Understanding shamanism sheds light on the potential origins of meditative techniques, based on classical yoga. Hypothetically, meditation, practiced in solitude descends directly from the trances of professional shamans.²⁸ The importance of tales and myths as reflections of the inner life - the role of dreams and visions, early forms of meditation, and the mysterious sky and its rhythmic phases towards the earth all may have led to the enormous human dependence on nature.²⁹ Such confidence of the primitive man in the forces of nature was based on a belief that objects and material things are not only alive, but that they have an ability

²⁴ N. Smart, *The World's Religions* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14-15.

²⁵ S. Spencer, *Mysticism in World Religions*, 10-13.

²⁶ M. D. Zomonov, *Ezotericheskaya Kul'tura Buryatskogo Shamanizma* (Ulan-Ude: Izd.-Poligr. Kompleks Vsgaki, 2007), 46.

²⁷ R. Mehta, *The Fullness of the Void* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 198), 35-36.

²⁸ R. E. Ryan, *The Strong Eye of Shamanism: A Journey into the Caves of Consciousness* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1999), 8.

²⁹ N. Smart, *The World's Religions*, 36.

to consciously interfere with the lives of humans. This made the human fight for survival even more intense, as it strengthened the emotions of helplessness and fear, which led to animistic beliefs.³⁰ A belief in the soul, a characteristic of primitive religions, left its traces in worldly religious systems, especially in those whose cultural traditions have developed and preserved the use of psycho-techniques for the achievement of mystical experiences. Although from the theoretical point of view, all worldly religions have the possibility of experiencing mystical experiences, not all of them, unfortunately, succeeded in preserving this, while others have lost it completely. In that way, traditional culture, which includes a specific order of spiritual-psychic phenomena that interlock with all aspects of human life, has its roots in concrete religious experience. The ideological systems of religious cults represent the organization of such beliefs by providing an interpretation of such experience in terms of its being a personal *habitus* (from Latin, meaning “form, outer look”).³¹

In the experience of religious communication humans see themselves as not being rigidly placed within the borders of an emotional and causal connection because mystical experience represents something willful and spiritual. From there arises the basic form of religious perception, which is described in myths, cultural rituals, and in symbolic and allegoric interpretations. Methods of inducing religious insight are developed in the process of primitive communication with the invisible world, accomplished by achieving an inner connection that corresponds to the level of the worldview.³² At the roots of the humanitarian sciences, there has always been a tendency to grasp into the connection with spiritual life. Spiritual experience lies at the basis of every realization of the spiritual order, one in which the psyche of the human is itself in a state of constant change. Descriptive psychology can explain human self-realization in the general metaphysical sense. Metaphysics, providing the existence of spiritual reality and its ethics, connects with the realization of an imminent and transcendental level of existence.³³ The intimate nature of the transcendental describes the relation with spiritual culture, which is divided according to life itself, expressing the spiritual connection that describes a worldview that has to be revealed in all areas of culture.³⁴

³⁰ M. I. Shakhnowich, *Ot Sueveriyi k Nauke* (Leningrad: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1948), 32.

³¹ E. Husserl, *Izbrannyye Raboty* (Moscow: Teritoriya Budushego, 2005), 228.

³² V. Diltey, *Sushnost' Filosofiyi*, 87-88.

³³ A. Huxley, *Vechnaya Filosofiya* (Moscow: Refl-Book, 1997), accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/haksl_i_olds/vechnaya_filosofiya.html

³⁴ V. Diltey, *Sushnost' Filosofiyi*, 125-126.

Scientific work has to be developed in an atmosphere of direct intuition, with the help of phenomenological achievement of the form of perception capable of receiving subtle supernatural realizations without the influence of any secondary symbolical and mathematical methods, and without any theoretical and proving apparatus.³⁵ Only when descriptive psychology determines the quality of human nature, will the connection between the natural and social sciences be found.³⁶

Any scientific endeavour is considered to merely satisfy curiosity if it does not serve to develop the higher axiological value of human existence. Science has true value only when it is engaged in developing of human consciousness. The ultimate aim of every individual should be the development of all forces that lie dormant in the human consciousness. Knowledge represents valuable power only if it helps to resolve the completeness of human nature.³⁷

One of the basic duties of the human, as the highest aim of attaining knowledge, is the achievement of self-realization. To achieve self-realization and complete freedom, one has to break the bond that connects him/her with the outer world. Questions about the origin of the world are closely interconnected with human origins. A higher form of spiritual life, as revealed in the ancient maxim “know thyself” is considered to be a categorical imperative, the highest ethical and moral law. According to E. Kassirer, on the border between the cosmological and anthropological thought lies the vision of Heraclitus, revealing that tapping into the secrets of nature, without resolving the human mystery, is impossible. What does the human being represent? The human is a being, who has been engaged in a constant search for their sense of self. The person who lives in harmony with himself/herself with their inner spirit (Greek. *daimon*) lives in harmony with the whole universe.³⁸

In that way, the human is connected with the universe. As far as s/he consists of those particles, s/he is connected with the cosmos itself. Meanwhile, all parts of the universe are identified with the organs of the human body.³⁹ Although the human is completely dependent on

³⁵ E. Husserl, *Izbrannyye Raboty*, 240.

³⁶ V. Diltey, *Opisatel'naya Pshihologiya* (St. Petersburg: Aleteya 1996), 65.

³⁷ Rudolph Steiner, *Filosofiya Svobody* (1918), accessed 11 February, 2011, accessed 12 April 2021.

https://royallib.com/book/shtayner_rudolf/filosofiya_svododi.html

³⁸ Ernst Kassirer, *Opyt o Cheloveke, Vvedenie V Filosofiyu Chelovecheskoy Kul'tury*, accessed 12 April 2020. https://www.koob.ru/cassirer/opit_o_cheloveke

³⁹ E. Kassirer, *Izbrannoe: Individ i Kosmos* (Moscow: Universitetskaya Kniga, 2000), 530.

himself/herself, here s/he is free, autonomous, and self-reliable; thus, s/he becomes the centre of the cosmos. In his book *Opyt o cheloveke* Kassirer quotes Pythagoras, saying: “The “human is the measure of all things”. According to his opinion, Socrates also realized the importance of inner ethical processes. His focus on the realization of the self was concerned with the equality of human nature. As shown by this school of thought, there seemed to be something powerful that was unreachable using classical forms of research and which was indubitably related to deep secrets. Socrates named this using the Greek word *daemonion*.⁴⁰

H. Blavatsky identifies the silent voice of the inner master, the higher self, or the spirit with the voice of Socrates - *daemon*.⁴¹ What do these *daemons* of Socrates, Plato, Plutarch, and other wise men of pre-Christian times represent? *Daemon* is the title, referred to by the ancients (especially those of Alexandrian times) as various kinds of spirits, which could be either benevolent, or malevolent. The word was also often used as synonymous for gods and angels.⁴² H. P. Blavatsky explains, that in the work of Philo Judaeus, *De Gigant*, *daemons* were shown to be “angels”- but later, due to Christianity, the meaning of this word was changed. It is considered that the *daemons* themselves taught the medium the way in which he should address them. Furthermore, it should be stated that not a single medium has ever denied they have achieved that knowledge from spirits underlining that the latter acted independently of their will, or that they had undergone initiation by their ancestors into the science of conjuring.⁴³ Blavatsky further quotes Xenocrates, that he has declared that the individual soul of every human being is their leading and guarding *daemon* and that no other *daemon* has any power over human destiny, apart from one’s *daemon*. In that way, the *daemon* of Socrates represents a divine essence that had been enchanting him for his whole life. Only on the human does it depend, based on whether the human’s consciousness is open or closed to a perception of the divine voice. Heraclitus had completely accepted Pythagorean and Platonic ideas about the human soul, its nature, and its characteristics, as shown by his speaking about “spirits *daemons*, whose bodies consist of air”. *Daemons* are spirits or astral souls,

⁴⁰ Ernst Kassirer, *Opyt o Cheloveke, Vvedenie V Filosofiyu Chelovecheskoy Kul'tury*, accessed 12 April 2020. https://www.koob.ru/cassirer/opit_o_cheloveke

⁴¹ Helena Petrovna Blavatskaya, *Taynaya Doktrina*, vol.3, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/blavatskaya_elena/taynaya_doktrina_tom_III.html

⁴² H. P. Blavatskaya, *Razoblachennaya Izida*, vol.1, accessed 12 April, 2020. https://royallib.com/book/blavatskaya_elena/razoblachennaya_izida_tom_I.html

⁴³ H. P. Blavatskaya, *Razoblachennaya Izida*, vol. 2, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/blavatskaya_elena/razoblachennaya_izida_tom_II.html

which, in their essence, represented the elements of pure ether and fire. According to Blavatsky, Apuleius, by identifying these spirits with breathing, considered that a human soul represents his *daemon* or genius.⁴⁴

Misunderstandings that have divided world religions into different enemy sects are, in essence, superstitious, due to their division of animism from materialism.⁴⁵ Nowadays, society has again enhanced the rebirth of traditions and beliefs, by connecting their roots with the deeper levels of ancient cultures, which gave birth to magic and sorcery by labelling this group of beliefs as spiritualism.⁴⁶ The concept of spiritualism is used in a wider sense for the determination of a specific cult that believes in fully spiritual views, by bringing this science about spiritual beings under the concept of animism.⁴⁷ Spiritualism represents the ecstatic cult, according to which ecstatic trances, shamanic sorcery, and other types of communication with spirits have existed in close connection for centuries. Questions about so-called “spiritual manifestations” are questions that need basic discussion from a scientific point of view. Such research, based on detailed observations performed in the scientific ‘spirit’ would possibly shed light on some more interesting lines of inquiry.⁴⁸ The rebirth of these ancient religious beliefs is often ‘heated up’ by the art of magic. Magical forces related to the primeval level of civilization, as parts of the heritage of ancient levels of cultural development, represent a special attraction even for a clear scientific mind, especially one in search of the realization of archaic wisdom.⁴⁹ Historical-cultural and ethnographic approaches towards spiritual matters have made a great impact on modern culture, and represent the rebirth of primeval beliefs. In order to understand views about the human soul or spirit, E. Taylor concentrated his attention on the fact that many primeval traditions have shared the same concepts for the determination of spirit and shadow, concepts like the psyche (Lat. *pneuma*,

⁴⁴ H. P. Blavatskaya, *Svyashennaya Nauka*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/blavatskaya_elena/svyashchennaya_nauka.html

⁴⁵ Edward Taylor, *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura* (Moscow: Gos. Soc. Ekonom. Izd-vo, 1939), 290.

⁴⁶ E. Taylor, *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura* (1989), accessed 28 March, 2011, http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_buks/history/tail/04.php.

⁴⁷ E. Taylor, “Perezhitki v kul'ture (Chap. 2), in *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura* (Moscow: Gos. Soc. Ekonom. Izd-Vo, 1989), 264, accessed 12 April 2020. https://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_Buks/History/Tail/index.php

⁴⁸ E. Taylor, *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura* (1989), accessed 28 March, 2011, http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_buks/history/tail/04.php.

⁴⁹ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magiya, Nauka, Religiya* (1998), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/malinovskiy_bronislav/magiya_nauka_i_religiya.html

anima, or *animus*).⁵⁰ The act of breathing (so characteristic of humans, while alive), the sensation of which is closely connected with life, was, for that reason, identified with life and the soul.⁵¹ Expressions that correlate with the concepts of life, mind, soul, and spirit do not represent separate essences such as different forms of one individual. According to primeval people, the soul can temporarily leave the body, which can, in turn, continue to live without the presence of the soul.⁵² The doctrine about the soul acknowledges its independent existence by giving it the ability, to enter into different bodies. The belief in spirit possession, in primitive cultures, represents the main theory about illnesses and inspirations.⁵³ The belief in a temporary departure of the soul from the body leads to the conclusion that the soul can free itself from its bodily jail at any time, as in shamanic ecstasy.⁵⁴ In primitive culture, there was no biological concept of death.⁵⁵ Primeval doctrine about the soul declared that the soul does not determine immaterial substance, but rather the kind of spiritual matter that is characterized by higher levels of purity and transcendence. Primitive people imagined the human soul as form of ethereal, air-like being and this worldview has survived throughout the centuries.⁵⁶ Perhaps, however, there is no need to change the processes of nature, because there is a much deeper philosophy that science has not even dreamed of - a philosophy that reveals the secrets of nature without changing its order.⁵⁷

According to Blavatsky, among many forms of sciences investigated over the centuries, none of them was considered more worthy than the oldest of all sciences - magic, the so-called “science of sciences”. Magic phenomena are occurrences of natural forces that are subtler than the ordinary processes of nature. Magic is a science. It is a deep knowledge of the occult forces and cosmic laws, which do not violate the laws of nature. As such, magic exists and has always existed. Since pre-historical times, it has been known as the “sacred science”. Magical science is based on occult forces and was understood as offering a higher level of knowledge of nature through deep insight into its secret powers, the esoteric laws that

⁵⁰ E. Taylor, *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura* (1989), accessed 28 March, 2011, http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_buks/history/tail/04.php.

⁵¹ E. Taylor, *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura*, 267.

⁵² James Fraser, *Zolotaya Vet'v*, 740.

⁵³ E. Taylor, *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura*, 253-352.

⁵⁴ E. Taylor, *Mifi Obryad v Pervbytnoy Kul'ture*, 153.

⁵⁵ J. Baudrillard, *Simvolicheskij Obmen i Smert* (Moscow: Dobrosvet, 2000), 241.

⁵⁶ E. Taylor, *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura* (1989), accessed 28 March, 2011, http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_buks/history/tail/04.php.

⁵⁷ H. P. Blavatskaya, *Razoblachennaya Izida*, vol.1, accessed 12 April, 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/blavatskaya_elena/razoblachennaya_izida_tom_I.html

are fundamental to every natural element. This science of sciences glorified by Platonists and ecclesiastics of Alexandrian schools, and practiced by theurgists and mystics, throughout centuries has its roots in the culture of primitive society.⁵⁸ There is a connection between magic and science that is based on mythological interpretations of modern anthropology. There is no strict border between the art of magic and the modern form of scientific thought. By using the means of imagination and fantasy, magic (according to its purpose) is no less scientific than scientific thought.⁵⁹ Theoretical magic is a science, although it is *de facto* considered as being a pseudo-science. Magical arts are directed to the achievement of practical aims, but, like other crafts, they are managed by theory, developing their methods at the same time.⁶⁰

In that way, the analogy between magical and scientific worldviews is considered as being authentic. From a practical point of view, magic represents a hidden, but real and strong, faith in the order and equality of nature. The reason for the practical side of magic has to be searched for in the depths of nature itself. The observation and determination of natural events and laws point to the direction and aim of all magical deeds. Magic was not used for ordinary practical aims, or for the support of society in ordinary life. It is predestined for much higher purposes, for courageous and dangerous accomplishments. In situations where there is no need for any special and *force majeure* undertakings, we find neither magic nor mythology.⁶¹ On the other hand, a high level of magical development and the mythology connected with it always takes place, in circumstances where the task is dangerous and the result is undetermined. In primitive societies, people addressed their situations through magical rituals only in states of enormous emotional tension.⁶² With the help of magic, men achieved a better concentration of all their powers and the technique of the ritual itself required the same attention. Each magical art required the highest level of attention. If these magical deeds were to be completed in

⁵⁸ H. P. Blavatskaya, *Svyashennaya Nauka*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/blavatskaya_elenasvyashchennaya_nauka.html

⁵⁹ E. Kassirer, *Opyt o Cheloveke: vvedenie v Filosofiyu Chelovecheskoy Kul'tury* (1998), accessed 12 April 2020. https://www.koob.ru/cassirer/opit_o_cheloveke

⁶⁰ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magiya, Nauka, Religiya* (1998), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/malinovskiy_bronislaw/magiya_nauka_i_religiya.html

⁶¹ Ernst Kassirer, *Opyt o Cheloveke, Vvedenie V Filosofiyu Chelovecheskoy Kul'tury*, accessed 12 April 2020. https://www.koob.ru/cassirer/opit_o_cheloveke

⁶² Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magiya, Nauka, Religiya* (1998), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/malinovskiy_bronislaw/magiya_nauka_i_religiya.html

the wrong order and not according to the prescribed rules, the desired result would not be achieved. In that sense, magic should be considered as being the primeval level of education, passed on by primeval man.⁶³ The unity of magic and religion during various epochs has been present in many traditions, but this state is not primal, because there was a time when humans based their faith only on magic. On this basis, it could be regarded that, in the evolution of human culture, magic existed before religion.⁶⁴ The relationship between magic and religion is one of the most unclear and contradictory of problems.⁶⁵ The difference between magic and religion depends on the question, "Are the forces that rule the world of the conscious and the personal, or the unconscious and the impersonal, character?" Any kind of religious experience, presuming, that the world is ruled by conscious agents, is fundamentally contradictory to magic and science. While magic is similar to religion in that it often deals with spirits as conscious agents, it differs in the sense that it begins from the presumption that all personal beings, in the end, are submerged under some kind of unconscious force, which has control over everything.⁶⁶

What, then, is the cultural function of magic? It is considered in the ritualization of human optimism, in the strengthening of its faith in the victory of hope over fear. However, without the power of magic (or the belief in it), primitive man could not cope with his difficulties; he could not achieve anything until living in much higher levels of culture.⁶⁷ According to Kassirer, the thesis of James Fraser, however, didn't survive critical examination, as modern anthropology completely renounced his theory that consideration of myth and magic does not provide adequate interpretations. In the mythological imagination, there is always an act of faith without which the myth would lose its reality in the foundation of its object. In this relation, it is crucial to compare mythological thought with scientific thought. The mythological question, in its essence, represents the psychological problem.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ernst Kassirer, *Opyt o Cheloveke*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://www.koob.ru/cassirer/opit_o_cheloveke

⁶⁴ James Fraser, *Zolotaya Vet'v*, 67-68.

⁶⁵ Ernst Kassirer, *Opyt o Cheloveke*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://www.koob.ru/cassirer/opit_o_cheloveke

⁶⁶ James Fraser, *Zolotaya Vet'v*, 67-68.

⁶⁷ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magiya, Nauka, Religiya* (1998), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/malinovskiy_bronislav/magiya_nauka_i_religiya.html

⁶⁸ Ernst Kassirer, *Opyt o Cheloveke*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://www.koob.ru/cassirer/opit_o_cheloveke

Religious faith, or faith in the supernatural, reveals itself in the sphere of the unconditional, in the sense that pure faith without practice is “dead”.⁶⁹ Religious traditions that include psycho-techniques to induce altered states are considered to have more power over nature and ordinary states of existence than those, which do not know such experience. Mystical ecstatic experience, in its essence, represents the confirmation of direct contact with spiritual entities by gaining control over them. This not only confirms the fact that God is *with* us, but also confirms the fact that God is *in* us. In that sense, shamanism is considered as being the religion *par excellence*.⁷⁰ It should not be neglected that ancient people mastered the deep knowledge of hypnotism or self-mesmerism – the voluntary induction of trance states. It is considered that, as a result of such practices, it was possible to conquer even death and to achieve the skills of divination, healing, and other extrasensory abilities.⁷¹

In primitive cultures, in the so-called rituals of death and resurrection, the human often entered into a form of lethargic sleep.⁷² This kind of initiation was triggered in transit from a natural, accidental, and irretrievable death, towards a death, which had been gifted and consciously achieved (and, in that case, was retrievable – by clearing out the distinction between birth and death).⁷³ Regardless of deep changes in world culture, the concept of the human soul remained unchanged from the time of primeval thinkers up to modern theologians, connecting in this way primitive barbarians with civilized humans.⁷⁴ Perhaps it is wiser to leave these theories forgotten and not “to raise the dead”. If, however, during all these centuries, humanity has been enchanted with this problem (one which, today, is considered as being “unreal”), then it is understood, that these poorly researched phenomena, deserve great investigative interest.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ James Fraser, *Zolotaya Vet'v*, 63.

⁷⁰ I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London: Routledge, 2003), 183.

⁷¹ H. P. Blavatskaya, *Terra Inkognita*, accessed 12 April, 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/blavatskaya_elena/terra_inkognita.html

⁷² James Fraser, *Zolotaya Vet'v*, 768.

⁷³ J. Baudrillard, *Simvolicheskiy Obmen i Smert*, 242-243.

⁷⁴ E. Taylor, *Pervobytnaya Kul'tura* (1989), accessed 28 March, 2011, http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_buks/history/tail/04.php.

⁷⁵ C. Levi-Strauss, *Pervobytnoe Myshlenie*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/levistros_klod/pervobitnoe_mishlenie.html

CHAPTER I

SHAMANIC TRANCE, ACCORDING TO PSYCHOANALYSIS

1.1. Trance and ecstasy, as phenomena of the unconscious

In the scientific literature on philosophy, cultural studies, anthropology, and psychology, we often find terms for “trance” (from the French *trance* meaning – “entrancement, catalepsy”) and “ecstasy” (from the Greek *extasis* meaning – “delight, admiration”). In psychology, trance is regarded as being characterized by stupor, and a lack of consciousness and control; on the other hand, it can be considered as being a state of ecstasy, with detachment from reality, in the form of liminal states of consciousness (as in meditation), for instance.⁷⁶ Ecstasy represents a state of extreme blissfulness,⁷⁷ resulting in extrasensory perception and potentially, generating visionary experiences.⁷⁸

Such terms are often used for the description of mystical experience or religious trance, where ecstasy is followed by sudden visions of light along with the feeling of uplifting and a strong energy flow, often accompanied by heightened perception, which provides a feeling of peace and tranquility. Ecstasy produces a feeling of freedom and salvation and identification with the universe, with all living beings, and with God by transcending the borders of space and time. Such a state is considered as being the perfect absorption of one idea; a full concentration on one single object. From the mystical and philosophical points of view, it represents the living perception of transcendence.⁷⁹

The phenomena of trance, ecstasy, and mystical experiences should be understood as being related to the so-called “numinous experience”. Lionel Corbett, in his book *Psyche and the Sacred*, quotes Rudolf Otto

⁷⁶ C. Levi-Strauss, *Pervobytnoe Myshlenie*, accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/levistros_klod/pervobitnoe_mishlenie.html

⁷⁷ V. N. Koporulina, ed. *Psichologicheskiy Slovar'* (Rostov: Feniks, 2004), 614.

⁷⁸ H. P. Blavatskaya, *Teozofskiy Slovar* (Moscow: Sfera, 1994), 521.

⁷⁹ N. Dyadkov, ed. *Entsiklopediya Mistitsizma* (St. Petersburg: Litera, 1997), 455.

who used the word “numinous” to describe this unique quality of the encounter with the sacred. He described this experience using the Latin phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the holy Other. During numinous experiences, one may feel entranced or transported. Contact with the numinous may also produce a profound sense of the union of oneness with the world and with other people.⁸⁰ The concept of ecstasy is always connected with a state of bliss, originating from the practice of meditation or mental concentration, by eliminating all distracting factors, leading to a mystical dissolution of the individual’s consciousness and its subsumption into the Absolute.⁸¹ It can also be reached by inducing a special state of altered consciousness, such as through communicating with spirits or divinities, for example, during shamanic rituals. Trance and ecstasy are also connected with intuition and artistic inspiration. In general, all kinds of artistic establishment and brilliant scientific discoveries are always considered as being signs of higher states of consciousness. It is generally considered that artistic and creative processes are guided by some kind of impersonal power, which controls such mental activity, providing maximum immersion into the object of intention.⁸²

Throughout history, science has defined the concepts of trance and ecstasy as being “unconscious phenomena”. Russian *Philosophical encyclopedical dictionary* quotes various philosophers, regarding this: In ancient times, Plato and Augustin considered the idea of unknown, or secret, psychic knowledge. Plotinus refers to the definition of ecstasy as a form of contemplation, where the human soul comes into contact with the divine or the Absolute. Gottfried Leibniz formed the conception of the unconscious as a lower form of spiritual activity, while Immanuel Kant considered it as being a form of intuition or sensory perception. In contrast to rationalists, the representatives of Romanticism developed an idea of the unconscious as being the embodiment of artistic creativity.⁸³

A. G. Spirkin in his work *Soznanie i Samozoznanie* cites various philosophers, who have investigated the concept of the unconscious: Arthur Schopenhauer developed an irrational conception of the unconscious, considering it to be the source of life itself, whereas Nicolai

⁸⁰ Lionel Corbett, *Psyche and the Sacred: Spirituality beyond Religion* (New Orleans: Spring Journal Books, 2012), 12-13.

⁸¹ E. F. Gubskiy, G. V. Korablyeva, V. A. Lutchenko, ed., *Filosofskiy Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar* (Moscow: Infram, 1997), 261.

⁸² A. G. Spirkin, *Soznanie i Samozoznanie* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1972), 202.

⁸³ L. F. Ilychev, P. N. Fedoseev, S. M. Kovalev, V. G. Panov, ed., *Filosofskiy Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar* (Moscow: Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya, 1983), 798.

Hartman considered the unconscious as being a spiritual principle in the form of the absolute unity of ideas.⁸⁴ According to Konstantin Stanislavsky, the unconscious plays a vital role in artistic processes. Mozart, Hermann von Helmholtz and Honore Balzac claimed that their most ingenious thoughts often appeared seemingly out of nowhere, suddenly and without effort. Henri Poincare pointed out that intuition and the subconscious play a greater role in the act of creation than conscious processes do, and that all big discoveries simply appeared in the form of the final result. According to Albert Einstein, a real discovery comes out of ignorance and comes from the “one who does not know”. Descartes, Rousseau, and Kant described their unexpected internal inspirations, which helped them achieve their best philosophical and creative ideas.⁸⁵

Stanislav Grof refers to the infinite, transpersonal consciousness, which extends beyond categories of time and space.⁸⁶ According to Carl Gustav Jung, the unconscious is considered as the root of creative fantasy.⁸⁷ Finally, it may be considered that moments of inspiration are often accompanied by intense emotional expression, intellectual enthusiasm, and heightened intuition.⁸⁸ The concept of the unconscious is based on Freudian fear, libido, and irrational instincts (which appear, for example, during alcohol or drug intoxication). Following Freud, many scholars have associated ecstatic trances, including shamanic states with pathological phenomena. However, according to M. D. Zomonov, a number of scholars such as A. Maslow, M. Eliade, S. Grof, R. Walsh, M. Winkelman, L. Corbett, E. A. Torchinov, consider shamanic ecstasy to be a special state of consciousness, one that can be induced by artificial means; it is not considered as being a mental disorder, nor can it be induced only by psychedelics.⁸⁹

According to M. Harner, in 90% of societies, altered states of consciousness in the form of mystical-religious trances are induced by natural methods, and only 10% are induced by using narcotics.⁹⁰ Shamanic

⁸⁴ A. G. Spirkin, *Soznanie i Samosoznanie*, 174.

⁸⁵ Spirkin, 197-199.

⁸⁶ Stanislav Grof, *Holotropnoe Soznanie: Tri Urovnya Chelovecheskogo Soznania i ih Vliyanie na Nashu Zhizn'* (Moscow: Kravchuka, 2002), 105.

⁸⁷ E. F. Gubskiy, G. V. Korablyeva, V. A. Lutchenko, ed. *Filosofskiy Entsiklopedicheskiy Slovar*, 43.

⁸⁸ A. G. Spirkin, *Soznanie i Samosoznanie*, 200.

⁸⁹ M. D. Zomonov, *Sushnost' Buryatskogo Shamanisma* (Ulan-Ude: Buryaad Unen, 1996), 40.

⁹⁰ M. Harner, “Shamanic Healing: We Are Not Alone”, *Shamanism: A Semi-Annual Journal of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies* 10, № 1, <https://shamanism.org/articles/article01.html>

rituals accompanying trance are considered to be forms of emotional unconsciousness. When the shaman is in a trance, his emotions and mind/body ratio are in unity.⁹¹ Scientists, who attempted to research the phenomena of unconscious and trance states on a practical basis, were the first representatives of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis divides the human psyche into several levels of processing: namely, conscious, subconscious, and unconscious psychic processes. Only the unconscious enables the conduction of scientific research on the human psyche.⁹² Transpersonal psychology divides consciousness into four levels: namely, sensory consciousness, individual consciousness, perinatal consciousness, and transpersonal consciousness.⁹³

One of the greatest legacies of Freud is that he demonstrated the possibility of studying the unconscious on a concrete, empirical, and material basis (although he admitted that, in the end, psychoanalysis cannot precisely explain what the unconscious is).⁹⁴ The characteristics of the unconscious are multivalent. In contrast to consciousness, the unconscious is characterized by an absence of contradictions. From a psychoanalytic point of view, behind the contradictions and absurdity of the unconscious thought processes, there appears to be a secret and mysterious meaning. In the unconscious, categories of time and place are absent, while boundaries between fantasy, and reality, disappear.⁹⁵ The representatives of psychoanalysis often made claims about the incredible independence of the unconscious, and about its autonomy and influence over the conscious and subconscious systems.⁹⁶

V. M. Leybin in *Postklassicheskiy pshioanaliz* quotes Nicolai Hartmann, that the unconscious is considered to be an important element of inspiration. It deals with the process of cognition, by stimulating artistic creativity. On the other hand, Hartman also emphasizes the limitations of the unconscious, because it always depends on the context. In contrast to consciousness, the unconscious is always depicted as being unknown and indeterminate. Humans can be proud of work done consciously, while

⁹¹ M. D. Zomonov, *Sushnost' Buryatskogo Shamanisma*, 14.

⁹² Sigmund Freud, *Psihologiya Bessoznatel'nogo* (Moscow: Prosvesheniye, 1990), 445.

⁹³ Stanislav Grof, *Za Predelami Mozga: Rozhdenie, Smert' i Transcendentsiya v Psihoterapiyi* (Moscow: ACT, 2002), 111.

⁹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Osnovnye Psihologicheskie Teorii v Psihoanalize: Ocherk Istoriyi Psihoanaliza* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 1998), 154.

⁹⁵ V. M. Leybin, *Klassicheskiy Psihoanaliz: Istoriya, Teoriya, Praktika* (Moscow: Institute of Psychology and Sociology Press, 2001), 272.

⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Osnovnye Psihologicheskie Teorii v Psihoanalize: Ocherk Istoriyi Psihoanaliza*, 183.

unconscious work is often presented as being in the form of a divine gift.⁹⁷ It seems that some part of the self, which is considered as being very important and valuable, appears to be unconscious, and it seems that it belongs neither to the subconscious nor to the repressed unconscious. According to E. Fromm, for that very reason, Freud concluded that in the psychic life of the human, there is another kind of unconscious, which he called the “third unconsciousness.” That part of the self he called the superego while defining three levels of psychic realms: the It (Lat. *id*), the Self (Lat. *ego*) and the Higher Self (Lat. *super-ego*).⁹⁸

Freud pointed out that, if a complex psychic work can be committed without the participation of consciousness, this means that the psyche can influence physiological changes, and that the human body is subordinated to some kind of power, like a soul or psychic energy, which seems to always be active and independent.⁹⁹ Consequently, the following question arises: Is it possible to consider the unconscious as being a phenomenon of the lower psychic nature? In the sphere of the unconscious, there are two levels of unconsciousness: the individual and the supra-individual unconscious (the latter of which is considered as being the collective unconscious).¹⁰⁰

M. D. Zomonov states that, along with the individual Freudian unconscious, Jung acknowledged the presence of the collective or transpersonal unconscious, by developing the theory of archetypes, where the collective unconscious reveals itself as a variety of archetypal forms.¹⁰¹ The concept of an archetype is used as the meaning of the primary image or the collective unconscious, which is not determined by its contents, but by its form.¹⁰² The archetype *per se* is considered as being empty and insignificant; it does not depend on moral values, but reveals itself in a concrete form of projection, from whence mythological constructions arise.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ V. M. Leybin, *Postklassicheskiy Psihoanaliz*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Teritoriya Budushego, 2006), 241.

⁹⁸ Erich Fromm, *Krizis Psihoanaliza* (St. Petersburg: Akadem. Proekt, 2000), 27.

⁹⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Tolkovanie Snovideniyi* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 1997), 440.

¹⁰⁰ Carl Gustav Jung, *Struktura Psihiki i Process Individuatsiyi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1996), 72.

¹⁰¹ M. D. Zomonov, “Buryatskiy Shamanism kak Tselostnaya Mirovoztrencheskaya Sistema” (PhD diss., St. Petersburg University Press, 2003), 44.

¹⁰² Stanislav Grof, *Puteshestvie v Poiskah Sebya* (Moscow: Institute of Psychotherapy Press, 2001), 148.

¹⁰³ Carl Gustav Jung, *Struktura Psihiki i Process Individuatsiyi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1996), 143.

Archetypes represent the universal origin of human nature; they are hereditary and cannot be developed individually. The collective unconscious is connected with ancient and common forms of human psychic phenomena. They hold in themselves the life of the ancestors as parts of archetypical mythological forms. Their content is represented in myths and fairy-tales of various cultural traditions, in the forms of symbols, visions, and religious representations.¹⁰⁴ Archetypes constitute a spiritual principle located within the psyche. In antiquity, archetypal processes were often personified as gods and goddesses.¹⁰⁵ Forms of deities or demons were perceived according to various cultural worldviews, where the souls and spirits of deceased ancestors were believed to interfere with the psychic lives of living people.¹⁰⁶

When repressions of the psychic energy of the unconscious invade a human individual, for example, the future shaman, then various mythical forms or archetypes manifest in his or her consciousness. When the inner spiritual world begins to reveal its contents, they can be in contradiction with the former personal worldview of the individual. So, it seems that the unconscious never rests, but, rather, that it always remains active. The controversy between the conscious and unconscious mind reveals itself as being a process, which is both long and hard. Changes in consciousness, achieved through the psychic proceedings of the unconscious, are transcendental, according to Jung. In the processes involved in making the unconscious conscious, the domination of the unconscious gradually reduces and, in the end, this process becomes a complete transformation of the personality.¹⁰⁷

Transcendence of individuality means becoming divine, transcending beyond the levels of the purely human - to become a super-human.¹⁰⁸ This ability of spiritual transformation is hidden in a transcendental function, an individual metamorphosis, which manifests itself in the merging of the unconscious and the consciousness. The individual who has experienced the assimilation of the unconscious admits that such a process has transformed them deeply and completely.¹⁰⁹ Human consciousness is based on contradictory psychic phenomena. The point is not centred in the transition into the opposite, but, on the contrary, in the preservation of old

¹⁰⁴ V. M. Leybin, *Postklassicheskiy Psihoanaliz*, vol.1, 210.

¹⁰⁵ Lionel Corbett, *Psyche and the Sacred: Spirituality beyond Religion*, 47.

¹⁰⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *Dusha i Mif: Shest' Arhetipov* (Minsk: Harvest, 2004), 378.

¹⁰⁷ C. G. Jung, *Struktura Psihiki i Process Individuatsiyi*, 220.

¹⁰⁸ Abraham Maslow, *Novye Rubezhi Chelovecheskoy Prirody* (Moscow: Smysl, 1999), 264.

¹⁰⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Psihologiya Bessoznatel'nogo* (Moscow: RAN, 2003), 221.

values together with recognition of their opposites. People are afraid of such practice, and penetration into the unconscious because it puts humans into conflict with themselves.¹¹⁰ Nobody wants to research their unconscious self, and it is easier to deny the possibility of its existence.¹¹¹

According to V. M. Leybin, Jung wished to transcend the borders of psychoanalysis, by including symbolic and mythological elements in its teachings. He wanted to explore various aspects of the symbolic nature of dreams, by defining parallels between dreams and the fantastic-mythological thinking of ancient people.¹¹² While exploring the literature on occultism, extrasensory phenomena, and spiritism, Jung took part in the spiritistic séances of mediums; and as a result, he wrote his doctoral thesis - *On the psychology and pathology of the so-called occult phenomena*. After his scientific break with Freud (a break which was connected with the period of his deep inner crisis), Jung started to practice Yoga, to research alchemy, religion, philosophy, Gnosticism, and oriental meditation techniques, and to attempt to explore the traditional life of indigenous cultures, including doing so by engaging in conversations with shamans.¹¹³

Spiritualism particularly interested him, as spiritualists appeared to be attempting to use scientific means to explore the supernatural and prove the immortality of the soul.¹¹⁴ Jung had extensive experience of studying mediums in trance states, during waking fantasies and visual hallucinations, and had conducted experiments with automatic writing. From the examples of the different ecstasies he had studied, he made it clear that the medium's consciousness was by no means idle during the trance, but that it instead developed an extraordinarily rich fantasy activity. In reconstructing the somnambulistic ego, the psychoanalyst was entirely dependent on the medium's subsequent statements, and many of the latter's ecstasies were experienced without pantomime and speech so that no conclusions about inner processes could be drawn from external appearances.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ C. G. Jung, *Struktura Psihiki i Process Individuatsiyi*, 82.

¹¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *Psihologiya Bessoznatel'nogo* (Moscow: Prosvesheniye, 1990), 204.

¹¹² V. M. Leybin, *Postklassicheskiy Psihoanaliz*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Teritoriya Budushego, 2006), 192.

¹¹³ Leybin, 184.

¹¹⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, *The Red Book* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2009), 185.

¹¹⁵ C. G. Jung, *Psychology and the Occult* (London: Routledge, 1982), 40.

Jung reported that mediums, while in a trance, were almost amnesic as they encountered the territory of the new personalities of their ego. In the beginning, during a state of semi-somnambulism accompanied by a dream-like manner and hallucinations, the amnesia gradually disappeared. There were also often certain resemblances of hysterical lethargy such as shallow breathing, a corpse-like pallor of the face, and the peculiar feeling of dying. The end of the ecstasy was usually followed by a cataleptic state. The pulse remained regular but low, and the breathing was gentle, shallow, or almost imperceptible. During these attacks, the medium's somnambulist ego was often represented as being almost completely released from the body.¹¹⁶ During his psychic experiences, Jung constantly turned towards his spirit-helper, his inner master, whom he called Philemon claiming that this phenomenon brought him a crucial, key insight. Jung claimed that what he used to practice (whether consciously or unconsciously) was an ancient form of magic in which spirits represented transpersonal forces, playing an important role in magical dialogues and, bringing knowledge to their master.¹¹⁷

R. Noll quotes the *Lexicon of Alchemy* from the 17th century - "Meditation is the inner dialogue with an invisible companion in the form of an invoked deity or dialogue with one's soul or guardian angel."¹¹⁸ At one point, Jung even experienced a feeling of soul loss, which helped him to maintain a connection with the unconscious. He realized that the unconscious symbolically corresponds with the mythology of the land of the dead or the ancestors. The phenomenon of soul loss is often found in indigenous shamanic religions. According to Jung, in the land of the dead, the soul gains the secret ability to animate ghosts and enclothe them in invisible forms of ancient instincts or archetypes of the collective unconscious. In the form of the medium, the soul gives the dead the ability to keep in touch with the world of humans.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ C. G. Jung, 1916. *On the Psychology and Pathology of the So-Called Occult Phenomena: Collected Papers on Analytical Psychology*, accessed 12 April 2020. <https://www.scribd.com/book/384025038/On-the-Psychology-and-Pathology-of-So-Called-Occult-Phenomena>

¹¹⁷ C. G. Jung, *Vospominaniya, Snovideniya, Razmyshleniya* (2003), accessed 22 July 2010. <http://lib.ru/PSIHO//JUNG/memdreamrefs.txt>

¹¹⁸ Robert Noll, "The Presence of Spirits in Magic and Madness," *Shamanism* (Wheaton III: Theosophical Publishing, 1988), 56.

¹¹⁹ C. G. Jung, *Vospominaniya, Snovideniya Razmyshleniya* (2003), accessed 22 July, 2010. <http://lib.ru/PSIHO//JUNG/memdreamrefs.txt>

In *The Red Book*, Jung wrote of a series of conversations with his soul, as well as various spirits, fantastic personalities, and his guardian spirit, and with God and the Devil, revealing them as symbolic expressions of his unconscious. The episodes describe his individuation process, in which he fought against his dark personality traits in order to be initiated into the gift of magic. He also described the tripartite nature of the soul, symbolically expressed as a serpent, an individual soul, and a heavenly bird.¹²⁰ The tripartite classification of the soul is widely known in shamanic, oriental, esoteric, and alchemical traditions, corresponding to shamanic cosmologies in the form of the sky, the earth, and the underworld. Transcending to the spiritual level of the soul by overcoming the power of the serpent, and symbolically uniting with the bird, symbolizes the process of illumination, salvation, and self-realization, a process otherwise known as the alchemical “Great Work”. We assume that the serpent symbolizes the *id* - the human soul the conscious *ego*, and the heavenly bird the transcendental soul or the *super-ego*. The serpent also symbolizes the oriental concept of the energy from Kundalini, which needs to be awakened and united with the Absolute. The human soul can unite with the heavenly bird that “flies into freedom” only by assimilating the dark side of the human personality, the Shadow, the archetypical representation of the unconscious *id*.¹²¹

Shamanic healing restructures the identity of the individual, constructing new forms of self-identification by increasing the level of psychological integration with the help of manipulation of the unconscious levels of the brain, by exploiting all parts of the brain, the conscious, as well as the unconscious.¹²²

The key to shamanic training reveals itself in the development and increase of the mental image. Shamanic practice, in that sense, develops a process in which the adept is trained in the heightening of his or her visual imagery through various psychological and physiological techniques, including various forms of self-healing, the self-regulating process that are similar to some psychotherapeutic procedures.¹²³

¹²⁰ C. G. Jung, *The Red Book*, 207.

¹²¹ Jung, 318.

¹²² Michael Winkelman, “Shamanism as Neurotheology and Evolutionary Psychology”, *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 45 (2002): 1875-1887, accessed 12 April 2020.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0002764202045012010>

¹²³ Robert Noll, “The Presence of Spirits in Magic and Madness”, *Shamanism* (Wheaton III: Theosophical Publishing, 1998), 48-52.

In Western culture, the profession in which the role of the shaman is most successfully expressed is that of the psychoanalyst. In this way, Jung perceived shamanic ecstasy as being a form of pre-scientific therapy. S. M. Shirokogoroff considers shamanism as being transcultural psychiatry, in the sense that shamans generally cure psychological aspects of illnesses. The role of the shaman in psychotherapy was also depicted in the literature with the explanation that the shaman constantly experiences his traumatic feelings, yet with the inversion of psychoanalytic elements: “The psychologist listens, while the shaman speaks”.¹²⁴

Traditional knowledge is irrational and secret, which is why it cannot be revealed directly. Indirectly, however, it can be revealed with the help of multivalued symbols and mythologies, which are archetypical. Those ancient and universal forms of human representations have a parallel life something like a partial soul where the unconscious is understood as being the source of knowledge. The transcendental function leads to the opening of essential processes in the human psyche. The aim of transcendence is the implementation of the original embryonal human identity, in the form of self-realization, by the person becoming aware of his or her, own true nature.¹²⁵ Psychoanalytic assumptions regarding the unconscious can be partially considered as being, a modern development of primitive animism.¹²⁶ The symbolism of depicting the unconscious is hidden within the archives of primitive culture, as such psychic processes do not fall into the area of waking consciousness.¹²⁷

Indigenous religions are based on the belief in a magical force, which was determined as animism. The concept of power in primitive cultures expressed as the archaic conceptions of soul and spirits bears in mind the belief in primitive energy. According to an ancient worldview, the soul itself has inner power; this worldview contains the idea of immortality, in which the spiritualized soul becomes divine.¹²⁸ Divinities and demons are perceived as being souls or spirits that interact with the psychic life of living individuals. The soul and spirits in indigenous religions represent psychic facts, they are objects of the supernatural world, while for other humans - they represent manifestations of the

¹²⁴ I. O. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London: Routledge, 2003), 172-174.

¹²⁵ C. G. Jung, *Struktura Psihiki i Process Individuatsiyi*, 153.

¹²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Osnovnye Psihologicheskie Teorii v Psihoanalize* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 1998), 157.

¹²⁷ S. Freud, *Psihologiya Bessoznatel'nogo* (Moscow: Prosvesheniye, 1990), 440.

¹²⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, *Struktura Psihiki i Process Individuatsiyi*, 74.

unconscious.¹²⁹ The self, the God-image in the psyche is a symbol of totality, so it must contain the potential for both good and evil.¹³⁰

According to animism, every human has a soul that can travel to other worlds or which can possess another human body. The animistic soul shares characteristics of both, the unconscious and the conscious. Transparency and mobility of the soul, with its ability to leave the body either temporarily or forever, are features resembling the essence of the consciousness, while its ability to hide behind the manifestation of the individual personality reveals characteristics of the unconscious.¹³¹ The concepts of the soul, spirit, god, psychic power, magic, and healing in the form of a special spiritual state match with primitive conceptions of God. The idea of the immortality of the soul in primitive cultures is called metempsychosis, meaning the transmigrations and transformations of the soul and its psychic impressions, which are stored in the unconscious of every individual.¹³²

Basic animistic worldviews have originated from various different cultures, and animism can be considered as being a spiritual expression of the natural state of human consciousness. Psychoanalysis proves that animism in the form of magic or mysticism, spiritualism, or occultism is considered as being a means for conquering the supernatural world that is based on a projection of the unconscious. As such, religion, mythology, and philosophy will never manage to finally understand the phenomena of mystical experiences in the form of ecstatic trances until scientific research includes the psychology of the unconscious.¹³³

Abraham Maslow and Roberto Assagioli had a particular impact on the scientific research of the unconscious. According to Assagioli, the path towards the higher transpersonal self in the higher form of the unconscious or super consciousness belongs to the intuition, to artistic and scientific inspiration, which is considered to be the origin of higher feelings, parapsychological functions, talents, contemplative states, and such mystical experiences as enlightenment and ecstasy.¹³⁴ According to Maslow, on the other hand, transcendence represents the ecstatic achievement

¹²⁹ Jung, 227.

¹³⁰ Lionel Corbett, *Psyche and the Sacred: Spirituality beyond Religion*, 165.

¹³¹ Sigmund Freud, *Totem i Tabu: Psihologiya Pervobytnoy Kul'tury i Religiyi* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 1997), 128.

¹³² C. G. Jung, *Vospominaniya, Snovideniya, Razmyshleniya* (2003), accessed 22 July, 2010. <http://lib.ru/PSIHO//JUNG/memdreamrefs.txt>

¹³³ V. M. Leybin, *Postklassicheskiy Psihoanaliz*, vol. 1, 87.

¹³⁴ Roberto Assagioli, *Psihosintez: Ot Dushevnoho Razvitiya k Vyshemu Ya* (Moscow: Reffl-Book, 1994), 11.

of the being itself and manifests as concentrated cognition, illumination, mystical experience, or trance.¹³⁵ The spiritual development of individuation is connected with a deep catharsis and an absolute transformation of consciousness itself. Such deep changes in consciousness themselves pass through critical stages, often accompanied by a nervous and emotional crisis. Before complete spiritual awakening, there are several critical stages one must undergo until they experience the final state of the “dark night of the soul”. The dark night of the soul is a term, developed by Christian mystics meaning a concept representing the final stage of this inner transformation, which is accompanied by great suffering and inner darkness. Such a process, in mythological plots, is often experienced as being an essential part of the individuation process.¹³⁶ Such a life crisis reveals itself in confrontations with the Shadow. Painful feelings are not obstacles, but rather signposts and doorways into the soul's deeper levels.¹³⁷

Seeman's “*Individuation and the Subtle Body: A Commentary on Jung's Kundalini Seminar*” - describes several categories of phenomena that typically occur during a Kundalini awakening,¹³⁸ where psychic experiences during initiations in supra-personal processes are linked with the unconscious.¹³⁹ During the process of merging the unconscious into the consciousness, sensitive individuals experience intensive feelings, by becoming subjects of a psychic crisis. The intrusion of the archetypical unconscious towards such a parapsychotic state reveals this transpersonal crisis - a crisis, which, in primitive religions, was called “shamanic illness”. Shamanic initiation reveals itself in the form of a deep psychotherapeutic procedure. After such mystical crucifixion or mystical death comes the resurrection and complete healing in the form of an award for past sufferings.¹⁴⁰ Spiritual illumination can be either instantaneous or gradual, and it often begins with an experience such as an eruption of the

¹³⁵ Abraham Maslow, *Novye Rubezhi Chelovecheskoy Prirody* (Moscow: Smysl, 1999), 256.

¹³⁶ Roberto Assagioli, *Duhovnoe Razvitie i Nervnye Rasstroistva* (Novosibirsk: Urania, 1992), 107-108.

¹³⁷ Lionel Corbett, *Psyche and the Sacred: Spirituality beyond Religion*, 244.

¹³⁸ G. W. Seeman, “Individuation and Subtle Body: A Commentary on Jung's Kundalini Seminar” (PhD diss., Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2001), 243-244.

¹³⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology of Kundalini Yoga* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 70.

¹⁴⁰ E. A. Torchinov, *Religiya Mira: Opyt Zapredel'nogo. Psihotekhnika i Transpersonal'nye Sostoyaniya* (1998), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/torchinov_evgeniy/religii_mira_opit_zapredelnogo.html

numinous. In the process of illumination, which may follow “purgation”, we begin to see everything as a manifestation of the divine.¹⁴¹

Stanislav Grof, the famous psychoanalyst, and psychiatrist, considered as the father of transpersonal psychology, took an interesting approach to researching altered states of consciousness as forms of transpersonal experiences. He took part in many scientific projects based on research into the use of LSD and other psychedelics (such as Psilocybin, MDMA, and DMT), not only to heal psychic disorders, but also to investigate the assertions of spiritual aspirants who claimed to have had mystical experiences. Such types of healing had much in common with shamanic rituals and other practices of indigenous traditions.¹⁴² Grof developed the techniques of holotropic breathing, self-realization, personal growth, systems of condensed experience (SCE—the dynamic combination of memories about different life periods, united with strong emotional charges and intense sensations), out-of-body experiences, basic perinatal matrices (BPM – healing of birth traumas), and transpersonal experiences, induced by different psychotherapeutic techniques.¹⁴³ By doing so, he came to the conclusion that transpersonal experiences widen the human psyche and that they don’t depend on personal intellectual capacity, as far as the mind/body itself cannot be considered as being an adequate instrument for analyzing such transpersonal realms of being, that manifest themselves in higher levels of metaphysics.¹⁴⁴ The concept of transpersonal experience can be determined as being one that widens the consciousness, reaching beyond the ordinary limits of the physical ego and the borders of time and space. Such changes induced by holotropic states are characterized in all sensory spheres, including that of the emotions (covering a wide range of feelings).¹⁴⁵

According to E. A. Torchinov, transpersonal experiences are considered to be the basis of all mystical and religious phenomena.¹⁴⁶ L. Corbett points out that numinous experience emerges from the transpersonal level of consciousness. It is therefore impossible to know to

¹⁴¹ Lionel Corbett, *Psyche and the Sacred: Spirituality beyond Religion*, 243-245.

¹⁴² Stanislav Grof, *Chelovek Pered Litsom Smerti* (Moscow: ACT, 2002), 26.

¹⁴³ S. Grof, *Psihologiya Budushogo: Uroki Sovremennyh Issledovaniyi Soznaniya* (Moscow: ACT, 2002), 455.

¹⁴⁴ S. Grof, *Kosmicheskaya Igra: Issledovanie Rubezhey Chelovecheskogo Soznaniya* (Moscow: ACT, 2002), 48.

¹⁴⁵ Grof, 23.

¹⁴⁶ E. A. Torchinov, *Religiya Mira: Opyt Zapredel'nogo. Psihotekhnika i Transpersonal'nye Sostoyaniya* (1998), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/torchinov_evgeniy/religii_mira_opit_zapredelnogo.html

what extent God and the transpersonal psyche are synonymous.¹⁴⁷ The holotropic mode of consciousness raises the intention of achieving a state of unity or equality of being, and is characterized by unusual, altered psychic states, similar to contemplative or mystical experiences. In such states of consciousness, which are similar to regressive therapy, it is possible to receive access to past life memories. Holotropic-breathing séances transcend beyond spatial borders and are accompanied by feelings of unity and identification of oneself with other people, with the whole world, and with the cosmos and its supracosmic and metacosmic voidness.¹⁴⁸

Transpersonal or mystical experiences can be induced during psychedelic séances and in various types of psychotherapies through a wide range of indigenous and oriental spiritual practices, using special types of breathing, music, dances, physical exercises, and dream interpretations. Modern laboratory techniques, insomnia, sensory deprivation, and various kinaesthetic means can also induce such phenomena, forming an access point to the transpersonal realms of consciousness, where the most important means for achieving such states lie dormant and need to be awakened in the perinatal level of the unconscious.¹⁴⁹ The transpersonal or numinous experience of different cultural and psychological backgrounds has different names and contents, even though the effects of the experience and the associated emotional quality may be very similar.¹⁵⁰

The Jungian theory is the most powerful in understanding such states, due to its theory of the archetypical collective unconsciousness. Grof pointed out that specific effects of transpersonal experiences depend on the socio-cultural heritage of the individual, which proves the Jungian idea of archetypes.¹⁵¹ Transpersonal psychology proved the existence of the third transpersonal level of the unconscious, where perinatal experiences come into contact with transpersonal or mystical states,¹⁵² where the origin of such trances is the perinatal level of the unconscious.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Lionel Corbett, *Psyche and the Sacred: Spirituality beyond Religion*, 74.

¹⁴⁸ Stanislav Grof, *Puteshestvie v Poiskah Sebya* (Moscow: Institute of Psychotherapy Press, 2001), 60.

¹⁴⁹ S. Grof, *Za Predelami Mozga*, 336.

¹⁵⁰ Lionel Corbett, *Psyche and the Sacred: Spirituality beyond Religion*, 32.

¹⁵¹ S. Grof, *Psihologiya Budushogo: Uroki Sovremennyh Issledovaniyi Soznaniya* (Moscow: ACT, 2002), 186.

¹⁵² M. D. Zomonov, "Buryatskiy Shamanism kak Tselostnaya Mirovozrencheskaya Sistema" (PhD diss., St. Petersburg University Press, 2003), 308.

¹⁵³ Stanislav Grof, *Za Predelami Mozga*, 380.

1.2. The psychophysiology of altered states of consciousness

The turn of the new millennium has seen the emergence of spiritual neuroscience, a field of scientific investigation at the crossroads of psychology, religion, spirituality, and neuroscience by exploring the neural underpinnings of religious, spiritual and mystical experiences, considered as altered states of consciousness.¹⁵⁴

These experiences, which relate to a fundamental dimension of human existence, are frequently reported across all cultures and refer to a basic dimension of human existence.¹⁵⁵

Altered states of consciousness are considered as being any mental states which are induced by various physiological, psychological, pharmacological, or behavioral manoeuvres or agents which can be recognized subjectively, whether by the individual himself or by an objective observer. They are seen to represent a sufficient deviation in subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms during alert, wakeful consciousness.¹⁵⁶

Common features of most altered states phenomena include alterations in thinking, a disturbing sense of time, loss of control, changes in emotional expression, changes in body image, perceptual distortions, and changes in meaning or significance.¹⁵⁷

Altered states phenomena can be classified by their origin as being induced by normal or altered circadian cycles (states of drowsiness, daydreaming, hypnagogic states, sleep or dreaming); exposure to extreme environmental conditions related to pressure, temperature, starvation, diet, sexual activity, orgasm, respiratory manoeuvres, sensory deprivation, homogenisation (monotonous stimulation), rhythmic stimulation and special techniques such as meditation, hypnosis, and biofeedback. Altered states share similar psychophysiological mechanisms, especially concerning the link between near-death and out-of-body experiences. An out-of-body experience is defined as being an experience in which a

¹⁵⁴ M. Beauregard and V. Paquette, "Neural Correlates of a Mystical Experience in Carmelite Nuns", *Neuroscience Letters* 405 (2006): 186.

¹⁵⁵ Beauregard and Paquette, "EEG Activity in Carmelite Nuns during a Mystical Experience", *Neuroscience Letters* 444 (2008): 1.

¹⁵⁶ M. Ludwig, "Altered States of Consciousness", *Archives of General Psychiatry* 15 (1996): 255.

¹⁵⁷ Charles Tart, ed. *Altered States of Consciousness* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1969), 12-16.

person perceives the world from a location outside their physical body.¹⁵⁸ Most of the early 19th century views on out-of-body experiences emphasized the idea that something such as spirit or the soul, when exteriorized from the body, either stayed close to the physical body or visited distant locations or dimensions. When bodily vitality is at low ebb, the human spirit might temporarily leave its earthly tenement.¹⁵⁹

The concept of the double, subtle or astral body is used to explain spontaneous psychic phenomena. The phenomena of such bilocation demonstrate, that within the somatic body, there exists an indwelling etheric body, which in rare circumstances can release itself temporarily from the somatic body.¹⁶⁰

According to C. S. Alvarado, H. Hart classified cases of out-of-body experience under the following categories: cases induced by hypnosis, methods of wilful projection by concentration and spontaneous apparitions of out-of-body sensations. Hart suggested that hypnosis should be seriously considered as being means to induce out-of-body experiences. C. Tart conducted the most important and influential studies of out-of-body states. Sometimes, out-of-body states are interpreted as being hallucinatory constructs of the subconscious levels of personality through extrasensory perceptual means.¹⁶¹

Subjects who claimed to have frequent and spontaneous out-of-body experiences, or who claimed to be able to induce the experience at will, were tested for extrasensory perception and were monitored using electroencephalography, electrocardiography, and electrooculography (rapid eye movements). Occultists, magicians, and astral travelers have long described the astral world as a thought-created world and one responsive to the imagination. Most out-of-body experiences start from viewpoints that are most easily constructed in the imagination. It is known that many out-of-body experiences begin with a disembodied perspective of seeing one's physical body from above and from a location that carries with it a feeling of being located slightly behind one's head.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ C. S. Alvarado, "Trends in the Study of Out-of-Body Experiences: An Overview of Developments Since the 19th Century", *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 3, № 1 (1989): 27.

¹⁵⁹ C. S. Alvarado, ed. *The Spirit in Out-of-Body Experience: Historical and Conceptual Notes* (Virginia: Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies, 2009), 5.

¹⁶⁰ C. S. Alvarado, "Trends in the Study of Out-of-Body Experiences: An Overview of Developments Since the 19th Century", 28-31.

¹⁶¹ Alvarado 31-33.

¹⁶² S. Blackmore, "A Psychological Theory of the Out-of-Body Experience", *Journal of Parapsychology*, 211-212.

Out-of-body experiences are often connected with autoscopic phenomena and are generally classified among disorders of asomatognosia. Autoscopic phenomena (Greek *autos* – “self” + *skopeo* – “looking at”) are dramatic, illusory perceptions of one’s own body. There are, certain phenomenological, functional, and anatomical similarities and differences between the three main forms of autoscopic phenomena: namely, out-of-body experience, autoscopic hallucination, and heautoscopy. During autoscopic hallucinations, one’s own body is seen without any changes in bodily self-consciousness.

During out-of-body experiences, one’s own body is observed from an elevated perspective and a location associated with disembodiment. During heautoscopy, subjects report strong self-identification with the feeling of having the two bodies, often associated with the experience of existing and perceiving the world from two places at the same time.¹⁶³

During internal heautoscopy, subjects report seeing one or even several of their inner organs. During negative heautoscopy, subjects report not seeing their reflection in a reflective surface. An out-of-body experience can thus be defined as involving the presence of the three following phenomenological elements: a feeling of being outside one’s physical body; the presence of a distanced and visual-spatial perspective; and the seeing of one’s own body.¹⁶⁴

Two basic experiences are involved in out-of-body experiences: the feeling of having an unseen body (an illusory body) being touched; and the experience of being located in an illusory self-location in the room.¹⁶⁵ The initial stimulation leads to sensations such as ‘falling from a height’ or ‘sinking into the bed.’ The illusion of having another body, which can be seen from outside, is probably mediated by populations of multisensory neurons in the premotor cortex, the posterior parietal cortex, and the putamen.¹⁶⁶

Patients with out-of-body experiences may also experience paroxysmal visual body-part illusions such as phantom limbs, supernumerary

¹⁶³ L. Heydrich and O. Blanke, “Distinct Illusory Own-Body Perceptions Caused by Damage to the Posterior Insula and Extrastriate Cortex”, *Brain: A Journal of Neurology* (Geneva, 2013): 1-2.

¹⁶⁴ O. Blanke and C. Mohr, “Out-of-Body Experience, Heautoscopy and Autoscopic Hallucination of Neurological Origin Implications for Neurocognitive Mechanisms of Corporeal Awareness and Self Consciousness”, *Brain Research Reviews* 50 (2005): 186.

¹⁶⁵ A. Guterstam and H. H. Ehrsson, “Disowning One’s Seen Real body during an Out-of-Body-Illusion”, *Consciousness and Cognition* 21 (2012): 1038.

¹⁶⁶ Guterstam and Ehrsson, 1041.

phantom limbs, and illusory limb transformations during out-of-body experiences. These feelings can lead to several experiences grouped under the term ‘break-off phenomenon’ which is characterized by feelings of physical separation from the earth, including a kind of lightness. Medical situations involving near-death experiences usually involve a cardiac arrest, perioperative or post-partum complications, septic or anaphylactic shock, electrocution, coma resulting from traumatic brain damage, intracerebral hemorrhage or cerebral infarction, hypoglycemia, asphyxia, or apnoea.¹⁶⁷

Another class of altered states similar to out-of-body states is near-death phenomena. Near-death experiences occur when a person is in a state close to death or is considered as being clinically dead. The elements associated with near-death experiences include feelings of happiness and calm, departing from the body, movement through a tunnel, visions of pure light, feelings of unconditional love and mystical unity, visions of heavenly landscapes, and meeting deceased ancestors or spiritual entities,¹⁶⁸ as well as hearing unusual sounds, encountering a panoramic life review, visiting the realm where all knowledge exists, experiencing a supernatural rescue, and reaching a border or a boundary and coming back into the body.¹⁶⁹

Greyson defined four phenomenological components of a near-death state: cognitive, affective, paranormal, and transcendental states.¹⁷⁰

An intriguing syndrome, which can also help to explain the sensations relating to a near-death experience, is the so-called “Cotard’s”, or “walking corpse” syndrome – a feeling that one is dead. Anatomically, Cotard’s syndrome has been associated with the parietal lobe, as well as the prefrontal cortex.¹⁷¹

Near-death experiences fall into five major categories: those associated with accidents; those occurring at the time of cardiac arrest; those associated with a post-surgical complication, those experienced

¹⁶⁷ O. Blanke and S. Dieguez, “Leaving Body and Life Behind: Out-of-Body and Near-Death Experience”, *The Neurology of Consciousness* (2009): 306-310.

¹⁶⁸ T. Weiss, “Psychobiology of Altered States of Consciousness”, *Psychological Bulletin* 131, № 1 (2005): 100-102.

¹⁶⁹ B. Greyson, “The Mystical Impact of Near-Death Experiences”, *Shift at the Frontiers of Consciousness* 17 (2008): 9.

¹⁷⁰ Greyson, 310.

¹⁷¹ D. Mobbs and C. Watt, “There is Nothing Paranormal about Near-Death Experiences: How Neuroscience Can Explain Seeing Bright Light, Meeting the Dead, or Being Convinced You are One of Them”, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 992 (2011): 1.

during surgery, and those associated with labor or childbirth.¹⁷² Indeed, although many patients had been clinically dead, most did not have an “out of body” near-death experience.¹⁷³

In 55% of cases, their near-death experiences occurred as forms of mystical experiences.¹⁷⁴ Unpleasant near-death experiences can be classified into three main categories: first, those which have similar features to a pleasurable type (such as an out-of-body experience, movement through a tunnel, or a light), but the experience is frightening; second, an acute awareness of nonexistence or of being completely alone in an absolutely empty space; and third, hellish imagery, an ugly or foreboding landscape, demonic beings, annoying noises, or frightening animals.¹⁷⁵

Experiences similar to near-death states – experiences such as seeing oneself from the outside, changes in time perception, recalling old and non-easily accessible memories, and performing a life review can also be artificially induced during hypnosis.¹⁷⁶

It has been proposed that near-death experiences are the result of stimulation of the hippocampus by endogenous endorphins. The process of dying certainly generates natural opioids, such as enkephalins and endorphins, which inhibit neuronal discharge within the hippocampus.¹⁷⁷

Other neuromodulators (particularly, serotonin pathways) and various hallucinogenic agents (such as ketamine and phencyclidine) suggested that also, the high concentrations of carbon dioxide and high serum levels of potassium might be important in provoking these experiences. There is evidence that the temporal lobe of the cerebral cortex is involved in mystical and religious experiences and that its stimulation can induce hallucinations, memory flashbacks, body distortions, and out-of-body experiences. In addition, the limbic system is involved in

¹⁷² E. W. Kelly, “Near-Death Experiences with Reports of Meeting Deceased People”, *Death Studies* 25 (2001): 239.

¹⁷³ C. Agrillo, “Near-Death Experience: Out-of-Body and Out-of-Brain?” *Review of General Psychology* 15. № 1 (2011): 6.

¹⁷⁴ D. Rousseau, “Near-Death Experiences and the Mind-Body Relationship: A Systems-Theoretical Perspective”, *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, № 3 (2011): 409.

¹⁷⁵ C. Agrillo, “Near-Death Experience: Out-of-Body and Out-of-Brain?” 4.

¹⁷⁶ V. Palmieri et. al., “Reality of the Near-Death-Experience Memories: Evidence from a Psychodynamic and Electrophysiological Integrated Study”, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 13.

¹⁷⁷ M. L. Morse, D. Venecia, and J. Milstein, “Near-Death Experiences: A Neurophysiologic Explanatory Model”, *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 8, № 1 (1989): 46.

emotions and memory, and, therefore, anoxia in this region might determine the life review phenomenon that sometimes occurs during near-death experiences.¹⁷⁸ Near-death memories are characterized by a sense of phenomenological certainty, as such experiences have been perceived as being real or even more real.¹⁷⁹

Near-death experiences include making loving choices; moving away from negative situations; experiencing unconditional love; understanding that we are all part of one whole; not judging others; celebrating our differences; realizing that there is no separation between human beings, and following the powerful transformation of personal beliefs and values.¹⁸⁰

The content of near-death phenomena is usually modified by cultural background. C. Agrillo quotes S. Blackmore, saying: “It is probably a matter of personal preference whether to define the near-death experiences as a glimpse of the life beyond or the product of the dying brain.”¹⁸¹

Terms such as extrasensory perception, the sixth sense, and parapsychological phenomena are synonymous, as they all refer to the psychic ability to communicate without using the five common channels of senses. Extrasensory perception is a term popularized by J. B. Rhine and refers to information perceived by telepathy, clairvoyance, or precognition. The PSI phenomenon (meaning the “operation of Psi or psychic phenomena”) is used as a term for all types of extrasensory and psychokinetic phenomena. Intuition is a subconscious and irrational process, based on a deep understanding of the situation.¹⁸²

Extrasensory phenomena are also sometimes referred to as gut instinct or a hunch. The term *psychokinesis* can also be referred to as *telekinesis*. The concepts of telekinesis and psychokinesis are often described as being powers of “mind over matter”.¹⁸³

The main forms of extrasensory perception are telepathy (the sending of thoughts to another; clairvoyance), precognition (knowledge of

¹⁷⁸ C. Agrillo, “Near-Death Experience: Out-of-Body and Out of Brain?” 6.

¹⁷⁹ Agrillo, 8-9.

¹⁸⁰ R. Waxman, “Spiritual Aftereffects of Incogruous Near-Death Experiences” (PhD diss., Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, 2012), 102.

¹⁸¹ C. Agrillo, “Near-Death Experience: Out-of-Body and Out-of-Brain?” 9.

¹⁸² A. K. Zahran, “Some Personal and Social Variables that Affect Extra-Sensory Perception (Sixth Sense),” *Psychology 2*, № 4 (2011): 387.

¹⁸³ P. Dhananjay, “Interpretation of the Paranormal Power like Extra-Sensory Perception and Psychokinesis through the Consciousness Model”, *American Journal of Physics and Applications 1*. № 3 (2013): 86.

the future), premonition (a feeling that something is going to happen), psychometry (picking up information by touching an object), psychokinesis (moving objects without physical exertion), and PSI dreams (ones dealing with telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, or premonition of events).¹⁸⁴

PSI and extrasensory perception are considered as being the thought force, which can give rise to a strong nuclear force, an electromagnetic force, a weak nuclear force, and a gravitational force, among others. It is to be noted here that the thought force is considered as being a stronger force than the nuclear force is.¹⁸⁵

Introspections for extrasensory perception include a degree of mental receptivity, a level of certainty of judgment, a vividness of imagery, a kind of impression (whether visual, auditory, or kinaesthetic), and a level of spatial and temporal orientation.¹⁸⁶

Modern neurophysiology has discovered that the human brain is continuously producing the electromagnetic flow of brainwaves, which can be measured by an electroencephalogram. Brainwaves are produced by synchronized electrical pulses from masses of neurons communicating with each other. There are five categories of brainwaves related to our behavioral patterns, breathing work, and states of consciousness. In ordinary consciousness, the human brain works at the level of beta waves (13–30 Hz). During very high brain activity, the brain works on the level of gamma waves (30–70 Hz). If, on the other hand, the human moves into a very relaxed state, such as at the beginning of meditation or, before sleep, the brain and breathing become relaxed and the activity of the alpha waves (8–12 Hz) is raised. If the brain becomes even more relaxed, such as in light sleep, deep meditation or mystical experience, the activation of theta waves is raised (7–4 Hz). Delta waves (5–3 Hz) are produced during the state of coma, unconsciousness, or deep sleep.¹⁸⁷

It was revealed that a series of electroencephalographic changes were observed during a state of attentive awareness during Zen (Zazen) meditation. In Japan, there are two Zen sects, named Soto and Rinzai,

¹⁸⁴ A. K. S. Zahran, «Some Personal and Social Variables that Affect Extra-Sensory Perception (Sixth Sense)», *Psychology* 2, № 4 (2011): 387.

¹⁸⁵ P. Dhananjay, “Interpretation of the Paranormal Power like Extra-Sensory Perception and Psychokinesis through the Consciousness Model”, 81.

¹⁸⁶ C. Drennen, “An Investigation of the Phenomena of Extrasensory Perception Using Blind Subjects” (MA diss., University of Utah Press, 1957), 23-24.

¹⁸⁷ D. W. Orme-Johnson, and J. T. Farrow, eds., *Scientific Research on the Transcendental Meditation Program: Collected Papers*, vol. 1 (Switzerland: Maharishi European Research University Press, 1977, 656).

which regard Zazen as being the most important training method of their disciples in enlightening their minds, by attaining the mental state of “Satori” (or enlightenment). After approximately ten minutes, the amplitude of alpha waves was shown to rise, predominantly in the frontal and central regions. The appearance of alpha waves was more marked in the frontal, central, and parietal regions of the brain than in the occipital region. After 30 minutes, rhythmical waves of theta-wave activity begun to occur in all the regions of the brain. After the end of Zen meditation, alpha waves were seen to continue, making this an apparent after-effect of Zen meditation.¹⁸⁸

Electrographic differences exist between the theta waves caused by sleep and the rhythmical theta-wave train apparent in Zen meditation. The rhythmical theta-wave train in this instance has alpha-wave activity, which is similar to the waking alpha-wave rhythm. Just before falling to sleep, or when in the hypnagogic stage, large alpha waves are often seen. However, the large alpha waves seen in Zen meditation persist much longer than those in the pre-sleep pattern.¹⁸⁹

During research studies on practitioners of transcendental meditation, there was a constant tendency to shift from alpha-wave activity to slow frequencies, mostly theta-wave activity and mixed frequencies, sometimes low and medium voltage delta. The alpha-wave periods predominated at the beginning of meditation. Low/mixed theta waves differ from drowsiness and were present in deep meditation. Alpha-wave activity always returned at the end. The changes reported on the encephalogram, induced by yoga meditation, include fast frequencies during deep states of meditation, the prominence of alpha-wave activity associated with the absence of reaction to external stimuli, and the appearance of theta waves during meditation,¹⁹⁰ in the frontal and posterior temporal regions of the brain.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Hirai T. Kamasatsu, “An Electroencephalographic Study on Zen Meditation”, *Folia Psychiatrica et Neurologica Japonica* 20, № 4 (1996): 315-319.

¹⁸⁹ Kamasatsu, 327.

¹⁹⁰ D. W. Orme-Johnson and J. T. Farrow, eds. *Scientific Research on the Transcendental Meditation Program: Collected Papers*, vol. 1, 151-152.

¹⁹¹ J. Lagopoulos et al. “Increased Theta and Alpha EEG Activity during Nondirective Meditation”, *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 15, № 11 (2009): 1190.

The state produced during meditation differs from those produced during sleep, relaxation, and arousal. Likewise, the reactions to light, sound, and somatic stimuli were decreased or even absent.¹⁹²

Electroencephalographic studies have provided some insight into the neurophysiology of meditation, including long-term changes in cortical activity. In one study, there was a tendency to identify changes in electrical brain activity associated with meditation. There was a significant difference in theta-wave power in the frontal and temporal–central regions of the brain. Furthermore, there was a significant difference in alpha-wave power in the posterior region in comparison to the frontal region. Post-hoc analysis revealed significantly lower delta-wave power in the posterior regions as compared to both the frontal and temporal central regions. There was a significant increase in alpha-wave power in the posterior, frontal, and temporal central regions and an increase in theta power in the posterior, frontal and temporal–central regions during meditation. There was also a notable increase in delta-wave power in the temporal central regions. Theta-wave activity was greater in the frontal and temporal central areas, whereas alpha waves were more abundant posteriorly. Several studies have shown that long-term meditators exhibit higher theta and alpha-wave power. Both sympathetic and parasympathetic indices increased during frontal theta-wave activity, suggesting a close relationship between cardiac autonomic functioning and activity of the medial frontal neural circuitry. Successful meditation involves slower frontal alpha-wave synchronization, coupled with reduced sympathetic activity, while mindfulness may activate theta-wave activity in the frontal areas, as well as increased parasympathetic activity. During meditation practice, heart rate reduction indicated lower sympathetic and higher parasympathetic nerve activity in comparison to regular relaxation.¹⁹³

It is widely assumed that meditation is a way to relax by inducing a hypometabolic state of the body and a tranquil but alert state of mind. Recently, however, attention has been drawn to the fact that meditation might not generally lead to a relaxation response and that the effects of meditation on psychophysiological processes might depend on a number of factors including the type of meditation and the level of experience with meditation. A study was carried out focusing on the assessment of heart rate and high-frequency heart rate variability, in three types of meditation

¹⁹² D. W. Orme-Johnson and J. T. Farrow, eds. *Scientific Research on the Transcendental Meditation Program: Collected Papers*, vol. 1, 170.

¹⁹³ J. Lagopoulos et al. "Increased Theta and Alpha EEG Activity during Nondirective Meditation", *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 15, № 11 (2009): 1188-1191.

exercises: breathing meditation, loving-kindness meditation, and mindfulness meditation. Participants from the Buddhist schools of Theravada and Vajrayana who practiced meditation exercises were chosen for investigation. The results showed an increase in heart rate, was found in the Theravada types of meditation that included a concentrative focus on bodily sensations. In contrast, a decrease in heart rate was found in the Vajrayana types of meditation, which included an active generation of mental imagery.¹⁹⁴

Heart rate variability significantly decreased during loving-kindness meditation and mindfulness meditation, but not during breathing meditation.¹⁹⁵

The fact that not all kinds of meditation showed the same heart rate results is also connected with the type of meditation being engaged in. Not all kinds of meditations have the same aims. Some can be used only as a form of relaxation, concentration, journeying, creative visualization, or self-inquiry. For the first time, paroxysmal gamma waves were observed in subjects practicing a yoga technique of breathing control called the “Bhramari pranayama”, which is also a meditation technique. During practice of this technique, low frequency power was diminished, significantly for the theta-wave range and non-significantly for the alpha-wave range. The paroxysmal gamma-wave activity was raised during the humming period of this practice. A bilateral distribution of the activity was located in both brain hemispheres only for intermediate practitioners, whereas, for beginners, the activity was located in only the left hemisphere. A biphasic hypersynchronous activity, in the high gamma-wave range, was also reported.¹⁹⁶

The important objective of the study during of electroencephalographic measurement was determining the spectral power in the mystical condition of Carmelite nuns. As for the phenomenology of the subjective experience during the mystical condition, several items on the mysticism scale were noted: an experience that something greater than one’s self seemed to absorb the person; a feeling of profound joy and sacredness, which cannot be expressed with words; and a feeling that

¹⁹⁴ L. Lumma, B. E. Kok, and T. Singer, “Is Meditation Always Relaxing? Investigating Heart Rate, Heart Rate Variability, Experienced Effort and Likeability during Training of Three Types of Mediation”, *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 97 (1), (2015); <http://doi:10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2015.04.017>.

¹⁹⁵ L. Lumma, B. E. Kok, and T. Singer, 2015.

¹⁹⁶ F. B. Vialatte et al., “EEG Paroxysmal Gamma Waves during Bhramari Pranayama: A Yoga Breathing Technique”, *Consciousness and Cognition* 50 (2008), accessed 24 February, 2018, <https://doi:10.1016/j.concog.2008.01.004>.

everything in this world is part of a whole, which is impossible to communicate. Theta-wave power in particular was increased over the left and central frontal and parietal regions, and a greater theta-wave ratio was found across the frontal, central, temporal, and parietal regions. In addition, gamma-wave power increased in the right temporal and parietal regions. As for increased theta-wave power over the parietal cortex, this was associated with religiously charged mentally visualized images, based on the evidence suggesting an implication of parietal theta-wave activity in the visual mental imagery. It has been proposed that the gamma-wave frequency band plays a central role in brain mechanisms underlying conscious experience and states of consciousness. With respect to this issue, given that gamma-wave activity in the right middle temporal gyrus has been shown during self-reconstitution meditation and that clinical data suggest an involvement of the temporal lobe in mystical experiences, it is conceivable that increased gamma-wave activity in the right temporal region during the mystical condition was related to the subjective impression of union with God. Increased theta-wave connectivity between the left frontal and central areas and enhanced long-distant alpha-wave connectivity in the right hemisphere between the right frontal and temporal region, as well as the parietal region, and between the right central and parietal regions, were found during mystical experiences.¹⁹⁷

Recent research studies associate the presence of an additional level of meditation-induced changes in brain waves with the presence of biphasic hyper-synchronous high-frequency gamma waves (40+ cps).¹⁹⁸

The presence of gamma waves is a direct confirmation of the integrative model because gamma waves are associated with the binding of diverse brain signals. Furthermore, gamma-wave synchronization is modulated by rhythmic discharges of theta wave and alpha waves.¹⁹⁹ These discharges reflect linkages of the attentional mechanisms (located in the reticular formation), the emotional brain (comprising the hippocampal-septal area) and the frontal cortex by projecting ascending discharges from ancient levels of the brain onto the frontal lobes.²⁰⁰

The cross-cultural manifestations of shamanic trance reflect the fundamental homeostatic dynamics of the human nervous system, based

¹⁹⁷ M. Beauregard and V. Paquette, "EEG Activity in Carmelite Nuns during a Mystical Experience", 1-4.

¹⁹⁸ M. Winkelman, "Shamanism", *A Biopsychological Paradigm of Consciousness and Healing* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2010), 35.

¹⁹⁹ M. Winkelman, "Shamanism in Cross-Cultural Perspective", 56.

²⁰⁰ M. Winkelman, "Shamanic Cosmology as an Evolutionary Neurocognitive Epistemology", 80-84.

on the neuropsychological foundations of altered states.²⁰¹ These states involve an adaptive integrative mode of consciousness, resulting in slow-wave synchronization across brain systems, thereby enhancing the operation of self-functions of the paleomammalian brain.²⁰²

On the basis of neuro-anatomical, structural, and functional divisions, a hierarchical triune brain is based on the following strata: firstly, the reptilian (organic/behavioral) brain (the R-complex), connected with the reticular formations and thalamic structures of the brain stem area, which control the amount of information that the higher levels of the brain receive; secondly, the paleomammalian (limbic/emotional) brain (or the limbic system), particularly the hippocampus and the amygdala, which provide emotional information, personal memories, and the sense of self; and thirdly, the neocortex (or neomammalian) brain, which is connected with the visual and auditory areas of the frontal cortex.²⁰³

A particular feature of shamanic consciousness involves the integration of consciousness, manifested in brain activity across the brain systems by slow, highly coherent brain waves driven by interactions between the paleomammalian brain and the R-complex, producing interhemispheric integration.²⁰⁴

Altered states of consciousness, induced by meditative and shamanic techniques have been characterized by an overall decrease in frequency of the brain waves, specifically the theta-wave range, resulting in increases of alpha-wave (8–12+ cps) and theta-wave (5–7+ cps) amplitude and regularity in the frontal and central regions of the brain.²⁰⁵

Ritual-induced altered states of consciousness share common physiological features that permit right hemisphere dominance, achieving cortical synchronization in both hemispheres and evoking a dominant trophotropic parasympathetic state. M. Winkelman quotes Mandell, who suggests that there are two bases for hypersynchronous temporal lobe

²⁰¹ M. Winkelman, “Shamanic Cosmology as an Evolutionary Neurocognitive Epistemology”, *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 3, № 1 (2013): 79.

²⁰² M. Winkelman, “Shamanism as Neurotheology and Evolutionary Psychology”, *American Behavioral Scientist* 45 (2002): 1875-1887, accessed 12 April 2020. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0002764202045012010>

²⁰³ M. Winkelman, *Shamanism: A Biopsychosocial Paradigm of Consciousness and Healing* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2010), 149.

²⁰⁴ M. Winkelman, “Shamanic Cosmology as an Evolutionary Neurocognitive Epistemology”, *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 3, № 1 (2013): 80-84.

²⁰⁵ M. Winkelman, “Shamanism in Cross-Cultural Perspective”, *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 31, № 2 (2013): 56.

activities: the hippocampal-septal system and the amygdala. The hippocampal-septal region, which is central to the focus of brain activity in trance states, belongs to the phylogenetically older part of the brain.²⁰⁶

The hippocampus is a focal point of the mechanisms that reduce inhibitory serotonin regulation of the temporal lobe's limbic function. The loss of inhibitory regulation by serotonin results in a reduction of the emotional response and enhancement of dopamine circuitry, leading to emotional flooding or ecstasy.²⁰⁷

As such, altered states of consciousness produce spiritual experiences, which co-exist with complex psychodynamics, by inducing the arousal of serotonin functions. This, in turn, leads to an adaptive potential in the healing of consciousness.²⁰⁸

Altered states involve a shift towards increased slow-wave activity across the frontal lobes, coupled with increased dominance of limbic system activity, especially in the hippocampus, amygdala and septum and a shift towards parasympathetic dominance in the autonomic nervous system. The increase in depth of an altered state is shown by a gradual decrease in frontal lobe activity followed by a similar decrease in limbic involvement, both of which seem to be associated with transcendent states of consciousness.²⁰⁹

The most important scientific discoveries during the 1980s were the discoveries of endorphins – natural, inner-brain opioids. Research into the existence of inner endorphins and similar endogenous systems has described in which relations altered states of consciousness are connected with the use of hallucinogens or psychedelics and in what way these states can be induced without the influence of psychotropic stimulators. Various types of shamanic trances, extreme situations, endurance quests, temperature differences, asceticism, dancing, music, sexual abstinence, sensory deprivation, and fasting also lead to the release of endorphins.²¹⁰

Concerning the neurophysiological research conducted on Siberian shamans, Russian scholar V. I. Haritonova declared that the focus of brain

²⁰⁶ M. Winkelman, "Trance States: A Theoretical Model and Cross-Cultural Analysis", *Ethos* 14, № 2 (1986): 174-178.

²⁰⁷ M. Winkelman, "Shamanism in Cross-Cultural Perspective", 54.

²⁰⁸ M. Winkelman, "Shamanism as Neurotheology and Evolutionary Psychology", *American Behavioral Scientist* 45 (2002): 1875-1887, accessed 12 April 2020. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0002764202045012010>

²⁰⁹ S. Krippner and A. Combs, "The Neurophenomenology of Shamanism", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 9, № 3 (2002): 81.

²¹⁰ M. Winkelman, "Trance States: A Theoretical Model and Cross-Cultural Analysis", *Ethos* 14, № 2 (1986): 178-192.

activity was strengthened within the temporal-parietal area of the right hemisphere of the brain. The focus point enabling maximization of psychosomatics was found in the left occipital area and in the right temporal-parietal region, while the decreasing indicators of that state were found in the frontal regions and in the right occipital region. An increase of mental engagement in shamanic trance was depicted in the frontal area of the right hemisphere of the brain, which has been (in a number of studies) linked to creative and artistic thinking. During shamanic ecstasy, the activation of the parietal temporal cortex and frontal areas of the right hemisphere was observed. The domination of the right hemispheric activity especially the intensification of central and temporal areas corresponds with the arousal of unconscious intuitive processes, connected with inner observation based on the act of experience itself.²¹¹

Modern neurophysiology demonstrates that everything considered as being supernatural is related to the interference of, mostly, the right brain hemisphere, often “in combination” with synchronous activity in both hemispheres.²¹²

²¹¹ V. I. Haritonova, *Feniks iz Pepla? Sibirskiy Shamanizm na Rubezhe Tysyatchiletyi* (Moscow: Institut Etnologiyi i Antropologiyi N. N. Miklukho-Maklaya, 2006), 31-32.

²¹² V. I. Kharitonova and D. A. Funk, “K Voprosu o Metodologiyi Issledovaniya Shamanstva v Krugu Rodstvennyh Yavleniyi”, *T'sentral'no-Aziatskiy Shamanizm: Filosofskie, Istoricheskie, Religioznye Aspekty – Materialy Konferentsiyi* (Ulan-Ude: 1996): 143.

CHAPTER II

CULTURAL SPECIFICS OF TRANCE IN BURYAT SHAMANISM

2.1. Shamanic trance as the phenomenon of traditional Buryat culture

Shamanism represents the national heritage and spiritual culture of the Buryat people. According to the ethnographic research of Mircea Eliade, the technique of the shamanic trance has attracted a great deal of interest, with the shaman being considered as the master of ecstasy. Eliade suggests that not every person who experiences an ecstatic state can be considered as a shaman. Rather, a shaman is regarded as the specialist of ecstasy, during which his soul leaves the body, either ascending into the upper world of transcendental consciousness or descending into the lower world of the unconsciousness. A basic characteristic of Central Asian shamanism, and especially, Buryat shamanism, is its mythological and spiritual structure, the elements of which include communication with spirits, ecstatic abilities, magical flight and shamanic journeys into the other world. These are all collected together in the form of psychotechnique, representing the spiritual practice of shamanic culture, while differences between these elements can be found not in the structure of cosmic levels, but in the intensity of the religious experience concerning shamanic consciousness and shamanic ecstasy.²¹³

Until recently, science did not pay much attention to the secret of shamanic techniques. This is the reason why, in various anthropological and ethnological studies, the concept of shamanic trance was not considered as being fully important. This is due to the fact that problems concerning the phenomena of the unconscious cannot be solved, either logically or rationally. Obviously, at present, research into the esoteric

²¹³ Mircea Eliade, *Arkhaicheskie Tehniki Ekstaza*, 1964. accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/shamanizm_arhaicheskie_tehniki_ekstaza.html

essence of the shamanic consciousness has become very popular in certain scientific circles, particularly in the domain of cultural studies.²¹⁴

Science generally classifies trance into three types: shamanic, prophetic, and mystical. Shamanic ecstasy emerges during the ascent of the shaman's soul into the sky or its descent into the lower world, and during communication with nature spirits. The prophet speaks with God, while the mystic experiences the presence of the divine Absolute. There are also four levels of trance perception: namely, 1) physiological reactions (a lack of bodily reflexes; uncontrolled neural reactions; a state of anger and frenzy), 2) emotional perception (a feeling of bliss or anxiety, happiness, sorrow, fear or amazement), 3) intuitive perception (a realization of the essence of the inner and outer beings as being parts of a single whole), and 4) a cumulative or eidetic perception scientifically interpreted as being a transpersonal and mystical perception that transcends the boundaries of psychic and emotional levels.²¹⁵ The state of shamanic trance is generally scientifically interpreted as being in connection with the unconscious, as being the achievement of spiritual power and as representing a connection with the other world. As such, they are classified as forms of religious experiences. The concepts of trance and ecstasy correlate with the category of the shamanic skill of trance induction, where the shaman consciously brings himself about a state of shamanic ecstasy.²¹⁶

Ritual without trance is considered as being a rational, intellectual, and conscious method of communication with the spiritual world, whereas the ritual with trance is interpreted as a connection with the emotional unconsciousness.²¹⁷ According to M. D. Zomonov, recognition of the shamanic consciousness is a huge problem in Buryatology, which lacks an explanation of the esoteric culture in shamanism. The psyche of the shaman acts as a catalyst for a constant process of elaboration on new forms of emotional, rational, and eidetic activities related to the shamanic trance.²¹⁸ This is a result of researchers identifying such states as spiritual

²¹⁴ M. D. Zomonov, *Poznanie Buryatskogo Shamanizma* (Ulan-Ude: Izd.-Poligr. Kompleks Vsgaki, 1997), 5.

²¹⁵ M. D. Zomonov, *Ezotericheskaya Kul'tura Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 62.

²¹⁶ I. A. Podgorbunskiy, *Shamanskie Verovaniya Mongolov i Buryat* (Irkutsk: Tip.Sizyh, 1895), 59,

²¹⁷ M. D. Zomonov, "Buryatskiy Shamanism kak T'selostnaya Mirovozencheskaya Sistema" (PhD diss., St. Petersburg University Press, 2003), 14.

²¹⁸ Zomonov M. D., *Poznanie Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 5.

skills.²¹⁹ Shamanic consciousness represents a holistic experience of awareness, which is related to a specific worldview that sees the state of being, although connected with both – the physical and spiritual worlds, as a single, unified whole.²²⁰ The psyche of the shaman is connected with the knowledge of both worlds, sacral and profane symbolically represented in the cosmological diagram of the three worlds, sky-earth-underworld. Eidetic consciousness represents contemplation of pure essence, in the form of the unity of emotional and rational cognition. The shaman, while in a state of trance (Buryat. *ongo oruulha*), acquires spiritual power and is connected with the other world.²²¹

Shamanic trance is a specific form of the psychosomatic state, one in which the psyche of the shaman is possessed by the ancestor guardian spirit (Buryat. *ongon*). This is because trance enhances the dialogue between the *ongon* and believers, as the spirit resides in the shaman's body and answers their questions.²²² Shamanic ecstasy is one of the strongest manifestations of the mystical experience, characteristic of religious emotionality. According to the Buryats, not all shamans are able to enter the state of shamanic ecstasy (Buryat. *ongo oruulha*). Shamans endowed with the skill of entering into a trance use shamanic ecstasy only in special situations. As existing studies have suggested, shamanic ecstasy has mostly been induced during the offering of a pacifying sacrifice connected with illness, or in order to get information from spirits and to acquire new forms of knowledge.²²³ The importance of the ability to enter into a shamanic trance is revealed in its being considered as representing approval of the practitioner's possession of actual shamanic skill and an ability to connect with another world; thus, in this way, its exercise strengthens faith in the shaman's authority.²²⁴ According to Buryat shamans, the world represents an organic wholeness consisting of both the material and the spiritual worlds, while, between the shaman and spirits there is constant gnoseological coordination in the form of the parallel or

²¹⁹ N. L. Zhukovskaya, *Lamaizm i Rannie Formy Religiyi* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 170.

²²⁰ Zomonov M. D., *Poznanie Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 17.

²²¹ N. L. Zhukovskaya, *Lamaizm i Rannie Formy Religiyi*, 170.

²²² M. D. Zomonov, "Buryatskiy Shamanism kak T'selostnaya Mirovoznrencheskaya Sistema" (PhD diss., St. Petersburg University Press, 2003), 19.

²²³ L. L. Abaeva and N. L. Zhukovskaya, eds. *Buryaty* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), 371.

²²⁴ M. D. Zomonov, *Stil' Myshleniya Buryatskogo Shamanizma* (Ulan-Ude: Izd-Poligraf. Kompleks Vsgaki, 2011), 43.

unseen world containing information about the mental structure of the supernatural world.²²⁵

The basic idea of shamanism is communication with spirits, which personify different cosmic levels and aspects of nature. It is well known that shamanic occult knowledge is connected with the trance ritual (Buryat. *ongotoho*) that has its origin in the cult of the sky, which is mostly known under the name of Tenegrism. The doctrine of the Sky-Tengeri represents the inner, self-realized human being. It is not only connected with the psychic state, but is also related to the whole Cosmos, representing the order of existence. The “Sky-Tengeri” is the highest spiritual level of consciousness, one in which space and time represent the unity of life, and where the human is considered as being the one who has realized his true nature. The sky is equated with the inner human, who understands its nature, which can be only realized by transcending beyond egoistic principles. S. I. Urbanaeva refers to Emmanuel Swedenborg, saying that, the sky itself represents the human, while at the same time dwelling inside of every human being. Despite all its greatness, the sky represents a single human being, in Kabbalistic teachings symbolized as the Adam Kadmon. Such a philosophic point of view is typical of the ancient philosophy of the Orient, which commonly features an ancient cosmic human, such as the Hindu Purusha. The achievement of the level of the sky represents a widening of human consciousness. In ordinary life, human consciousness is similar to a hypnotic dream, an illusory life. The experience of the ‘sky’ is the experience of death and resurrection. By gaining a more spiritual level of consciousness, the human automatically begins to understand how to merge into spiritual and transcendental energies.²²⁶

Such instinctive sensibilities lead to a deification of nature itself, a deification that brought forth the idea of the immortality of the soul, which, in turn, led to the cult of worshiping the dead who became ongon-spirits (Buryat. *ongod*) in the form of ancestor worship.²²⁷

The term *ongon* has many meanings. It can refer to an ancestral spirit; to the soul of a deceased ancestor; or even to a material totem - a symbolic representation of spirits (and made of various materials like wood, metal, fur, leather, or paper). Another name for ancestral spirits is

²²⁵ B. Bazarov, *Tainstva i Praktika Shamanizma* (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya Tipografiya, 2003), 105.

²²⁶ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: BNC SO RAN, 2000), 63-66.

²²⁷ D. Banzarov, *Sobranie Sochineniyi* (Ulan-Ude: Siberian Branch of Russian Academy of Sciences, 1997), 32.

“those with grey hair” or “saints” (Buryat. *ongon uhen*). There is also a term, which refers to “the holy land” or “land of the ancestors” (Buryat. *ongon gazar*). According to the opinion of Buryat shamans, ongon is a clot of informational energy that has its own will and spiritual/mental ratio.²²⁸

During the ritual, the shaman enters into a trance, while his soul departs from the body to free up space for the ongon-spirit to enter.²²⁹ Shamans declare that, through communication with ongon-spirits, there is the possibility of achieving knowledge of any kind of information, as they have access to the so-called celestial files, which contain answers to all questions.²³⁰ Spirits don't differ much from living people. The only difference is only in the quality of their form. For that reason, it is not possible to see them with physical eyes, although they dwell everywhere.²³¹

There is a widely shared opinion that ongons, while being spirit-helpers and guardians of the shamans supply them with magical powers.²³² On the one hand, the souls of the dead ancestors are believed to act for the benefit of living individuals, but, on the other hand, they are seen to also cause harm. These ideas gave rise to a new type of gods: the ongons. The spirits of the dead ancestors mostly protect their relatives, and they can punish those who have offended their descendants. The class of spirits who became ongons is comprised mostly of those who brought great benefit to their people (but who can be either good or evil). More frequently, the class of ongon-spirits includes the souls of departed shamans.²³³

During the ceremony of invoking the ongon-spirits (Buryat. *ongu oruulha*, Mong. *ongod oroot* – “the embodiment of the ongon”), the shaman enters a trance, invoking the spirits and asking them to accept an offering. Due to the shaman's behavior, one is able to tell whether the shaman became possessed or not. In the beginning, the distant sounds of a drum start to bring the shaman into a slight tremor, after that, beating a drum or ringing a bell makes the shaman tremble. Later, their trembling

²²⁸ M. D. Zomonov, *Ezotericheskaya Kul'tura Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 91.

²²⁹ V. D. Tsydypov, “Poklonenie Rodovym Ongonom - Ugaa Hundelhe”, accessed 21 May 2011. <http://tengeri.ucoz.ru/publ/1-1-0-3>

²³⁰ B. Z. Tsyrendorzhiiev, “Poklonenie Ongonom”, vol. 2. accessed 21 May 2011. <http://tengeri.ucoz.ru/publ/1-1-0-2>

²³¹ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism* (Vermont: Destiny Books, 2000), 50.

²³² G. R. Galdanova, *Dolamaistskie Verovaniya Buryat* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1987), 72.

²³³ D. Banzarov, *Sobranie Sochineniyi*, 48.

gets faster and faster, and, in the end, they begin to move violently; their eyes become inflamed, and they start to jump, run around, or dance.²³⁴

Each shaman has their own experience of the trance (Buryat. *ongon*). They can talk in a different language or a dialect, or even in the voice of a different sex, depending on which type of ongon-spirit has possessed them.²³⁵ These actions mean, that the shaman's body is possessed by the spirits or gods which have been invoked.²³⁶ The embodiment of the ongon-spirits is often described as if it were a strike of lightning, similar to the lightning clearance, where a kind of foggy or phantom phenomenon is often seen. One feels the lightning strike in the head, after which comes a feeling of stupor. Such kind of clearance is called the "fire of the *ongon*" (Buryat. *ongoni dulen*). According to the beliefs of the Buryats, the ongon does not always have to embody the shaman. However, it can just "slash him" with this lightning, which is considered as being enough for the ritual. Shamanic practice includes not only the ability to embody the spirits and to dissolve one's consciousness, but also the ability to participate in astral voyages and to travel in the spiritual body both on the earth and in other worlds.²³⁷ According to M. Harner, the wisdom-keepers of the Mongolian and the pre-Baykal region were familiar with secret wisdom, similar to that known to practitioners of classical yoga, Taoistic alchemy, and Buddhist Tantra. Buryat and Mongolian shamanism share a special characteristic - this being the syncretism of Buddhism and shamanism.²³⁸

According to Buryat shamans, shamanic tradition is divided into the black (which is purely shamanic) doctrine and the white tradition (which is similar to Lamaistic teachings), while some shamans and Tantric lamas participate in both, black and white rituals. From the esoteric point of view, the shamanism of the Mongols and Buryats is one of the ancient traditions belonging to the secret teachings of the proto-Turkic people, which I. S. Urbanaeva calls Tengerism. Tengerianic esoterism represents the symbolic objectivity that enhances the whole traditional culture of nomads revealing itself in nomadic mythology, shamanic rituals,

²³⁴ I. Podgorbunskiy, *Shamanskie Verovaniya Mongolov i Buryat* (Irkustk: Tipografiya Sizyh, 1895), 63.

²³⁵ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Zov Shamana*, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/sarangerel/zov_shamana.html

²³⁶ N. B. Dashieva, Buryatskie Taylagany: *Opyt Istoriko-Etnograficheskogo Issledovaniya* (Ulan-Ude: East-Siberian Academy of Culture and Arts Press, 2001), 56.

²³⁷ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: BNC SO RAN, 2000), 145.

²³⁸ Michael Harner, "Shamanic Healing: We Are Not Alone", *Shamanism: A Semi-Annual Journal of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies* 10, № 1 (1997): 16.

cosmology, astrology, and philosophy. Thanks to the esoteric origin of the tradition, Central Asia being one of the most ancient world civilizations preserves this tradition.²³⁹

Central-Asian Tengeri, as an ancient philosophical-religious concept of the nomads, determined the essence of the spiritual sky. The concept of Tengeri was used to describe God, being used much earlier than the term “Burkhan” (Buryat. *burkhan* – “God”, a title often used for the name of Buddha). Tengeri, as a term carrying the meaning of “God”, was generally used in ancient times. According to the Turkic-Mongolian people, during the time of Genghis Khan, the Muslims used to translate “Tengeri” as “Allah”, while Europeans interpreted it with the word “Deus”.²⁴⁰

The heavenly nature of the shamanic gift presents itself in the ecstatic way of being and reveals itself in a shamanic trance as a form of embodiment of spirit-ongons in terms of wielding control over the great elements.²⁴¹ The realization of the essential nature of the sky represents the widening of human consciousness. In everyday life, human consciousness is similar to a hypnotic dream, giving the illusion of life. To experience the “sky” is to experience death and rebirth (while alive). By achieving higher spiritual consciousness, the human automatically starts to conduct, within his body, higher spiritual-energetic forces.²⁴²

According to the shamans in the Tengeri religious organization in Ulan-Ude, Buryatia, the shaman can be possessed by various kinds of spirits: the sky-gods (Buryat. *tengri*), such as, the White Elder (Buryat. *burkhan gaarbal*); the tribal spirits, such as, Buha Noyon (Buryat. *buhe noyon*); or the guardian ancestral spirits (Buryat. *ongon*). Which of these possesses the shaman depends on the power and the level of initiation of the shaman. The moment of ongon-possession seems to be unpredictable, and, for that reason, the mental state, which is necessary for attaining the state of shamanic trance, can be reached with the receptivity of the mind. There are various ways of entering such altered states, but a common characteristic can be drawn and applied to almost every ecstatic

²³⁹ I. S. Urbanaeva, “Shamanizm Mongol’skogo Mira Kak Vyrazhenie Tengrianskoy Ezotericheskoy Traditsiyi T’sentral’noy Aziyi”, *T’sentral’no-Aziatskiy Shamanizm: Filosofskie, Istoricheskie, Religioznye Aspekty – Materialy Konferentsiyi* (Ulan-Ude: 1996): 48.

²⁴⁰ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Sovremennost’ i Duhovno-Filosofskoe Naslediye T’sentral’noy Aziyi* (Ulan-Ude: BNC SO RAN, 1997), 3.

²⁴¹ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: BNC SO RAN, 2000), 145.

²⁴² Urbanaeva, 66.

experience. During such a state of consciousness, the shamans are so concentrated on their task that all other sensations decrease (even the sensation of their own body and the drumbeat). The shamans and their drum merge into one. The drum beating becomes as natural as breathing itself. All sounds disappear and ordinary reality seems to be far away, and even unrealistic. The body feels no gravity, and the stick used in the beating of the drum becomes so light, that it does not require any physical power. The ritual embodiment of *ongons* (Buryat. *ongo oruulha*) is experienced as a real state of bliss, an ecstasy evoking a feeling similar to orgasm or to intoxication, when the whole being is filled with pleasant feelings. Ordinary reality disappears, and the shaman feels flooded with light, which suddenly comes with the release of energy. During the period of such a trance, there is a continuous feeling of encountering supernatural powers. During the ritual, the shaman can invoke one or several *ongon-spirits*. While in an ecstatic state, the shaman might not always be fully conscious of the external world. This is because their senses are intensified due to their union with the spirits. While in a trance, the shaman can see spiritual beings and energetic powers. There is also a feeling of being in two dimensions: in the physical reality of the material body, and the higher reality of the spirit. From the moment at which the spirits begin possessing the body, the shaman if energetically prepared, is in no danger, and the spirits do not allow any harm to come to their body. During that time, it is possible to do things, which the shaman is not otherwise capable of. This is possible due to the genetic line, the ancestral lineage (Buryat. *udha*) of the shaman, which acts directly through them teaching skills, learned from the spiritual experience of other shamans with whom it had interacted. The shamanic experience opens the practitioner to a variety of visions, which transcend all laws of the physical world. Random events seem to be synchronized, time and causality seem to be changed and physical distance and dimensions collapse or seem to be unnecessary. In such conditions, the adept has transcended the borders of physical reality and has seen the world “as it is”, in its true form.²⁴³

Almost everything that is considered as being normal and logical in the physical world is completely different in the world of the shaman. Probably, the hardest thing is to accept the reality (in terms of time and space), because it is reflected on a completely different level. In such a

²⁴³ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Zov Shamana*, accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/sarangerel/zov_shamana.html

state, time becomes cyclical, and, from a shamanic point of view, it doesn't exist at all.²⁴⁴

A. I. Darkhanova quotes Buryat shaman V. Hagdaev, who has described his experience of curing shamanic illness, when he fell into a comatose state, during which he temporarily departed his physical body. He had a vision that his soul reached the end of the world, and he got a feeling that this world is filled with many forms and yet that it is, at the same time, formless in a place in which there is neither space nor time; a place where past, present, and future merge into a single point. He felt such an enormous bliss that he didn't want to come back into his body. Then he saw the shining white light, filled with the Absolute knowledge. He had a wish to merge into that light, but something pushed him down, saying that it was too early for him to die; that the world still needs him. While coming back into the body through the top of the head, he felt pain in his heart and understood that this world is full of suffering.²⁴⁵

I would also like to describe my personal experience, which I felt during some of my first visits to Buryat shamans. During the ritual ceremony, my body started to shake. The shivering became faster and faster and more intense. I started to feel convulsions and pressure at the back of my head. Then, I felt a kind of a channel that was opening above my head, and some kind of energy started flowing down into my head through that channel. I was completely conscious, but could not speak. I lost perception of external reality. The time was running very quickly or, on the contrary, very slowly. Suddenly, I felt like I was flying out through that channel on the top of the head and at that very moment, the whole world suddenly disappeared before my eyes. I felt like I wasn't breathing and I saw endless, pure white space shining like electricity. The only feeling I felt was a sense of ultimate bliss. My thoughts were so clear, my head was empty, and, at that moment, I understood: "At last, this is something that I have been waiting for my whole life! Even if I die now, I don't care. There is nothing more beautiful than this." While possessing the shaman's body, the ongon-spirits perceive each physical sensation as being their own. While they dwell on the spiritual plane, in the case of ritual trance, they are very happy to once more feel a presence of being in this world after hundreds or thousands of years dwelling in the spiritual world. While possessing the shaman's body, they prevent all injuries,

²⁴⁴ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism*, 64.

²⁴⁵ A. I. Darkhanova, "Shamanizm Zapadnyh Buryat v Postsovetskiy Period: Sotsial'nye Funktsiyi, Traditsiyi i Innovatsiyi" (PhD diss., Ulan-Ude: Izd-vo Bgu, 2010), 64.

which could befall them from occurring, even if ensuring such prevention requires doing something dangerous, such as walking on fire, for instance. Due to their spiritual power, they protect the shaman because they automatically feel all kinds of pain and suffering as their own. During the embodiment of the spirits, the shaman loses control over their body and becomes unaware of ordinary reality. If the ritual includes a journey into the other world, their consciousness becomes similar to the state of a spirit and in that case, they can fly and travel to distant places, and possess powers, which are characteristic of spirits. Such experiences are considered as being spiritual gifts, so all kinds of miracles in shamanic work are made with the help of spirits.²⁴⁶

In shamanic development, aside from the ability to fall into a trance, there is also the skill of performing astral journeys and traveling with a subtle spiritual body, both on the earth and through the sky. Some shamans, for such purposes, use their so-called dream body, similar to a Tibetan practice and have been able to travel even in the physical world, forming their counterpart and showing up in two different places at the same time.²⁴⁷

According to the Buryat-Russian scholars L. L. Abaeva and N. L. Zhukovskaya, there are two kinds of trance, namely: 1) the common trance, where the shaman enters the ecstatic state at the same time showing extrasensory powers; and 2) the strong trance, where the shaman is in a state of strong excitement and uses hypnosis and supernatural abilities for healing and divination purposes.²⁴⁸ According to D. Ermakov, there are two types of shamanic ecstasy: the soul flight (during which shaman has partial control over the trance) and the mediumistic trance (where, by contrast, the shaman is completely under the influence of spirits). Both types may look similar from the outside, but in essence, they are completely different.²⁴⁹

According to the Buryat shamanic organization Boo Murgel, the state of shamanic trance is classified as comprising three forms: 1)

²⁴⁶ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Zov Shamana*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/sarangerel/zov_shamana.html

²⁴⁷ I. S. Urbanaeva, “Shamanizm Mongol’skogo Mira Kak Vyrazhenie Tengrianskoy Ezotericheskoy Traditsiyi T’sentral’noy Aziyi”, *T’sentral’no-Aziatskiy Shamanizm: Filosofskie, Istoricheskie, Religioznye Aspekty – Materialy Konferentsiyi* (Ulan-Ude: 1996): 48-64.

²⁴⁸ L. L. Abaeva and N. L. Zhukovskaya, eds. *Buryaty* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), 371.

²⁴⁹ Dmitriy Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 622.

meditative ecstasy on the level of mysticism (a slight form of the ecstatic contact with spirits, characterized by telepathy and gathering of the information from spirits), 2) divine ecstasy as the middle form of trans-meditation, manifested in the form of a “dialogue with spirits”), 3) full ecstasy as a deep form of trans-meditation, the so-called liturgical ecstasy). In shamanism, the power of the shaman's influence on the outer world is determined by the bioenergetic field, and by spiritual and geo-energetic areas.²⁵⁰ One of the ways of entering the trance is ascending through the shamanic tree (Buryat. *turge*). While symbolically ascending to the world tree, represented in the form of a virtual ladder, the shaman leaves this world and enters the world of spirits.²⁵¹

According to M. N. Hangalov, ancient shamans, while in the ecstatic state, dealt with secret powers and could transform themselves into animal forms, and cut off certain parts of their body while keeping on moving at the same time. Many of them shifted into beasts and animals, depending on their genetic line (Buryat. *udha*), as far as every shamanic root bears its origin from a particular animal totem.²⁵² If the ritual of the ongon-spirit embodiment contains mistakes, the shaman may lose their consciousness of the external reality and may not return to their body. That is why the presence of an assistant shaman is very important (Buryat. *tahilshin*). A shaman, who does not have a high level of initiation (Buryat. *shanar* – “quality”) during the ritual of spirit possession could lose their soul and die.²⁵³

Such cases happen very rarely, but can occur, if, for example the shaman doesn't follow purity restrictions during the ritual. In the case of the shaman consuming ritually prohibited substances (such as alcohol or similar stimulants), the spirits can “become angry”. In such conditions, amnesia or even death can occur if the ongon does not want to return to their world and captures the soul of the shaman while possessing their body. According to Buryat shamans, the process of achieving the trance state occurs, when the soul of the shaman temporarily visits the world of the ancestral spirits–ongons, while at the same time, the spirit possesses

²⁵⁰ S. Zh. Gomboev, *Pod Vechnym Sinim Nebom* (Ulan-Ude: N-P, 2010), 12-13.

²⁵¹ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism*, 92.

²⁵² M. N. Hangalov, *Sobranie Sochineniyi*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1959), 180.

²⁵³ I. S. Urbanaeva, “Shamanizm Mongol'skogo Mira Kak Vyrashenie Tengrianskoy Ezotericheskoy Traditsiyi T'sentral'noy Aziyi”, *T'sentral'no-Aziatskiy Shamanizm: Filosofskie, Istoricheskie, Religioznye Aspekty – Materialy Konferentsiyi* (Ulan-Ude: 1996): 63.

the shaman's body (as "switching of souls", in a way). According to Urbanaeva, such a meditative process of shamanic trance reminds us of the famous "assemblage point" pointed out in the works of C. Castaneda, highlighting that there is a danger of not coming back to the limits of Tonal (the material world).²⁵⁴

Shamanic trance, in the form of ritual spirit possession, can be performed only to recover a lost soul, to exorcise evil spirits (Tibet. *sabdag*) or to gain knowledge about certain shamanic techniques. When the shaman enters into the trance state, they mostly do so in a ritual place. However, if they possess an excellent mastery of shamanic skill, the ongon-spirits (if necessary) can possess a shaman even in a place far away from the ceremonial site.²⁵⁵ During the ritual, in addition to the shaman, the other participants and believers who attend the ritual séance can also enter into the ecstatic state.²⁵⁶

One of the most famous rituals, which surely demands the process of working with energy (while entering the trance is by no means necessary), is the ritual of shamanic initiation. The mechanism of this is based on stimulation of the hidden energetic fires in the human body, a stimulation representing the awakening of the occult activity and the raising up of the vibration of the human energy centres by widening all levels of the shaman's bodily and psychic layers. It represents a specific method of the acceleration of the evolutionary process, which expands human consciousness raising it to the spiritual levels of reality in the form of insight, of illumination.²⁵⁷ The ritual of shamanic initiation (Buryat. *shantar* – "quality", Mong. *chinar* – "essence") enlightens the intellect of the shaman and reveals the secret of the afterlife and the life of the spirits.²⁵⁸

Initiation into black shamanism is called "*shantar*", while initiation into white shamanism is called "the golden hitch" (Buryat. *altan serge, shandroo*). White shamanism implies some of the elements of Buddhism, and for that reason, initiation into black shamanism is considered as being a purely shamanic tradition. Black shamans are not considered as being evil. Rather, they are called "black" because they deal with malicious spirits. Their power is much stronger than that of white shamans because

²⁵⁴ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: BNC SO RAN, 2000), 144.

²⁵⁵ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Zov Shamana*, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/saragerel/zov_shamana.html

²⁵⁶ N. L. Zhukovskaya, *Lamaizm i Rannie Formy Religiyi*, 170.

²⁵⁷ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: BNC SO RAN, 2000), 140.

²⁵⁸ Urbanaeva, 164.

black shamans have to pacify harmful energies. Such pacification is considered as being much harder, and even dangerous. A further difference between white and black shamans is in the class of spirits and gods they invoke. White Tengeri are more peaceful and passive; because of their benevolent nature, they don't influence people, except for the better, and give only blessings. On the contrary, black shamans are considered as being more powerful, as they are forced to pacify the evil spirits that influence humans in the form of illnesses. Nowadays, in Buryat shamanism, many shamans receive both initiations, black and white. There are other kinds of shaman (so-called) black sorcerers who deal with malicious spirits, not for healing and exorcism but rather to harm and manipulate people (Tibet. *sabdag* – “ghost, spirit”). According to I. S. Urbanaeva, shamanic initiation works through the esoteric principle of spiritual energy, the power of Kundalini. The spiritual development of the shaman is accompanied by the forcing of vibrational activity, which is achieved by gaining supernatural sensitivity to that power. The process of shamanic development (from one level to another) reveals secrets about the afterlife and the lives of spirits. The shaman learns these secrets in the process of gaining the measure of that limitless knowledge. During initiation, while altering their consciousness, the shaman enters into a state of trance and remembers the enormous quantity of information previously gained from former shamanic teachings and later recalls the information gained during the trance. The laws of the shamanic trance and its characteristic features prove that such a state of consciousness does not represent anything that is not already known to the ancient Eastern, as well as Western esoteric practices. Buryat shamanism has kept some features of the classical tradition of Tengerism, together with elements borrowed from modern bioenergetics, such as extrasensory methods.²⁵⁹

Shamanic development (from one level of initiation to another) involves raising the energy of the shaman and the development of meditative practice until they become able to swiftly centralize their consciousness into a single point of focus (Mong. *tublerhen uhaan*). In Tibetan yoga, consciousness is concentrated in the heart chakra in the form of a drop called “Thigle” (Sanskrit. *bindu*). The concept expressed by the term “Thigle” has an important impact on the practice of meditation. It refers to the original, concentrated point of opening or entry into the inner

²⁵⁹ I. S. Urbanaeva, “Shamanizm Mongol'skogo Mira Kak Vyrazhenie Tengrianskoy Ezotericheskoy Traditsiyi T'sentral'noy Aziyi”, *T'sentral'no-Aziatskiy Shamanizm: Filosofskie, Istoricheskie, Religioznye Aspekty – Materialy Konferentsiyi* (Ulan-Ude: 1996): 64.

space of the self and the last point of emergence into a higher unity with the Beyond.²⁶⁰

There are five kinds of Thigle in the form of five colors of the rainbow. For example, Thigle in the heart symbolizes compassion; while Thigle ascending through the central channel (Avadhuti) represents equality, the state beyond duality (Tibet. *rig pa*).²⁶¹ That is the point at which inner and outer space merge into one forming an irrational unity of time and space. In Tibetan and Mongolian medicine, the term “Thigle” means the “drop of life-giving essence”, which dwells in the spiritual body, representing the origin of human life. All kinds of Thigle are generated together by the main Thigle. This main Thigle is situated in the centre of the heart chakra and represents the pure quintessence of the five primordial elements (namely: earth, water, fire, air and ether) and absolute knowledge about the subtle manifestations of spiritual energy. Shamans of the highest rank of initiation, the 9th/13th level²⁶² (Buryat. *zaarin*), can concentrate their consciousness into that one point (Buryat. *thigle*). This kind of shaman (Buryat. *zaarin boo* – “the highest shaman”) has reached the highest truth of shamanism and is named as a messenger of the Sky-Tengeri. Such shamans appear very rarely and are also considered as being saints (Buryat. *gegen zaarin* – “the enlightened one”). The Thigle state of consciousness is a form of meditative state which is considered as being the highest spiritual state, the state of the Absolute. Shamans of such high order, when centralizing their consciousness into one point can manifest from it anything possible.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, vol. 2 (Ulan-Ude: BNC SO RAN, 2000), 143.

²⁶¹ V. R. Tendzin, *Ist'eleniye Formoy, Energii i Svetom: Pyat' Elementov v Tibetskom Shamanizme, Tantrе i Dzogchene* (St. Petersburg: Uddiyana, 2003), 139-140.

²⁶² In Buryat shamanism there are 9 main levels of initiation, where the 9th (Buryat. *zaarin*) corresponds with the last level of the classical obligatory shamanic initiation system. After reaching the 9 levels, there are 4 additional initiatory levels, which are connected with the subtler spiritual realms and are very rarely seized. The 13th level represents the last and the highest spiritual title, where the shaman is considered as being a saint (Buryat. *Gegen Zaarin* = “sacred, holy”); M. D. Zomonov, “Osnovy verovaniya buryatskogo shamanizma: Printsipy i Idealy”, *Vestnik Vostochno-Sibirskoy Gosudarstvennoy Akademiyi Kul'tury i Iskusstv*, vol. 1, no. 8 (2015): 52.

²⁶³ I. S. Urbanaeva, “Shamanizm Mongol'skogo Mira Kak Vyrazhenie Tengrianskoj Ezotericheskoy Traditsiyi T'sentral'noy Aziyi”, *T'sentral'no-Aziatskiy Shamanizm: Filosofskie, Istoricheskie, Religioznye Aspekty – Materialy Konferentsiyi* (Ulan-Ude: 1996): 63.

According to the Buryats, not all shamans can enter into ecstasy. After the 5th level of initiation, the shaman receives the right to enter into the trance (Buryat. *ongo*); while after the last level, the 9th/13th level of initiation, he receives permission to embody the Khan-Tengeri of the Cosmos. This kind of shaman becomes the messenger of the Sky-Tengeri himself (Buryat. *tengeriin tabiltay zaarin boo*) and can visit, while in a trance, all three levels of the Cosmos.²⁶⁴ A shaman who has reached this level of consciousness is even capable of resurrection. This proves the fact that shamans can consciously leave their body during trance, while ordinary people are capable of doing so only at the time of death.²⁶⁵

According to Buryat shamanism, every human has a personal relationship with Sky-Tengeri, and even shamans cannot influence this primordial bond. Every individual is responsible for his deeds, while Tengeri observes everything. Only he is the final judge; it is he who influences a person's destiny.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ B. Bazarov, *Tainstva i Praktika Shamanizma* (Ulan-Ude: Respublikanskaya Tipografiya, 2003), 30-32.

²⁶⁵ M. D. Zomonov, *Ezotericheskaya Kul'tura Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 34-38.

²⁶⁶ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism*, 4.

2.2. The genesis and origin of white shamanism, the Tengerism

Recently conducted historically and culturally focused research studies have investigated the ancient Central Asian polytheistic religion known as “Tengerism”, representing the cult of heaven/the sky (Buryat. *tengeri*) and earth (Buryat. *gazar*). Tengerism is considered as being the white form of shamanism, and is widely spread across the southern regions of Siberia and Mongolia. It seems that Tengerism shares many similar characteristics with the ancient Vedic religion, especially concerning the worship of the sky-earth cult (Sanskrit. *dyāvāpṛthivī*).²⁶⁷

Such evidence points to the conclusion, that Tengerism might not have its origins in the aboriginal proto-Turkic-Mongolian people, but that it had arrived in Central Asia from outside of the region.²⁶⁸

The term *Tējri* is still present in the Turkic phrase *Tanggri ta' Ala'*, which (in the present day) is used in some parts of Afghanistan, in the context of carrying reference to the supreme God of Islam. Ethnographically, Afghanistan is a part of the Central Asia region and local shamanism has its origin in the ancient Turks, sharing similar characteristics to some shamanic traditions, which are still practiced in some regions of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Mongolia. Modern Afghan ascetics the successors of ancient shamans are skilled in the practice of ecstasy techniques and can enter into the state of shamanic trance. They are called the “holy people, touched by the hand of Allah”. During their rituals, they read the Koran, and their prayers are addressed to Allah.²⁶⁹

According to historians, the most ancient cult of the sky Tengeri was known to the civilization of Sumer in Mesopotamia. Archaeological excavations in the city of Ur in lower Mesopotamia (3rd millennium BC) show that during the period of the 16th through to the 13th century BC, there was a huge and powerful Hurrian kingdom from the state of Mitanni. Mitanni, at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC came into contact with Indo-Iranian tribes who came from the north of the Black and Caspian Sea, and who brought the cult of Vedic gods (such as Indra, Varuna,

²⁶⁷ A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2002), 9.

²⁶⁸ Dashinima S. Dugarov, *The Origin of Central Asian White Shamanism* (2009), accessed 17 May 2010. <https://tengeri.ucoz.ru/publ/2-1-0-10>

²⁶⁹ M. H. Sidky, 1990. “Malang, Sufis and Mystics: An Ethnographic and Historical Study of Shamanism in Afghanistan”, *Asian Folklore Studies* 49 (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1990): 275-301.

Mitra, and Nasatya) with them.²⁷⁰ This is evidenced by the fact that in 1906, in Asia Minor, at the place called Boghas Kuy (Turk. *Boğaz Köyü*) near the city of Ankara (in modern Turkey), an archive of Hittite rulers containing an Akkadian text in the form of a compact between the Hittites and rulers of the Mittani kingdom has been found. In that contract, the ruler of Mittani gives an oath in front of the ancient Indo-Iranian Vedic gods Mitra, Varuna, and Indra. It seems that the citizens of the Mittani state were keepers of ancient Vedic cultural traditions.²⁷¹

In the 13th century BC, a significant part of the Hurrian-Mittani army, headed by the Indo-Iranians, left the Near East and headed towards Central Asia, North-West China, and South Siberia. There, during the period from 12th through to the 9th century BC, they created a Karasuk culture. Archaeological findings in this area from the period from the 8th through till the 3rd century BC are connected with the cult of the deer, a cult, which is very familiar to the ethnic cultures of people dwelling in the Mongolian and Baykal regions.²⁷²

The deer cult is widespread in Siberian shamanism (including Buryat and Mongolian shamanism) and also in the Tibetan religion of Bön (whose shamans and priests wear a horned headdress made from deer antlers which symbolizes their ability of soul flight). During the period of 8th century BC, a great amount of rock art paintings were created in the forest-steppe lands of South Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China, and the Baykal region. Many of such rock art paintings depict war chariots of designs similar to those of the Near East.²⁷³

The worship of the horse, a form of worship particularly famous among the Turkic-Mongolian people is considered as being very ancient. Perhaps it has Indo-Iranian and Indo-European origins. Such depictions of chariots found in Western Mongolia date from the middle of the 1st millennium BC, as do so-called fantastic anthropomorphic horned beings carved or painted on the rocks. According to the Buryat-Russian scholar D. S. Dugarov, Tengerism arrived in these regions during the Late Bronze Age and began to emerge with prominence precisely in the period of the

²⁷⁰ Dashinima S. Dugarov, *The Origin of Central Asian White Shamanism* (2009), accessed 17 May, 2010, <http://tengeri.ucoz.ru/publ/2-1-0-10>.

²⁷¹ Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevnost* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1973), 67.

²⁷² Dmitriy Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 382.

²⁷³ D. S. Dugarov, *Istoricheskie Kornj Belogo Shamanstva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 69.

Early Iron Age, having been brought by the nomadic people, specifically the Indo-Aryans. He suggests that the ancient religion of the sky Tengeri was adopted 3000 years ago by the aborigines of the Turkic-Mongolian tribes of Buryatia, Yakutiya, and other people of the Sayan-Altay region.²⁷⁴

Concerning this statement, let us have a look at the connection between Tengerism and the Vedic religion, and look at how the connection between Tengerism and the Vedic religion can be associated with the destiny of Indo-Iranians precisely, Indo-Aryans who have migrated to India. Vedic mythology holds a very important position in the canon of research on religious culture. It belongs to the early period in the evolution of religion, and its philosophy is based on the personification and worship of nature, while the Vedas, are considered by many as being the most important literary monument in the world. The doctrine on which its philosophy is based is that every object of nature everything that surrounds the human has to be endowed with a soul and be considered as being sacred. In Vedic times, everything that influenced the soul, or that had been considered being as capable of having good or bad effects on humans, became an object of religious ritual. The most important origin of the Vedic gods is the ancient literary record of the *Rigveda* (Sanskrit. *ṛgveda*), which includes a variety of gods, personifying the spirits of the earth and the sky. Aside from the cult of divinities, commonalities between the two include the worship of ancestral spirits and some inanimate objects. This points to the elements of animism, totemism, and shamanism in the Vedic religion. In the *Rigveda*, one can find remnants of totemism and the belief, that the human race originated from animals or plants. On the other hand, the material of the *Atharvaveda* generally consists of domestic and magical rituals, which are related to the world of spirits and demons, as the *Atharvaveda* is much older than the *Rigveda*.²⁷⁵

The *Atharvaveda* is a collection of spells, which didn't originally belong to Vedic literature, but which was later added to the Vedic corpus. The language and metrics of the *Atharvaveda* although inclusive of folk elements, are the same as in the *Rigveda*, which proves that the edition of the *Atharvavedic* corpus was added later, although part of the book of spells is very ancient. In *Avesta*, the name "Atharva" (Iran. *athrava*, Sanskrit. *atharvan*) represents the priest who served the sacrificial fire (Iran. *atar*). *Atharvan* was the fiery sorcerer, who, in addition to placing offerings into the fire as an oblation, also had the abilities of charming and

²⁷⁴ Dashinima S. Dugarov, *The Origin of Central Asian White Shamanism* (2009), accessed 17 May 2010. <https://tengeri.ucoz.ru/publ/2-1-0-10>

²⁷⁵ A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 2002), 2-5.

healing. The Atharvaveda has strongly influenced folk beliefs, having given origin to medicine and astrology.²⁷⁶

In the centre of Atharvavedic practice stood the medicine healer in the form of the enchanted master of spells. The Atharvan priest who, in ancient Vedic society was once a healer, shaman, and sorcerer, was considered as being powerful and dangerous. Possibly, for that reason, his descendent the traveling Ayurvedic doctor was also considered as being suspicious by the high Brahmanical society.²⁷⁷

The aim of the *Atharvaveda* was not only to pacify, but to curse as well; to heal illnesses, to exorcise evil spirits and malicious ghosts, and to ensure long and harmonious life and good health. A practitioner of the art was considered as being frightening and dangerous. For that reason, priests who were engaged in the service of the other three Vedas looked on the *Atharvaveda* with suspicion and tried to limit its ritual performance.²⁷⁸

The chronology of Vedic literature is very hard to determine. R. Katicic refers to Max Müller, the leading Indologist of his time, believed that the only date in Hindu history which can be universally considered by Hindus as being of greatest importance to their faith is that of the birth of the Buddha in approximately 500 BC. In that case, Vedic culture and literature can be dated from the period of the 12th–10th centuries BC. B. G. Tilak and H. Jacobi date this to a later period to even 4000 BC, but their chronology has been criticized by many scholars.²⁷⁹

Indo-Iranians precisely, Indo-Aryans entered the land of India in approximately 1500 BC, probably arriving from Central Asia,²⁸⁰ where they came into contact with a highly developed Indus Valley culture.²⁸¹ The history of the culture of the Indus Valley civilization lasted for the approximate period of 2500–1500 BC. Many scholars believe that it was destroyed by the Indo-Aryans.²⁸² The Indus Valley culture left many fascinating series of seals discovered as archaeological findings in 1924,

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 13.

²⁷⁸ Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevnost* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1973), 86.

²⁷⁹ Katicic, 104.

²⁸⁰ N. Smart, *The World's Religions* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 54.

²⁸¹ L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1954), 15.

²⁸² N. Smart, *The World's Religions* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 52.

which were written in an ideographic script.²⁸³ The script itself consists of 270 symbols, although in some interpretations, the number of symbols exceeds 396, which are mostly of pictographic origin and which carry ideographic or symbolic meanings. The script's overall meaning and content have still to be deciphered. For now, it is possible only to guess at, and try to determine, its meaning.²⁸⁴

There have been several attempts to decipher the language of the Indus Valley seals, but all have been left or abandoned without definitive results. What is understood, however, is that one function of the seals was that of determining ownership, and that sometimes such seals served as amulets. Mostly they represented animals, often an eagle or a horse.²⁸⁵ The symbol of a bird, especially an eagle, is popular in Vedic mythology, as divinities were often understood to have took the form of an eagle.²⁸⁶ Mystical eagles and birds are an integral part of Buryat shamanism, as well as the shamanic traditions of other groups of people. According to Buryat shamanism and the Tibetan religion Bon, Tengeri and other divinities are sometimes depicted in the form of a bird or an eagle. In Buryat shamanistic mythology, the heavenly white-headed eagle (Sanskrit *garuda*, Buryat *haan garudi*, *haan garid*) descended to the earth and revealed the secret of shamanism to the Buryat people.²⁸⁷

The figure of Garuda represents the solar symbol and speaks to Buddhist and Hindu influence. In addition, Buryats and Mongols accepted Buddhism from Tibet, and underwent a response to the enormous cultural influence from that country. This, in turn, has transferred to these cultures what they have borrowed from Indian culture.²⁸⁸

The question about Indo-Aryan settlements in India remains still unclear. Motif depicting horses may hypothetically lead to the conclusion that the cities of the Indus Valley – Harappa and Mohenjo Daro were Indo-Aryan settlements, because India didn't know about the horse until the arrival of these cultures. Some seals were filled with geometric lines, while others represented the Swastika. In Buryat shamanism, it is

²⁸³ Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 107.

²⁸⁴ L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1954), 19.

²⁸⁵ V. A. Worthington, *A History of Yoga* (London: Arkana, 1989), 12.

²⁸⁶ Worthington, 152.

²⁸⁷ Dmitriy Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 234-237.

²⁸⁸ Vladimirtsov B. Y., trans. *Volshebny Mertvets: Mongolo-Oyratskie Skazki (The Magical Dead: Mongol-Oirat Tales)* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1958), 10.

considered that the Swastika (Buryat. *haas temdeg*) was accepted from Buddhism and that it symbolizes the movement of the constellation of Ursa Major.²⁸⁹ The motif of the Swastika on Indus Valley seals points to its non-Aryan origin; obviously, Indo-Aryans adopted it as a sacral symbol after having engaged in a period of contact with Indus Valley culture.²⁹⁰

The most interesting and popular divinity pictured on Harappan culture seals is that of the so-called “horned god”. He was represented as being seated in a meditative position, and was depicted as having an erected phallus. The basic characteristic of the Indus Valley religion was the phallic cult and the cult of the Mother-Goddess. The horned deity wears a headdress made of two buffalo antlers which seem to grow out of his head. Sometimes he is surrounded by animals and his face shows a fierce look, a beastly expression. Sir John Marshall, a famous archaeologist, who worked on the excavations of the Indus Valley civilization, named that divinity as the Proto-Shiva (Sanskrit. *Śiva*). That name is commonly accepted, because, indeed, the horned god of the Indus Valley did have much in common with the god Shiva of later Hinduism. He is often represented as the lord of fertility called the Pashupati (Sanskrit. *paśupati* – “lord of the beasts”).²⁹¹

The god Shiva in esoteric Hinduism and the yogic and tantric traditions is considered as being the greatest of all yogis, and as being the lord of the yogis (Sanskrit. *yogīśvara, mahāyogin*). What proves this fact is that meditation had its roots in early Indus Valley culture.²⁹² Together with the research studies of Marshall and Sir Mortimer Wheeler, the oldest records of practicing meditation and yoga can be found in the archaeological ruins of Mohenjo Daro and other cities of the Indus Valley. The sculptures found there show the horned god sitting under the branches of the sacred Peepal tree (Lat. *Ficus Religiosa*) under which the Buddha achieved enlightenment.²⁹³

Similar representations, including paintings and sculptures of horned beings, are found in France. For instance, in the cave of Les Trois Frères, one can find the most famous picture of an anthropomorphic being, dressed in animal skin with horns, which may represent the figure of a medicine-man, a sorcerer or shaman, who had a connection with the

²⁸⁹ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism* (Vermont: Destiny Books, 2000), 184.

²⁹⁰ Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 102.

²⁹¹ L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, 23.

²⁹² Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevnost*, 65.

²⁹³ L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, 23.

spiritual worlds. In England, a similar horned skull has been found; so we can assume that it was worn as a headdress. In Denmark, in a place called Gundestrup, there was found a seal depicting a horned shaman, also surrounded by animals.²⁹⁴ All of this reminds us of various forms of headdresses worn by modern shamans in Siberia and Central Asia.²⁹⁵

The design of the Indus Valley seals points to the fact that yogins probably had a very high position in society; they might have even been worshipped.²⁹⁶ In Vedic times, yogins and masters who served outside of the Brahmanical society of that time were known by the name of Shramana (Sanskrit. *Śramaṇa*, from the root word *Śram* – meaning “effort, work, austerity”, or (Pāl. *sāmana* – “practicing austerities, ascetic”, representing a title for a Buddhist monk).²⁹⁷

In Hinduism, this title refers to the traveling hermits, ascetics outside the Brahmanical and caste system. Ancient Greek writers on the history of India distinguished these hermits from the Brahman priests (Sanskrit. *brāhmaṇa*).²⁹⁸ For that reason, they have received the title of Rishi or “forest philosophers”. They laid the foundations of metaphysics, abstract thought, and the practice of yoga.²⁹⁹ There is a long list of ascetic orders and various categories of hermits, some of whom practiced the ritual fire called Shramanaka, doing so by mastering the technique of ecstasy. There were also some groups of black magicians called Shramanas (*Apastambasutra* 2, IX, 23, 6–9), who could fulfill their wishes by just thinking about them. This last type of this kind of mystical experience was found to be consistently practiced among Eskimos and North-Asian shamans.³⁰⁰ Some of them were primeval healers, while others were sorcerers or magicians, although it was the Shramanas who comprised the majority of those who were traveling ascetics or healers.³⁰¹

From the early sources, it is clear that the ancient Hindu rulers of kingdoms were unsatisfied with the service of the Brahmana (Sanskrit.

²⁹⁴ M. Aldhouse-Green and S. Aldhouse-Green, *The Quest for the Shaman* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 129.

²⁹⁵ Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 38.

²⁹⁶ V. A. Worthington, *A History of Yoga*, 11.

²⁹⁷ Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1997), 1096.

²⁹⁸ M. Jezic, M. Jauk-Pinkhak, and K. Gonc-Moacanin, *Istocne Religije* (Zagreb: Filozofski Fakultet, 2001), 124.

²⁹⁹ G. Krishna, *The secret of Yoga* (London: Turnstone Books, 1973), 55.

³⁰⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertie i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/yoga_bessmertie_i_svoboda.html

³⁰¹ V. A. Worthington, *History of Yoga* (London: Arkana, 1989), 15.

brāhmaṇa) priests, whose rituals seemed not to be useful, and, for that reason, they enjoyed the service of the Shramanas, choosing them as powerful allies and counselors. The reason for that was the fact that rituals without emotions were considered as being cold, and doctrine without compassion was considered as being dry.³⁰²

Many of the Upanishads contain dialogues between rulers and yogins, the latter of whom were considered as being the authors of some early Upanishads. The term “Upanishad” (Sansk. *upanīṣad*) means “to sit near the feet of the master”. The Upanishads represent a dialogue in the form of a secret doctrine (Sansk. *rahasya*), and they belong to various levels of the Vedic texts, placed at the end of the Vedas. Shramans and yogins went to live far away in the forest, gathering around them groups of a few disciples each.³⁰³

In that way, they developed the essence of metaphysics, abstract thought, and the practice of yoga. Hinduism has always been highly syncretic and assimilative of other teachings. The Shramanic line in India is based on the doctrine of independent religious forms. The general characteristics of all yogins and Shramanas were the practice of austerities and of meditation, non-violence, yogic breathing, and physical exercises, which lead to the state of mystical experiences. The main characteristic of mystics is the confirmation of their constant connection with the Transcendental.³⁰⁴

In Vedic literature, the so-called “forest books” (Sansk. *āranyaka*) became an integral part of Hindu thought. In the *Aranyakas*, we find the desire to achieve liberation from ritual ceremonies as an important means of understanding the inner essence of the rituals. This teaching can particularly be found in the philosophy of the Upanishads, being known by the name of Vedanta (Sansk. *vedānta*), meaning the “end, essence of the Vedas».³⁰⁵

Forest ascetics have realized their visions and mystical experiences through asceticism (Sansk. *śram* – “effort”) or magical heat (Sansk. *tapas* – “heat, pain”). For that reason, they have been called “Rishis” (Sansk. *ariṣan* – “raised; one that has raised himself energetically»³⁰⁶).

³⁰² N. Smart, *The World's Religions* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14.

³⁰³ V. A. Worthington, *History of Yoga* (London: Arkana, 1989), 13.

³⁰⁴ Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1997), 1096.

³⁰⁵ Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevnost*, 91-93.

³⁰⁶ J. E. Mitchiner, *Tradition of Seven Rshis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1982), 286.

They are the authors and preservers of Vedic culture, who in their ecstatic trances, induced by the Soma plant had visions of the sacred knowledge in the form of hymns, spells and magical or ritual incantations, similar to the shamanic traditions of the Siberian people. They are the authors and preservers of Vedic culture, in the form of ritual hymns and magical incantations, which were transmitted by oral tradition. Their names are mentioned in the list of Vedic authors (Sanskrit. *anukramāṇī*) at the end of the texts called the Vedāṅgas (Sanskrit. *vedāṅga*).³⁰⁷

The Vedāṅgas are considered as being the limbs of the Vedas. They represent additional literature in the form of the Sūtras (Sanskrit. *sūtra*). They were not considered as being a part of the Vedas, but, rather, were used for the proper conduct of Vedic rituals. The ancient Vedic sages were represented as being a group of seven Rishis (Sanskrit. *saptārṣi*). They have been considered as divinities, and are connected with the seven stars of the constellation of Ursa Major.³⁰⁸

In Buryat shamanism, we find other popular magical uses of the number seven in groups such as the seven elders (Buryat. *doloon ubghen*) or seven divinities (Buryat. *doloon burkhan*), the seven visible stars of Ursa Major, whose symbolism is very popular in fantastic folklore and in the epic literature of shamanic, Buddhist, Hindu, and Vedic traditions. In the Buryat epic *Geser*, that constellation is related to seven blacksmiths, sons of the heavenly blacksmith Hozhiroy.³⁰⁹

Regarding this fact, shamanic spells addressed to these blacksmiths reveal the esoteric symbolism which is common to yogic practices, a symbolism in which the world axis is identified with the human spinal cord in microcosmic terms, as shown by the following quote: “The blacksmiths of Lord Bozhintoy have descended from the Golden stake (Buryat. *altan hadan'* – “Polar star”) and have formed the pillar (Buryat. *serge* – “hitch”), by placing themselves along the spine”.³¹⁰ The role of the sages in ancient Vedic ritual lay in their correlation between the microcosmos and the macrocosmos, between the ritual and mythological

³⁰⁷ Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevnost*, 74-75.

³⁰⁸ A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 144.

³⁰⁹ N. L. Zhukovskaya; *Kochevniki Mongolii: Kul'tura, Traditsiya, Simvolika* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2002), 176.

³¹⁰ M. N. Hangalov and N. N. Agapitov, “Novye Materialy o Shamanstve u Buryat”, *Izvestie Vostochno-Sibirskogo Otdela Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva* 14, nos. 1-2 (Irkustk: Tipografiya K. N. Vitkovskoy, 1890): 40-41.

world, and between human and divine law,³¹¹ where the secret cosmic law (Sansk. *ṛta*) represents the secret truth in the form of the Brahman.³¹²

In ancient Vedic mythology, there was a concept of flight and a journey inside the philosophy of yoga, one that points to the phenomenon of soul-flight, similar to the shamanic journey. The Rishi poet has to open his way to the Brahman, asking the gods to help him (RV 5.43.5): “O Indra, please do so, that we can saddle our horses, so that the journey can begin.”³¹³ The thoughts of the Vedic poets are “dragged by horses” (Sansk. *aśvayogāh*), where the fiery lord called Agni (in the form of a horse) plays the role of a messenger between the world of humans and the world of the gods. According to the *Atharvaveda*, through the power of fire (Sansk. *agni*), the Vedic ascetics manifested the subtle spiritual body, with the help of which they maintained their ability to go on journeys to the other world.³¹⁴ In Buryat and Mongolian shamanism (and also, in Buddhism), there is a term, “Windhorse” (Buryat. *hii morin*), which refers to personal psychic energy and, with its help, the shamans maintain their work and participate in shamanic journeys.³¹⁵

The role of the poet-sage in ancient Vedic ritual is correlated with the microcosm and the macrocosm, the two dimensions which stand between the ritual and mythological worlds between the human and divine order,³¹⁶ where the cosmic order is identified with the secret truth called the Brahman.³¹⁷ In Tibetan Buddhism, metaphors that are present in the motherly Tantra and Dzogchen traditions are symbolically represented as a “transfer of consciousness”, which is connected to the unity of mind with the vital breath in the form of the “horseman, who has steered the wind-horse-*prana*».³¹⁸ A number of sacred poets have practiced yoga, the control of the mind, a concentration of the pure state without thoughts to achieve instinctive awareness.³¹⁹ There are many examples in Vedic literature of Rishis becoming endowed with supernatural abilities, achieved through asceticism (Sansk. *tapas*, *tejas* – “inner fire, magical

³¹¹ B. Oguibenine, *Essays on Vedic and Indo-European Culture* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1998), 202.

³¹² Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevnost*, 73.

³¹³ B. Oguibenine, *Essays on Vedic and Indo-European Culture*, 204-206.

³¹⁴ A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 165-166.

³¹⁵ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses*, 15.

³¹⁶ B. Oguibenine, *Essays on Vedic and Indo-European Culture*, 204-206.

³¹⁷ Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevnost*, 73.

³¹⁸ V. R. Tendzin, *Istel'eniye Formoy, Energiyey i Svetom: Pyat' Elementov v Tibetskom Shamanizme, Tantrе i Dzgochene* (St. Petersburg: Uddiyana, 2003), 130.

³¹⁹ B. Oguibenine, *Essays on Vedic and Indo-European Culture*, 207.

heat»).³²⁰ Tapas, is a fiery and solar symbol, and signifies Logos, the origin of life and spirit in the form of fiery breathing.³²¹

It is considered to be of artificial origin in a cosmological, religious, and metaphysical sense. According to the *Chandogya-Upanishad* (V 19–24), true sacrifice is the sacrifice of breathing (V 24, 1), representing an archaic symbolism of initiation, where the initiated is called the “twice-born”. By mastering the yogic heat, the yogi goes wherever he wants by flying through the sky or by transforming himself into various forms (MhBh V, 160). For primeval people, magical-religious power was represented as heat and was determined by concepts connected with the arousal of temperature, heating, and fire. Various Buddhist texts (*Majjhima-Nikaya I*, 244) also speak about heat, which is achieved through breathing practices. The state of Buddhahood is represented as the state of undergoing heating,³²² and tantric texts have pointed out that kindling of the Kundalini is characterized by the rising of bodily temperature. Shamans are taught to be the masters of heat, as they often swallow burning coals, touch melted iron, or walk on fire, while the ecstatic state can be reached only after the shaman has «heated himself».³²³

This fundamental magical-religious experience that is everywhere registered in the archaic levels of culture, in access to the sacral is accompanied by enormous arousal of temperature.³²⁴ Magical heat is induced by the transmutation of sexual energy, based on breathing practices and various visualization techniques that are characteristic of yogic and tantric practice.³²⁵

Rishis exist in the form of energy (Sanskrit. *prāṇa*) (ŚB 6.1.1.1–5) by producing the essence of the whole process of creation, the energy of which sanctifies the Rishi’s surroundings. Energy (Sanskrit. *prāṇa*, Tibet.

³²⁰ J. E. Mitchiner, *Tradition of Seven Rshis*, 210-212.

³²¹ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Sovremennost' i Duhovnoe Naslediye T'sentral'noy Aziyi* (Ulan-Ude; BNC SO RAN, 1997), 14.

³²² Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertiyе i Svoboda*, accessed 12 June, 2010, http://www.klex.ru/books/yoga_immortality_and_freedom.rar.

³²³ M. Eliade, *Arhaicheskije Tehniki Ekstaza*, 1964. accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/shamanizm_arhaicheskije_tehniki_ekstaza.html

³²⁴ M. Eliade, *Ritualy i Simvoly Initsiyatsiyi*, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/taynie_obshchestva_obryadi_initsiyatsii_i_posvyashcheniya.html

³²⁵ M. Eliade, *Arhaicheskije Tehniki Ekstaza*, 1964. accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/shamanizm_arhaicheskije_tehniki_ekstaza.html

Rlung – “subtle wind, breath”) is a subtle supernatural essence, the true reality of the matter, and also its origin. The Tapas, or the ascetic heat, is the medium (with the help of which the mythological Creator has created the world), and Rishis (in the same way), in the form of Prana, create the essence of fire (Sansk. *agni*). Rishis originate from the fire, and also give birth to it. They dwell in the vital forces of the body, manifesting them as organs and they are identified with seven openings in the head (Sansk. *indriya*) (Pancavimsha-Brahmana, PB 22.4, 2–3).³²⁶ In Buryat fairy tales, the seven elders are also connected with the sensory organs.³²⁷ There have been several attempts to determine traces of shamanism in the *Rigveda*. In the majority of cases, such attempts have turned out to be unreliable. G. Thompson quotes the Indologist Michael Witzel, saying that elements of shamanism can be seen in some of the hymns of the *Rigveda*, particularly in those devoted to the god Soma (Iran. *haoma* – “nectar, ambrosia, drink, which gives clairvoyance, immortality”). The herb soma/haoma is related to the elements of magic and healing in connection with the Vedic god Indra.³²⁸ All dignities of the god Soma are enveloped in the ecstatic experience of its absorption by Indra, who has drunk the sacred potion and fell into ecstasy. The most important of all hymns describe the heavenly origin of the Soma, often represented in the form of an eagle flying towards the sky (RV 8 100, 8).³²⁹

Some parts of the *Rigveda* contain hymns called “*Atmastuti*” (Sansk. *Ātmastuti* – “hymns of self-praise”), symbolizing the embodiment of the divine in humans. Such incantations are connected with shamanic séances, in which the Vedic Rishi stands apart in the role of God. This reminds the author of a statement by the ancient Vedic Rishi bearing in his mind when he says: «I am Indra and Varuna» (RV 4.42.3). Here, the deities are those who are invoked, but the one speaking is the human, which points to the clear elements of the shamanic trance, where the voice of Rishi is transformed into the voice of Indra (i.e. Indra is talking through the sage). The personification of Indra indicates the presence of Central Asian elements in the *Rigveda*, and it becomes obvious, that Indra was

³²⁶ J. E. Mitchiner, *Tradition of Seven Rshis*, 286.

³²⁷ Barannikova E. V., Bardakhanova S. S., Gungarov V. Sh., ed., *Buryatskie Volshebnye Skazki* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1993), 215.

³²⁸ G. Thompson, *Shamanism in the Rgveda and its Central Asian Antecedents* (2001). accessed 8 September 2010.

<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/Thompson.pdf>

³²⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Istoriya Very*, vol.1. accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/istoriya_veri_i_religioznih_idey_tom_1_ot_kamennogo_veka_do_elevsinskih_misteriy.html

later adopted by the Vedas as an Indo-Aryan deity.³³⁰ One of the hymns of the *Rigveda* (X, 136) describes the sage (Sanskrit. *muni* – “one who has taken a vow of silence”) as being in a state of drunken ecstasy, flying through the sky as a wind tracker (AV XI, 5. 5, or XV, 7. 1.). Although the ecstatic figure reminds the author of the yogin, the symbol of the wind-horse points (with more likelihood) to the use of a shamanic technique.³³¹

It is interesting, that the god Yama (Sanskrit. *Yama*, Tibet. *gshin-rje-erlig qayan*, Buryat. *erlig haan* – “lord of the underworld; the king of death”) in the *Katha-Upanishad* reveals the secret knowledge of immortality.³³² The plot, used in this Upanishad, is original and mystical, and details the Brahman Nachiketa descending into the infernal levels of the underworld to ask the god Yama about human destiny after death. The descent into the underworld reminds us of the shamanic journey, while the king of death reveals to Nachiketa the secret of fire, leading to the sky (Sanskrit. *tapas*), representing the bridge to the Absolute, the Brahman (ChU VIII, 4, 1–2).³³³

Who, then, were the people who created the Indus Valley culture? Some Hindu historians believe that it could be the Indo-Aryans, as the authors of the *Rigveda*; but that is a subject of debate.³³⁴ According to many archaeological findings, it is obvious that during the period of the Indus Valley culture, the North-West part of India was a meeting-place of many races, including the Mongoloid, proto-Australoid, and Europid types. These races may belong to the Dravidian tribes, who were the aboriginal settlers of India, until the arrival of Indo-Aryans from Central Asia in the region of Indus valley.³³⁵ Their physical constitution is similar to the Europid type with elements also shared with the Mongoloid race. They used to worship horrible forms of gods, the so-called “mad gods”. The cult of Shiva in Hinduism points to the cult of aboriginal gods. Shiva has little in common with high Hindu Brahmanism, and his female

³³⁰ G. Thompson, *Shamanism in the Rgveda and its Central Asian Antecedents* (2001). accessed 8 September 2010.

<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/Thompson.pdf>

³³¹ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertnye i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/yoga_bessmertie_i_svoboda.html

³³² G. T. Tsybikov, *Izbrannye Trudy*, 71.

³³³ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertnye i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/yoga_bessmertie_i_svoboda.html

³³⁴ L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, 24.

³³⁵ N. Smart, *The World's Religions*, 52.

counterpart Shakti (Sansk. *śakti*) is of aboriginal origin, especially when manifesting in the terrifying forms of Kali and Durga, among others.³³⁶

The language of the Indus script seems to be an early version of the Dravidian language; and many sculptures and seals symbolize the later Dravidian concepts of fertility, which were based on animism.³³⁷ Also, the religious culture of Harappa has much in common with modern Hinduism, which is nowadays very popular in the Dravidian parts of South India.³³⁸ Many Dravidian gods have been included in later Hinduism, and have changed under the influence of Brahmanism. Dravidian deities are of local origin, and basically, represent local spirits, and souls of the deceased, mostly representing female divinities,³³⁹ who are connected to the Tantric cult of Shakti (Sansk. *śakti*) and Yogini (Sansk. *yoginī*). Yoginis were probably the priestesses who could be possessed by the Goddess and who have attained the status of divinities. They may represent the traces of archaic-esoteric cultural traditions of the Munda and Dravidian tribes of Central India, whose religious forms are dominated by a shamanic worldview and strong worship of ancestral cults.³⁴⁰ All-female spirits embodying the Shakti are identified with the shamanic priestesses, who played an important role in the religions of non-Aryan peoples. The nature spirits, modified as Yoginis, represent those supernatural powers, which are connected with shamanic practices and the magic of the aboriginal people of India, in those rituals, which are mostly practiced by women.³⁴¹

Some traditions of tantric Siddhas³⁴² show clear elements of shamanism. In such traditions, yogis heal themselves from illnesses with the help of mantras (Sansk. *mantra* – “magical spell”). Among the aboriginal tribes of India, the Sanskrit term Bhagat (Sansk. *bhagat*) corresponds with the meaning of the shaman, sorcerer, and magician; and such terms, in the first place, belong to the adepts of the Goddess.³⁴³

³³⁶ W. T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1995), 1-5.

³³⁷ V. A. Worthington, *A History of Yoga*, 14.

³³⁸ L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, 25.

³³⁹ W. T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, 10.

³⁴⁰ F. Brighenti, *Shakti Cult in Orissa* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2001), 214.

³⁴¹ Brighenti, 294-296.

³⁴² Siddha or Siddhayogin (Sansk. *siddha*, *siddhayogin* – “the perfect one, one that has attained perfection”) in Hinduism and Buddhism is addressed to the ascetic yogins. There were also cases in which shamans have been initiated into Siddha traditions.

³⁴³ D. G. White, *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 298.

According to the yogic texts, it is possible to achieve special powers through the practice of yoga (Sansk. *siddhi*), especially the healing ones, by using mantras or prayers for achieving those supernatural powers. The most popular magical Siddhi (Sansk. *ṣaṭkarmāṇi*) which are mentioned in tantric texts are: the pacification of spirits in exchange for receiving healing from illnesses or exorcism of evil spirits (Sansk. *śānti*); subordination (Sansk. *vaśikaraṇa*, *vaśya*); paralysis and confrontation (Sansk. *stambhana*); destruction and exile (Sansk. *uccāṭana*); disagreement (Sansk. *vidveṣaṇa*); and death (Sansk. *māraṇa*).³⁴⁴ These powers can be either inherent or achieved with the help of concentration, magic, or narcotics (YS 4.1).³⁴⁵ D. G. White refers here to Patanjali, mentioning the so-called elixir of life (Sansk. *rasāyanatantra*), which belongs to the 7th and 8th chapters of the *Ayurveda* (Sansk. *Āyurveda*).³⁴⁶ In yogic practice, there is another classification of the eight great Siddhi (Sansk. *mahāsiddhi* – “extrasensory powers”), which can be attained through yoga: 1) diminution (Sansk. *animā*); 2) enlargement (Sansk. *mahimā*); 3) levitation (Sansk. *laghimā*); 4) heaviness (Sansk. *garimā*); 5) control over mind and body (Sansk. *īśitva*); 6) invincible willpower (Sansk. *prākāmya*); 7) control over elements (Sansk. *vaśitva*); and 8) fulfilment of all desires (Sansk. *kāmāvasāyitva*). The supernatural powers of extrasensory perception, telepathy, precognition, the ability to become invisible or take astral voyages, and the ability to possess another physical body are all signs of yogic Siddhi.³⁴⁷

Numerous Hindu legends reveal the shamanic essence of the initiation of some Siddhas and yogis who used to practice well-known Yogic-Tantric techniques, describing the ability to enter into a state of ecstatic trance by descending into the underworld. These legends often clearly show shamanic plots, such as a typical shamanic journey and a return of the lost soul.³⁴⁸ Throughout the world, the same magical abilities have been addressed to yogis, shamans, lamas, and alchemists. However, these powers often have a spiritual character.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ D. Kinsley, *The Ten Mahavidyas: Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1998), 56.

³⁴⁵ J. H. Woods, trans. *The Yoga System of Patanjali* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1914), 299.

³⁴⁶ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 263.

³⁴⁷ D. N. Lorenzen, *The Kapalilas and Kalamukhas: Two Lost Shaivite Sects* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1972), 93.

³⁴⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertie i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/yoga_bessmertie_i_svoboda.html

³⁴⁹ M. Eliade, *Arhaicheskie Tehniki Ekstaza*, 186.

In addition, yogis used to achieve states of immortality and eternal youth, states that were especially of interest to Medieval Hindu alchemists, whose teachings are called the Rasayana (Sanskrit. *rāsayāna* – “way of *rāsa*”). This part of Hindu medicine is considered as being the most prestigious of all systems of Ayurveda (Sanskrit. *Āyurveda* – “the science of life”), identifying the physical body with the model of the universal macro-cosmos.³⁵⁰

Alchemy was a spiritual technique for achieving illumination, the method by which the human could achieve the secret sense of life while searching for immortality. There was a close connection between alchemy and yoga, while the true origins of alchemy are related to ascetic and mystical meditative techniques.³⁵¹ Ascetic ignition was not only characteristic of the ascetics and masters of ecstasy but was also a characteristic of yogis and shamans as well. As such, the connection between ancient shamanic magical practices and tantric yoga is, in this case, indisputable.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 186.

³⁵¹ Mircea Eliade, *Aziatskaya Alhimiya*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://www.koob.ru/mircea_eliade/aziatskaya_alhimiya

³⁵² Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertie i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020.
https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/yoga_bessmertie_i_svoboda.html

CHAPTER III

THE ESOTERIC SYMBOLISM OF THE SHAMANIC TREE OF LIFE

3.1. The esoteric symbolism of shamanic trance and Buddhist and Hindu psycho-techniques

According to the majority of anthropologists and specialists in cultural studies, the phenomena of trance and ecstasy are always connected with the feeling that the soul of the shaman is active, and that consciousness itself remains passive, while the spirit possesses the shaman's body. Such a hypothesis leads to the conclusion that, during the trance state, the shaman loses proprioceptive consciousness about his own body. It is a very intense mental concentration that is so strong that the mind loses control over its senses.³⁵³

The very idea of the human soul strongly correlates to shamanism, and many animistic beliefs have their origin in the latter. The art of shamanic magic complements animism, and vice versa. The soul represents the mystical concept in every religious tradition, a concept, which is connected with spiritual dimensions, and with life after death and with those systems, which can communicate with gods and spirits, which affect human life. This kind of spiritual knowledge forms a vital component of faith, which has its foundation in magic.³⁵⁴

Animism is a phenomenon that can be found in every religious system, as “there is no such religion without animistic ideas; such a religion never was, and never will be.”³⁵⁵

The principles of anthropological and cultural research of shamanic ideology have formed a connection between the human and nature, while human existence is based on the dialectic unity of body and soul. That is

³⁵³ Alice Kehoe, *Shamans and Religion* (Illions: Waveland Press, 2000), 589.

³⁵⁴ Dmitriy Ermakov, *Bøø and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 519.

³⁵⁵ T. M. Mikhaylov, *Buryatskiy Shamanizm* (Novosibirsk: Nauka 1987), 50-51.

why the philosophy of Buryat shamanism is considered as being a form of animism.³⁵⁶ The experience of having control over one's soul and the souls of others represents the essence of the shamanic ability to go into a trance state. According to Buryat shamanism, there is a complex system of classification of human souls, because some soul-parts are considered as being subtle spiritual energies that correspond to many parallels regarding the energetic fields of the body, similar to the Buddhist and Hindu practices of Yoga and Tantrism. A human being has three kinds of souls, each of which achieves a different destiny after death. Some Siberian shamanic traditions recognize a greater quantity of souls, which exist as the forms of energy that serve the normal physiological functions of the body.³⁵⁷

The first such kind of soul in the Buryat language is called the "good soul" (Buryat. *hain hunehen*) or the Creator (Buryat. *zayashi*). It has direct communication with the Sky God, the Father-Sky-Tengeri, and its basic function is to preserve and protect the human body. The second soul is called the "middle soul" (Buryat. *dunda hunehen*), representing an astral counterpart, which, after death, undergoes the process of reincarnation. It can fly out of the body temporarily (for instance, during sleep) and visit different places, but, in the end, it comes back, holding (in itself) remembrance about these journeys, which are manifested as dreams. Very skilled shamans can master their Dunda Hunehen and can travel with it through all three levels of the cosmos in dreams and during shamanic ecstasy. For ordinary humans, if this kind of soul wanders out of the body for a long period, this often leads to death. As such, when a shaman is performing the ritual of recovering the lost soul, it refers to the middle soul. The third soul is known as "the wicked soul" (Buryat. *muu hunehen*). It is very closely connected with the physical body and it never leaves it.³⁵⁸

Apart from those three kinds of souls, there are also two vital components in the energetic system (Buryat. *amin* and *hulde*). According to D. Ermakov, these components are not considered as being souls, but are subtle spiritual energies, connected with the three souls mentioned earlier. The soul-breath (Buryat. *amin*) represents the breathing process

³⁵⁶ M. D. Zomonov, *Poznanie Buryatskogo Shamanizma* (Ulan-Ude: Izd.-Poligr. Kompleks Vsgaki, 1997), 33.

³⁵⁷ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism*, 50.

³⁵⁸ Dmitriy Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 523-525.

and life energy. It has characteristics of subtle wind, according to Tibetan Buddhism (Tibet. *lung* – “subtle wind”, Sanskr. *prāṇa*).³⁵⁹ There is a similar classification according to the Buryat-Mongolian shamaness Sarangerel, where Amin is included in the following classification: The first soul stays within nature after death (Mong. *suld*), while the second soul undergoes reincarnation and holds (in itself) the collective consciousness of ancestral memories (Mong. *amin*). The third soul also undergoes reincarnation (Mong. *suns*). From those three souls, Suld is considered as being the most vital, if it goes out of the body, death is practically inevitable, while the other two souls can temporarily fly out of the body without causing injury. All three of the souls mentioned earlier, live in the spherical field of energy, the centre, which surrounds the physical body. According to shamanic philosophy, the human body is supported by a vertical axis (Buryat. *gal* – «centre»).³⁶⁰

Gal represents the vertical energetic channel, which passes through the centre of the body (Sansk. *avadhūtī*, *suṣumnā*, Tibet. *rtsa dbu ma*).³⁶¹ Gal is also called the “centre of fire” (Buryat. *gal gulamt*), representing the fireplace, or symbolically, the centre of the world and bears in itself seven energy wheels known as chakras (Sansk. *cakra*, Tibet. *khoro* – “wheel”).³⁶²

The chakras are energetic centres in the human body, the so-called plexuses referring to the points of the subtle spiritual body. On the physical level, the main chakras are associated with plexuses (Lat. *plexus*), which are placed in the areas near certain glands and organs. Sarangerel reports that the three souls mentioned earlier are connected with chakras that are placed along the world axis, which in the human body is represented as the spinal cord. As such, the Suld soul is based on the top of the head in the uppermost chakra, where it has a direct connection with the Father-Sky-Tengeri, receiving energy from above, and flows downwards to the centre of the individual human soul. The other two souls, Amin, and Suns, pulsate along the axis. They intertwine around the body and at the same time piercing the chakras, forming a spiral. To be in harmony with each other, these two souls always have to be on the opposite sides of the

³⁵⁹ Ermakov, 532.

³⁶⁰ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism*, 51-53.

³⁶¹ Dmitriy Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 753.

³⁶² J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism*, 189.

body, on the left and right of the axis. The Sun's soul together with the Suld soul forms the personality; it dwells in the underworld between reincarnations and retains memories from past lives. So, when people remember their past lives, this is mostly due to the Sun's soul.³⁶³

The idea about the three souls is connected with Buryat cosmological representations concerning the three worlds: sky-earth-underworld;³⁶⁴ while in case of a shaman, all three souls (Buryat. *hunehen*) are taken by the spirit-helpers onto the Sky-Tengeri which, in the human body, is associated with the top of the head or the axis mundi (the world tree, world mountain, or world axis), the spinal column, where they are taught under the guidance of spirits and gods (Buryat. *saytaani suuldende*), including the first shaman, an eagle.³⁶⁵

According to Buryat shamanism, there are nine levels that should be transcended in order to achieve the Milky Way (Buryat. *tengeriin uuden* – “head of the sky”), the door of the Absolute. Of these nine levels, the first two correspond to the world of shamanism, while the next five are connected with the world of divinities, and the last two belong to the world of the gods. The first and second levels correspond to worlds, and represent the surroundings of the animate and inanimate world, manifested as an energy of the visible world. The third level is the world of seasons, and the fourth level is the world of heavenly planets. The fifth level is the world of creating spirits, and the sixth level is the world of those spirits, which are responsible for the punishment of human deeds. The seventh level is the world of fire, the dwelling place of the ancestors, while the eighth and ninth represent the beginning of the world of the gods and belong to the Lord of Fire and the Lord of Time.³⁶⁶

Cosmic power is represented in the form of “wind power” (Buryat. *hii morin* – “wind-horse”) that flows from the Milky Way,³⁶⁷ which is considered as being a connecting point, in which shines the Polar star.³⁶⁸ Fire, emerging from cosmic energy, forms various energetic levels that are symbolized as nine blue skies (Buryat. *yuhen huhe tengriin*). To this symbolism is aligned the hierarchy of the Buryat gods or Tengerism.³⁶⁹

³⁶³ Ibid., 51-53.

³⁶⁴ M. D. Zomonov, *Poznanie Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 34.

³⁶⁵ M. D. Zomonov, *Ezotericheskaya Kul'tura Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 74.

³⁶⁶ N. Angaraeva, *Put' k Devyati Nebesam Yuhen Huhe Tengeriin Hargy*, 17-20.

³⁶⁷ Angaraeva, 36.

³⁶⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Istoriya Very*, vol. 3, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/istoriya_veri_i_religioznih_idey_tom_3_0_t_magometa_do_reformatsii.html

³⁶⁹ N. Angaraeva, *Put' k Devyati Nebesam Yuhen Huhe Tengeriin Hargy*, 37.

This is why, while visualizing his spiritual body and entering into a deep meditative state, the shaman visualizes himself as being a tree, surrounded with the colour of the eternal blue sky-Tengeri, and at the same time, feeling inside of himself the vertical axis along the body, parallel with his spinal column. The top of the axis ends on the top of the head, where the sphere of the Suld soul is situated, having a direct connection with Father-Sky-Tengeri; and the beginning of the axis remains at the base of the spinal cord. The axis itself is visualized as being a pillar with seven chakras that are connected with different glands, including the base, sacral and solar plexuses, the heart centre, the throat, the third eye and the chakra on top of the head.³⁷⁰

Any adept who has had experience in practicing the Hindu Kundalini (Sanskrit. *kundalinī*) or Buddhist Yoga or Tantra is well aware of the fact that the central world axis is identical with their own subtle energetic part of the spinal column. While practicing the techniques of Yoga or Tantra, they understand that the whole external world in esoteric terms can be metaphorically immersed into the Mandala of their spine.³⁷¹

The Mandala (Sanskrit. *maṇḍalā*) is the key to understanding the Hindu and Buddhist Tantric practices. It represents the energy field, symbolizing the constant movement of the divine and the demoniac in the Cosmos itself, in the form of their relations and patterns of behaviour, connecting the universal macrocosmos with the individual microcosmos, linking the physical world of human experience and the transcendental-immanent world, which cannot be seen by ordinary eyes. By achieving this level, the adept starts to understand the world as being a representation of their very own self; they reach the divine cosmic vision by realizing that the whole world represents themselves.³⁷²

Their personal creative force, in the form of the serpent goddess Kundalini, awakens and starts to ascend along the spine through the central nerve of the column, piercing through all the psychic centres – the chakras, which symbolically represent the cosmic levels, while all divinities, spirits, and elements dwelling on these levels are dissolved into Kundalini during her ascension to the top of the head.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses: A Journey into the Heart of Mongolian Shamanism*, 67-68.

³⁷¹ P. Rawson, *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy* (New York: Avon Books, 1973), 116.

³⁷² D. G. White, *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.

³⁷³ P. Rawson, *Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy*, 116.

The very process of piercing the chakras (Sanskrit. *śaṭcakrabhedā* – “piercing the six wheels”) is considered as being a fundamental aim of the practice of Kundalini yoga, while the adept should never forget that Kundalini is the female energy of the Goddess.³⁷⁴ According to Tantrism, being the moving force of the Cosmos, Kundalini swallows the whole world of the phenomena in her womb – darkness, space, and voidness by identifying herself with the Eternal Spirit, which in Hindu philosophy, is identified with the cosmic man, Puruṣa.³⁷⁵

Puruṣa (Sanskrit. *puruṣa*), in the ancient Vedic religion, is depicted as being a cosmic space with a dual essence, by whose sacrifice the Cosmos itself is manifested. The *Rgveda* mentions the ritual placement of sacrificial verses in the various parts of Puruṣa's body, identifying him with the Universe and gods, by listing the organs, which are mentioned in verses of the Puruṣasukta.³⁷⁶ Consider this citation from the *Rgveda* (X, XC. 1–7/2): “This man, Puruṣa is everything that has ever existed and everything that will exist; he is the lord of Immortality”.³⁷⁷

In the philosophy of Jainism, the achievement of union with the universal soul is generally presented in the true form of a human, as being the state of enlightenment.³⁷⁸ According to neo-Confucianism, the sky, earth, and human together form one physical body.³⁷⁹

In Hindu Tantrism, the human body is represented as being the city of the Brahman,³⁸⁰ while the Brahman enters into the body through an opening on the top of the head called the fontanel. The *Aitareya-Upaniṣad* (AU III 11–12) also declares the following: “It (the Brahman) pierced that parting place (the fontanel), and went through that (door) inside. This is that blissful place”.³⁸¹

³⁷⁴ G. Feuerstein, *The Shambala Guide to Yoga* (Boston: Shambala, 1996), 125–126.

³⁷⁵ C. Berkson, *The Divine and the Démoniac* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 102–103.

³⁷⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertije i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020.

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³⁷⁷ R. T. H. Griffith, trans. *The Hymns of the Rīgveda* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1973), 602.

³⁷⁸ N. Smart, *The World's Religions* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 69–71.

³⁷⁹ R. Walsh and F. Vaughan, eds. *Paths beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1993), 113.

³⁸⁰ M. Davy, ed., *Enciklopedija Mistika*, vol.1 (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1990), 1.

³⁸¹ M. Jezic, *Rigvedske Upanisadi: Aitareya i Kaushitak* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1999), 113.

The Cosmos consists of the macrocosm and the numerous microcosmoses originating from it. Everything present in the first Cosmos also exists in the second, while, in the latter, heavenly bodies and divinities that reflect microcosmos in numerous large-scale worlds are classified as ‘as above, so below’³⁸² or ‘as on heaven, so on earth’.³⁸³

The *Taittiriya-Upanishad* (TU 3.10.6) also declares the following: “One, who dwells here in the human and who dwells there on the sun, is ... the same”.³⁸⁴ The *Puruṣasūkta* (RV X 90.15) states: “There were seven pillars attached to him (the human). When gods crucified the sacrifice, they tied up the human for it”. The macrocosmic sense becomes an analogue of the microcosmos. The sky came forth from his head; the earth from his feet; the moon from his mind; the sun from his gaze; Indra and Agni from his mouth; and the wind from his breath; etc.³⁸⁵

Lama Anagarika Govinda quotes the *Mundaka-Upanishad* (MU 2, 2, 5), which also speaks of a meeting of the sky and the earth in the human body, as shown by the following quote: “One, in whom the sky, earth, and middle world are united as one, together with the mind and all vital liquids, that one knows the realized self”. The human is the scene between the sky and earth, on which the psycho-cosmic drama takes place,³⁸⁶ where the Universe is understood as being a free revelation of the Divine or, in the final sense, as its game.³⁸⁷

Buddhism also explains the system of six realms of existence (Tibet. *rig drug*, *rigs drug* – “six worlds”) in the shape of a Mandala, representing the symbolic image of the Universe, which is ruled by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, whose centre is represented as the world mountain Meru. The very process of making offerings is related to the power of Dakini (Sansk. *dākiṇī*, Tibet. *khandro*, *mkha’gro*, *mkha’gro ma*), which means “ascending to the sky”, “a traveller in space”), while the

³⁸² A. Avalon, *Tantra of the Great Liberation. Mahanirvanatantra* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 46.

³⁸³ Helena Petrovna Blavatskaya, *Razoblachennaya Izida*, vol. 1, accessed 12 April, 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/blavatskaya_elenarazoblachennaya_izida_tom_I.html

³⁸⁴ P. Ollivelle, *The Early Upanishads* (New York: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1998), 313.

³⁸⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Istoriya Very*, vol. 1, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/istoriya_veri_i_religioznih_idey_tom_1_ot_kamennogo_veka_do_elevsinskih_misteriy.html

³⁸⁶ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Osnovy Tibetskogo Mistitsizma*, accessed 12 April, 2020, https://www.koob.ru/govinda_lama/osnovi_tibetskogo_mistic

³⁸⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Opyty Mysticheskogo Sveta*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/opiti_misticheskogo_sveta.html

sky represents the attainment of the Void called the Shunyata (Sansk. *śūnyatā*, Tibet. *Stong pa ñid*).³⁸⁸

The representations of Dakini under the influence of Buddhist schools from the 6th to the 7th century BC are marked in the meaning of space in terms of the element of ether (Sansk. *ākāśa*), where the Void is its metaphysical equivalency, representing the higher spiritual consciousness and is understood in terms of the heavenly space (Tibet. *NamkHa*), while Dakini represents the form of the embodiment of the inner fire (Sansk. *tapas*, Tibet. *Gtumno*).³⁸⁹

The concept of the inner fire “Tummo” (Sansk. *tapas*, *cāṇḍalī*, Tibet. *Gtum mo*) is connected with the practice of yoga, based on the increase of the inner magical heat. This practice uses the bodily postures, along with breathing and visualization to awaken (in the abdominal chakra) the inner fire, a fiery Prana that ascends upwards along the central channel (Avadhuti) to the top of the head. This practice came to Tibet from the hot plains of India,³⁹⁰ and is well-known in all Tibetan schools, in Tibetan Buddhism, and in the religion of Bon.³⁹¹

The secret fire of Tummo awakens in the central channel (Avadhuti), by channelling the creative sexual energy. It spontaneously purifies psycho-physiological elements in the body, which is what induces the experience of blissfulness.³⁹² Buddhist Tantrists claim that this fire causes the inner heat that induces the arousal of Kundalini, or in Buddhist terms, the Chandali, and forces it to ascend upwards piercing the chakras.³⁹³

The abdomen is the meeting place between the upper and lower origins of the yogic body. There is a mystical symmetry between those two poles of the body. On the top is situated the male semen/moon/Soma/nectar of immortality/Shiva/liquid, which is identified with the upper pole. The origin of the lower part of the yogic body is identified with female menstruating blood/Sun/fire/energy/Shakti/heat that is placed beneath the navel, in the lower pole. This symbolism corresponds to the yogic representations of the human body as the microcosmos, where

³⁸⁸ V. R. Tendzin, *Istselenie Formoy, Energiiy i Svetom: Pyat'Elementov v Tibetskom Shamanizme, Tanre i Dzgochene* (St. Petersburg: Uddiyana, 2003), 213.

³⁸⁹ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Osnovy Tibetskogo Mistitsizma*, accessed 12 April, 2020, https://www.koob.ru/govinda_lama/osnovi_tibetskogo_mistic

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ V. R. Tendzin, *Ist'eleniye Formoy, Energiiyey i Svetom*, 217.

³⁹² L. P. Lhalunga, trans. *The Life of Milarepa* (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1997), 213.

³⁹³ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertiyey i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/yoga_bessmertiey_i_svoboda.html

the pool of blood (which is situated below the navel) is identified with the lower chakras (the dwelling place of the sun), while the pole of semen, which is transformed into nectar which rejuvenates the body and gives liberation from worldly sufferings and death is identified with the moon.³⁹⁴

The moon is placed in the foremost chakra, called Bindu (Sansk. *bindu* – “dot”), which is represented in the form of white semen, while the fire (Sansk. *agni*), which is represented by the red uterus, blood, and sun symbolizes their unity.³⁹⁵ On a physiological level, the unity between the sun and moon corresponds to the seizure of inhalation and exhalation, meaning precisely, in Tantric terms, sexual unity, resulting in the return of the semen.³⁹⁶ The unity of the moon, sun, and fire in the human body results in physical immortality.³⁹⁷

In Buddhism, the sun and moon represent psychic energies of the Cosmos, which are under the control of the chief Dakini,³⁹⁸ where the unity of the male principle of Buddha in the form of compassion (Sansk. *karuṇā/upāyā*) and the female form represents his wisdom and cognitive realization (Sansk. *prājñā*).³⁹⁹

In the context of Vajrayana Buddhism, both symbolize the sun and moon (the Buddhist equivalents of Shiva and Shakti) and their symbolical unity in the form of the Buddhist Vajra. Vajra (Sansk. *vajra*, Tibet. *dorje*, Buryat. *dorji* – “lightning”) represents the alchemical Mercury, the yogic semen that ascends upwards with the help of the Kundalini.⁴⁰⁰ It symbolizes lightning and the maximum amount of active energy, represented in the form of a diamond. It is also identified with the state of Bodhicitta (Sansk. *bodhicitta*, Tibet. *thig-le*), the essence of enlightenment.⁴⁰¹

A central metaphor of the Kundalini awakening could be interpreted as being that of arousal of sexual energy, symbolically represented as the unity of Shiva and Shakti, during which the adept experiences a state of deep trance, called Samadhi. The awakening of Kundalini-Shakti and her unity with Shiva in the crown chakra could be

³⁹⁴ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 243-246.

³⁹⁵ John Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 2003), 46.

³⁹⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertie i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/yoga_bessmertie_i_svoboda.html

³⁹⁷ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 282.

³⁹⁸ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Osnovy Tibetskogo Mistitsizma*, accessed 12 April, 2020, https://www.koob.ru/govinda_lama/osnovi_tibetskogo_mistic

³⁹⁹ M. Jezic, *Istocne Religije* (Zagreb: Filozofski Fakultet, 2001), 156-157.

⁴⁰⁰ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 251.

⁴⁰¹ P. Rawon, *Sacred Tibet* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 23.

interpreted metaphorically as being a sexual union, in terms of an awakening of the consciousness.⁴⁰²

According to Buryat and Mongol shamanism, inside the blue colour of the sky that surrounds the shaman's body, the subtle spiritual body reveals two glittering points: white and red. The white point is placed on the top of the head and is connected with the Sky-Tengeri⁴⁰³ and the solar colour of the soul *Suld* (Buryat. *suld*).⁴⁰⁴

Meanwhile, the red point is placed in the heart, and represents personal psychic energy, the wind-horse (Buryat. *hii morin*).⁴⁰⁵ According to I. S. Urbanaeva, in Tengerism there is a representation of the unity of the two cosmological principals – lunar and solar principal,⁴⁰⁶ where the sun (Buryat. *hara ehe*) represents the female principle; and the moon, the male principle (Buryat. *haraa esege*).⁴⁰⁷

Male and female principles in the form of the sun and moon symbolize the primeval oneness, the Absolute, and from the endless force of the creation itself. The shaman unifies in himself these two opposite principals, and their personality is identified with this union of sky and earth, thus maintaining the connection between the sacred and the profane.⁴⁰⁸ Shamanism has a special relationship with the divine, one in which the personality of the medium is completely erased, during which adept's experience of the mystical union is often described in terms of erotic love.⁴⁰⁹

According to T.M. Mikhaylov, this tradition of the subjective-psychological approach towards researching shamanic ecstasy represents a hypothetical approach proposed by European researchers, which has influenced Russian scholars on shamanism: D. K. Zelenin, V. G. Bogoraz, L. Y. Sternberg and K. K. Platonov, who, in describing the moment of spirit embodiment, symbolically identified it with the sexual act.⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰² D. Kinsley, *The Ten Mahavidyas: Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1998), 241-244.

⁴⁰³ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses*, 67.

⁴⁰⁴ D. B. Batoeva, G. R. Galdanova, D. A. Nikolaeva, ed., *Obryady v Tradit'sionnoy Kul'ture Buryat* (Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2002), 34.

⁴⁰⁵ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses*, 67.

⁴⁰⁶ I. S. Urbaneva, *Sovremennost' i Duhovno-Filosofskoe Naslediye Tsentral'noy Azii*, 13.

⁴⁰⁷ B. Bazarov, *Tainstva i Praktika Shamanizma*, 82.

⁴⁰⁸ R. Ryan, *The Strong Eye of Shamanism: A Journey into the Caves of Consciousness*, 222.

⁴⁰⁹ I. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London: Routledge, 2003), 50.

⁴¹⁰ T. M. Mikhaylov, *Buryatskiy Shamanizm* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1987), 61.

Spirit intrusion in the form of the heavenly consort is often described as spiritual *coitus*⁴¹¹ which represents the union of male and female aspects in one individual. This is known as the concept of sacred marriage (Greek *hierosgamos*).⁴¹²

In Tantrism, the yogi who has activated inside him or herself the power of Kundalini and who has achieved unity with this power becomes, in spiritual terms, a hermaphrodite. According to the teachings of Tantra, all entities are endowed with male and female principles that should be in harmony with each other.⁴¹³ This kind of androgyny is realized ritually and ecstatically, and is considered as being one of the conditions, necessary for transcending the state of being profane.⁴¹⁴

Each spiritual body is of a hermaphroditic nature, and is distinguished along the vertical axis on the male and female halves – as, for example, in the mythological manifestation of the god Shiva in his form of Ardhanarishwara (Sansk. *ardhanārīnara* – “half female, half-male”), where the right side is masculine, representing Shiva, and the left side is considered as being (in nature) the female principle, representing the goddess Shakti. Their union symbolizes the unity of opposites (Lat. *conjunctio oppositorum*).⁴¹⁵

According to the Hindu philosophy of Sankhya, the primeval creative couple was Purusha (Sansk. *puruṣa* – “human/spirit”) and Prakriti (Sansk. *prakṛti* – “nature/matter”), who in theological terms correspond to the Shiva-Shakti in the form of the hermaphroditic entity Ardhanarishwara (Sansk. *ardhanārīśvara* – “half-man, half-God”), where the god Shiva represents the passive aspect, and his Shakti represents the active creative force.⁴¹⁶

Confirmation of this symbolism can be found in the androgynous nature of many gods in various religions, where God manifests Himself in the form of a hermaphrodite (Greek. *Hermaphroditus* – “a descendent of Hermes (messenger of the gods) and of Aphrodite (the goddess of love)”), representing a symbol of the primeval infantile state of consciousness, as

⁴¹¹ R. Ryan, *The Strong Eye of Shamanism: A Journey into the Caves of Consciousness*, 188-189.

⁴¹² R. Walsh and F. Vaughan, eds. *Paths beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1993), 141.

⁴¹³ Wendy Doniger, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 160.

⁴¹⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Mefistofel' i Androgin*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/mefistofel_i_androgin.html

⁴¹⁵ Wendy Doniger, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts*, 160.

⁴¹⁶ F. Brighenti, *Shakti Cult in Orissa* (D. K. Printworld, 2001), 76.

in a child – a symbol that originates from the original Chaos. Chaos is depicted as being a dismemberment or negative chaos, the tendency of returning to the maternal womb, a wish for death (the Thanatos of Freud). On the other hand, the unity or positive chaos (the transcendence of Jung) is a symbolical resolution in the form of a union of the human and the divine.⁴¹⁷

Pictures of the world in primeval societies and cultures of the pre-civilizational period represent the human in the form of the little Cosmos, connected with the Megacosmos or the Sky, with the Creator himself, in which the human reproduces the cosmic apparatus, where ritual itself represents the form of communication with another world. For that reason, the primeval worldview created binary concepts: the sky-earth, the beyond-below, the day-night, and the male-female.⁴¹⁸

According to shamanic cosmology, the shaman, while in a trance, stands between the three worlds, which symbolically represent the levels of consciousness: (the upper world of the transcendental consciousness, the middle world of the ego-consciousness and the underworld - the realm of unconsciousness), in the virtual centre of the earth, where these three worlds interconnect. Here, Gal (Mong. *gal golomt*) or the magical fire is symbolically represented as the center of the world.⁴¹⁹

The power over the magical fire represents one of the most famous conceptions of shamanism, as far as the inner fire of the shaman allows him to achieve extrasensory perception.⁴²⁰ And in that sense, fire is functionally connected with the shamanic world tree. The Buryat epic *Geser* consists of nine branches, as well as a shamanic or world tree.⁴²¹ In the ritual of shamanic initiation, the ritual trees reveal important symbolism. Climbing the world tree (Buryat. *turge*) is one of the ways of entering into ecstasy because it symbolizes the ladder or way to the sky.⁴²²

Ecstasy is the state of the inner world of the shaman – the secret, inner Cosmos,⁴²³ and it should be interpreted in the esoteric sense.⁴²⁴ Power over the fire or magical heat is an integral part of shamanism, as far

⁴¹⁷ Wendy Doniger, *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts*, 294-295.

⁴¹⁸ E. B. Ostrovskiy, *Istoriya i Filosofiya Nauki* (Moscow: Unity, 2007), 60.

⁴¹⁹ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses*, 189.

⁴²⁰ M. D. Zomonov, *Ezotericheskaya Kul'tura Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 38.

⁴²¹ *Geser: Buryatskiy Geroicheskiy Epos (Geser: The Buryat Heroic Epic)* (Moscow: Hudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1968), 13.

⁴²² D. S. Dugarov, *Istoricheskie Kornia Belogo Shamanstva*, 140.

⁴²³ K. Medouz, *Shamanskiy Opyt*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/medouz_kennet/shamanskiy_opit.html

⁴²⁴ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, 143.

as inner heat enables a shaman to achieve the supernatural state.⁴²⁵ The entering into a trance state reveals itself as a psychic power of the shaman (Mong. *Tsog*), a power that can be seen in their eyes.⁴²⁶ The sight of the shaman and his view of others is often described as being a very intensive, even unpleasant, experience, manifesting the burning heat that reflects from inside of their eyes, penetrating the shady depths of other people's minds.⁴²⁷

Another symbol of the world center is the world mountain, the top of which is located at the polar star; while its roots are placed in the underworld, relating to Mount Meru, called Sumeru or Rirab in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and Sumber in shamanic traditions (Sansk. *Meru*, *Sumeru*, Tibet. *Rirab*, Buryat. *Sumber*).⁴²⁸

In this way, the shaman represents a social model of the cosmos, where the real and the spirit world are interconnected, having its center through which the shaman enters into their ecstatic state.⁴²⁹

According to the Buryat shamaness N. A. Stepanova, the Buryat shamanic esoteric psycho-technique is connected with the practice of Kundalini, where the human being is represented as an energetic system consisting of chakras.⁴³⁰ Here, Stepanova gives the number of 13 chakras, in contrast to Sarangerel, who cites 7 basic chakras that are very well known to all Eastern and Western esotericism. According to I. S. Urbanaeva, in contrast to Buddhist initiation, the shamanic initiation, as well as Hindu yogic initiation, operates with a field of energy consisting of the power of Kundalini.⁴³¹ Michael Harner declares that Buryat shamanism represents a syncretism of shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism.⁴³² Tibetan Buddhism itself contains some of the elements of Hindu Buddhism and the religion

⁴²⁵ M. D. Zomonov, *Ezotericheskaya Kul'tura Buryratskogo Shamanizma*, 38.

⁴²⁶ J. A. Stewart – Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses*, 189.

⁴²⁷ Robert Noll, “The Presence of Spirits in Magic and Madness”, *Shamanism* (Wheaton III: Theosophical Publishing, 1988), 49-51.

⁴²⁸ Dmitriy Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 765.

⁴²⁹ M. D. Zomonov, *Ezotericheskaya Kul'tura Buryatskogo Shamanizma*, 37.

⁴³⁰ Nadezhda Stepanova, “Lyudi Razuchilis' Lyubit” – an Interview with Shamaness, by Larisa Bochanova (2009), accessed 12 April 2020. https://vk.com/id50060430?w=wall50060430_28

⁴³¹ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, vol. 2, 143.

⁴³² Michael Harner, “Shamanic Healing: We Are Not Alone”, *Shamanism: A Semi-Annual Journal of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies* 10 (1997), 16, accessed 24 February, 2018, <https://shamanism.org/articles/article01.html>

of Bön.⁴³³ Bonpo priests, in their essence practically do not differ from shamans. Some of them could be ritually possessed by divinities, while adepts of the god Dpa-bo (Sanskrit. *Shiva*) are the typical representatives of Bon. Lamaism has completely preserved shamanic tradition, while even the greatest masters of Tibetan Buddhism could perform healings and miracles in purely shamanic tradition.⁴³⁴ Buddhists accepted Tibetan shamanic rituals, mythology, and symbolism, reinterpreting shamanic concepts in Buddhist terminologies that are closely connected with Hindu Tantrism and Kundalini yoga.⁴³⁵

In the practices of forms of esoteric cultural heritage, Buddhism is considered as being fundamentally yogic. The aim of every kind of yoga, including both Tibetan and Hindu forms, is gaining freedom from all restrictions, including even that of death by achieving the state of enlightenment.⁴³⁶

The difference is in terms of concepts and techniques, but not in essence. In Buddhist practice, the main aim is in the merging of the individual mind with the cosmic mind, where the main aim is transcending all worldly sufferings (Sanskrit. *samsāra*, Tibet. *srid-pay Khor-lo, 'khor ba*, Mong. *sansariyn hurde* – “the world of suffering”) through the realization of Nirvana (Sanskrit. *nirvāṇa*, Pali. *Nibbāṇa* – “renouncement”). The doctrine of freedom from ignorance and suffering is the same for Hindus as well as for Buddhists. It is the same realization and enlightenment, no matter what it is called (Sanskrit. *mokṣa*, *samādhi*, or *nirvāṇa*).⁴³⁷

The absence of thoughts represents the state of meditation (Sanskrit. *dhyāna*, DHĪ, Pali. *jhana*, Chin. *chan*, Jap. *zen*),⁴³⁸ the best and the highest natural state of consciousness, in which the union of the divine can be felt spontaneously and eternally.⁴³⁹ Nirvana (Sanskrit. *nirvāṇa* – “renouncement”) in Brahmanism is connected with the state of freedom by entering into Brahman, the highest transcendental state, in which the individual is freed

⁴³³ Dmitriy Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 150.

⁴³⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Arhaicheskie Tehniki Ekstaza*, 1964. accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/shamanizm_arhaicheskie_tehniki_ekstaza.html

⁴³⁵ Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevnost*, 210-212.

⁴³⁶ T. Legget, *Shankara on the Yoga Sutras* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1992), 2.

⁴³⁷ W. T. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 38-39.

⁴³⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Aziatskaya Alhimiya*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://www.koob.ru/mircea_eliade/aziatskaya_alhimiya

⁴³⁹ Arthur Avalon, *Kularnavatantra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1965), 64-65.

from suffering, death, and repeating rebirths, and that state is identified with the concept of Voidness (Sansk. *shunya*).⁴⁴⁰

According to the energy systems of Hindu Yoga and Tantra, the energetic field of the human being consists of seven chakras, 72 thousand subtle channels called Nadi (Sansk. *nādi*) and 5 energy shells or bodies (Sansk. *vyoma*).⁴⁴¹

Various systems of chakra classification according to the Hindu and Buddhist traditions sometimes classify them differently, because chakras are numerous. However, the Hindu tradition classifies the main 6, 7, or 8 chakras as follows: The first two chakras are (1.) Muladhara (Sansk. *mūlādhāra*), the anus, representing the origin of Kundalini, the place where Kundalini sleeps; then (2.) Svadhastana (Sansk. *svādhiṣṭhāna*), the reproductive organs, the sacral plexus, representing the level of the unconscious with karmic influences of the past lives on the destiny.⁴⁴²

The state of the dark night of the soul is a trial, which is related to the experiences of the Svadhasthana chakra.⁴⁴³ Then follows (3.) the Manipura (Sansk. *māṇipūra*), the abdomen (“inner fire”). From those first three chakras, a physical body is formed. Then comes (4.) Anahata (Sansk. *anāhata*), the heart, the place of the dwelling of an individual soul (Sansk. *ātman*). After that comes (5.) Visuddhi (Sansk. *viśuddhi* – “the throat”), where the soul attains purity. After that comes (6.) the Ajna (Sansk. *ājñā*), “the third eye”, the dwelling place of inner master (Sansk. *guru*), which is located between the eyebrows.⁴⁴⁴

Located even higher above the eyebrows, there is a level of the so-called causal body, with (7.) the last chakra, which is situated on the top of the head, being called Sahasrara (Sansk. *sahasrāra*) or Brahmaraṇḍhra (Sansk. *brahmarāṇḍhra*), “the door of the Brahman”. Everything that exists, in the beginning, has its potential here. This is a dwelling place of the Void (Sansk. *śunya*, Tibet. *stong pa nyid*), which represents the Absolute, called the Brahman. From the numerous subtle nerves of the human body (which are called Nadi), there are three basic nerves: Ida (Sansk. *īdā*), Pingala (Sansk. *piṅgala*), and Sushumna (Sansk.

⁴⁴⁰ M. Jezic, *Istocne Religije*, 118.

⁴⁴¹ G. W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1973), 287.

⁴⁴² Svami Maheshwarananda Paramahansa, *Skrivene snage u Covjeku: Cakre i Kundalini* (Zagreb: DNM, 2006), 96.

⁴⁴³ A. U. Vasavada, *Tripura-Rahasya* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sankrit Series Office, 1989), 184-185.

⁴⁴⁴ M. P. Pandit, *Kundalini Yoga: A Brief Study of Sir John Woodroffe's The Serpent Power* (Madras: Ganesh and Co. Madras, 1962), 33.

suṣumnā), of which the Sushumna is the most important. It is situated inside the central nerve of the spinal column, called the Meru (Sansk. *merudaṇḍa*) or Shunyatishunya (Sansk. *śunyaṭiśunya* – the Absolute Void) and is identified with the world axis (Lat. *axis mundi*). The Sushumna rises from the basic plexus and ascends to the top of the head. On her left side, there is Ida, the lunar channel, representing the feminine principle; and on the right side is Pingala, the solar nerve, representing the male principle.⁴⁴⁵ Both are intertwined around the Shuhumna nerve, overlapping it on both sides in the form of a spiral, ascending to the top of the body by piercing through the lotuses of the chakras.⁴⁴⁶

The difference between Buddhist and Hindu systems of chakras is based on the fact that the two last chakras on the top of the body are merged into one chakra, as are the two first chakras at the bottom, which is what yields the number of five chakras instead of seven. Here, the two centers at the base of the spine – the Muladhara and Svadhastana centers are combined into one single chakra (Tibet. *sang-na, gsañ-gnas*) corresponding to the sacral plexus (Lat. *plexus epigastricus*). Manipura, the place of inner fire (Tibet. *lte-bahi pa-dma*) is identified with the solar plexus. Anahata represents the breathing process and is situated in the area of the heart. Vishuddhi is connected with the throat (Lat. *plexus cervicus*) and Ajna, the third eye (Lat. *medulla oblongata*), is classified together with Sahasrara (Tibet. *Hdab-ston*). As in Hinduism, the Tibetans also recognize the system of subtle nerves or subtle life energy, which is connected with the process of breathing – the Lung (Tibet. *rLung*) or Prana (Sansk. *prāṇa*), which flows through subtle nerves Nadi (Sansk. *nadi*, Tibet. *rtsa*). In Buddhism, there is a similar system, mentioning three main nerves in the human body: the lunar or female nerve (Tibet. *rkyan-martsa*), the solar or male nerve (Tibet. *roma-rsta*) and the central nerve in the inner axis of the spinal cord (Tibet. *dbu-ma-rtsa*). The first two are interconnected together, and their unity is symbolically identified with the world mountain called Meru.⁴⁴⁷

The main aim of the Buddhist and Hindu practices of breathing is to immerse all kinds of subtle winds (Prana, Lung) inside of the central nerve

⁴⁴⁵ A. Avalon, *Tantra of the Great Liberation. Mahanirvantantra* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 6.

⁴⁴⁶ M. P. Pandit, *Kundalini Yoga: A Brief Study of Sir John Woodroffe's The Serpent Power* (Madras: Ganesh and Co. Madras, 1962), 33.

⁴⁴⁷ Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Osnovy Tibetского Misticizma*, https://www.koob.ru/govinda_lama/osnovi_tibetskogo_mistic

Shuhumna or Avadhuti.⁴⁴⁸ According to the doctrine of Kundalini, when the breath or Prana is completely immersed in the central channel of Avadhuti, all mental activities (Sanskrit. *manas*, Tibet, *sems*), together with sensory deprivations, then disappear, until the unity called Samadhi (Sanskrit. *samādhi*) is formed.⁴⁴⁹

The control of breath has a favorable effect on all mental processes – an effect that leads to the subtle mental level, resulting in the feeling of Voidness.⁴⁵⁰

The place where the mind dissolves is situated at the place between the eyebrows, called the Ajna chakra or the ‘third eye’. When the oxygen in the body completely dissolves, then the mind and breathing ascend even higher, in the crown chakra on the top of the head.⁴⁵¹

Under the 6th chakra, it is impossible to control the Kundalini energy. When it reaches the third eye, then the opposite energies unite. The place of the third eye is symbolically represented in the stick of Esculap, where the two serpents represent the left and right channels, Ida and Pingala, and the middle pillar is Sushumna. In the 6th chakra, it is possible to harmonize the lunar or female and the solar or male energies; and the adept becomes something in between – he is not anymore a man, nor is she a woman anymore, but rather is the equality of both.⁴⁵²

That, which helps the mind to disintegrate is called the practice of “cheating death”.⁴⁵³ No master of yoga dies ordinarily and they simply reject their physical form while being completely conscious transcending into an ecstatic state described as an experience of having the vision full of bright light.⁴⁵⁴ At the time of death, their consciousness leaves the body through the fontanel, the opening at the top of the Brahmrandhra.⁴⁵⁵

In Tibet, advanced adepts of the practice of Dzogchen (Tibet. *rdzog chen*), who have attained the so-called great transcendence of consciousness called Pho Wa Chenpo (Sanskrit. *vijñāna-skandha*, Tibet. *‘pho ba chen po*), do not go through the ordinary process of dying, manifesting the so-called

⁴⁴⁸ D. Cozort, *Highest Yoga Tantra* (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1986), 45.

⁴⁴⁹ G. W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 344.

⁴⁵⁰ D. Cozort, *Highest Yoga Tantra* (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1986), 45.

⁴⁵¹ G. W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 344-345

⁴⁵² Paramhansa Swami Maheshwarananda, *Lila: Kozmicka Igra Samospoznaje – Blago Drevnih Indijskih Mudraca* (Novi Sad: Yusz, 2008), 78-79.

⁴⁵³ G. W. Briggs, *Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis*, 285.

⁴⁵⁴ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 168.

⁴⁵⁵ John Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 2003), 50.

immaterial rainbow body (Tibet. *'ja lus*), as, for example, in the case of the Buryat lama Sodoy from the Buryat area of Barguzin. According to D. Ermakov, as far as such a phenomenon is typical only for the advanced adepts of Dzogchen, it is interesting that his ancestors, who were not lamas but powerful shamans, have realized the state of the rainbow body,⁴⁵⁶ which points to the conclusion that this practice may not belong only to the Buddhist tradition.⁴⁵⁷

In Bon, there is a symbol of the rainbow bridge between the earth and sky, which consists of five colors corresponding to the five elements.⁴⁵⁸ The five colors of the rainbow represent the highest subtle level of the elements, the rainbow energy of the unique sphere of being (Tibet. *thig-le nyanchig*).⁴⁵⁹

In Buryat shamanism, there is a similar symbolism, where one of the methods of taking the shamanic journey into the sky-dimension is accomplished through trance with the help of the rainbow (Buryat. *holongo* - "bridge").⁴⁶⁰ Colors of the rainbow spectrum are associated with chakras, because chakras radiate the light energy, also representing various levels of consciousness.⁴⁶¹

If the yogi is an adept of technique Pho Wa, their Prana forms its exit through the central nerve, Avadhuti, while their consciousness leaves the body through the opening at the top of the head (Sanskrit.

⁴⁵⁶ Rainbow body (Tibet. *'ja lus*) is the fruit of Dzogchen practice. When a realized Dzogchen practitioner dies, their physical body dissolves into the essence of the elements and disappears from this plane of existence. The only remains left behind are some hair and nails; Dmitry Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 764

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid. 738,

⁴⁵⁸ D. Ermakov, 353-354.

⁴⁵⁹ V. R. Tendzin, *Istel'eniye Formoy, Energiyey i Svetom*, 38.

⁴⁶⁰ Dmitry Ermakov, *Bөө and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 353-354.

⁴⁶¹ If the colour of white corresponds to the crown chakra, then the colour of black is connected with the chakra below the feet. The third eye corresponds to the colour of violet. The chakra at the lower part at the base of the brain corresponds to the colour of indigo. The throat chakra corresponds to the colour of blue. The heart is connected with the colour of green. The solar plexus corresponds to the colour of yellow. The sacral plexus corresponds to the colour of orange. The chakra at the base of spine corresponds to the colour of red, the feet chakra, with purple; Kenneth Medouz, *Tam Gde Letayut Orly*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/medouz_kennet/tam_gde_letayut_orli_nepolnaya_kniga.html

brahmarāndhra). Mastering the technique of Pho Wa leads to the process, under ordinary circumstances, called death, which is controlled by one's own will; while leaving the body is only temporary. The process itself represents a state similar to "the bird flying into the open sky". The heavenly light represents the dwelling place of the Brahman, forming the entrance into the central nerve, called Shuhumna or Avadhuti. With the help of this practice of meditation, the master of yoga reaches the state of Buddha.⁴⁶²

In the doctrine of Dzogchen, the technique of mastering death – a technique that is revealed by transcendence of consciousness (Tibet. *rnampar-shes-pa*, Sanskr. *vijñānaskandha*) or Pho-wa Chen-po (Tibet. *'pho ba chen po*),⁴⁶³ forms the integral part of the Bardo (Sansk. *antarābhava*, Tibet. *bar'do* – the "dwelling inside of oneself"), that represents the intermediate state between death and new rebirth, being one of the most secret yogic practices in Tibet and India.⁴⁶⁴ The ability to take a conscious departure from the body symbolizes the taking of a magical journey, metaphorically representing ecstasy in the form of liberation of the soul. The myth about the soul-bird represents the whole essence of the metaphysics of spiritual autonomy and freedom.⁴⁶⁵

God dwells inside of the human, as the inner ruler or subtle soul, in other words, the soul is the divine embodiment of God (Sansk. *atman*). In Hindu mythology, the freeing of the soul from the limitations of the physical body is symbolically described in the form of the liberation of the heavenly bird (Sansk. *hamsa* – "swan").⁴⁶⁶

The swan or flying bird is identified with the subtle element, the ether (Sansk. *ākāśaśakti* – "power of the space"), the locus of which is the Voidness that is enlivened with mystical experience. In yogic terms, it is understood to refer to the movement of the breathing process (Sansk. *prana*), which is identified with the soul (Sansk. *ātman*).⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶² W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 238.

⁴⁶³ Dmitry Ermakov, *Bøø and Bön: Ancient Shamanic Traditions of Siberia and Tibet in their Relation to the Teachings of a Central Asian Buddha* (Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2007), 757.

⁴⁶⁴ W. Y. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, 169.

⁴⁶⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Bessmertie i Svoboda*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/yoga_bessmertie_i_svoboda.html

⁴⁶⁶ John Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power*, 50.

⁴⁶⁷ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 211.

The cosmological diagram, symbolizing the tree-eagle or a tree with a bird sitting on the top with a serpent at its base,⁴⁶⁸ symbolically represents the artistic contrast between the bird sitting on the top of the “cranial sky” and the serpent lying in the hole of the “abdominal cave”.⁴⁶⁹

The nectar on the top of the head is the place identified with the ethereal swan. Kundalini represents poison in the form of the serpent if it stays in the lower abdomen, but it becomes nectar while ascending through the central channel called Sushumna in the subtle body to unite the individual with the Absolute.⁴⁷⁰

In Siberian mythology, the world tree is symbolically represented in the form of a bird. The most popular motif in shamanism is represented by the symbol of the shaman’s soul, ascending into heaven in the form of an eagle. The concept of the soul in the form of a bird is also present in Buryat shamanism, where after death, the soul (Amin), in the form of a bird, returns to the world tree.⁴⁷¹

Once awakened, Kundalini can cause severe physical, emotional, and mental suffering during the period of prolonged nightmares.⁴⁷² The following comes from the text of *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika* (HYP II 15): “Mastering of the vital breath (Prana) should be performed slowly and carefully as if taming the wild beast, otherwise if it is forced into action, it will kill the practitioner”.⁴⁷³

R. E. Ryan cites the Gospel of Thomas, pointing out the fatal consequences of achieving the Transcendence: “If you wouldst realize that, which is within you, that, what you have realized will save you. If you don’t realize that, which is within you, that what you haven’t realized will destroy you”.⁴⁷⁴

In the way towards enlightenment, a person needs to practice fearless confrontation of consciousness in any aspect of the psyche, for successfully doing so it is necessary to have an experienced guide, the master (Sanskrit *guru*).⁴⁷⁵ The master energetically penetrates the disciple’s

⁴⁶⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Arhaicheskie Tehniki Ekstaza*, 1964. accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/shamanizm_arhaicheskie_tehniki_ekstaza.html

⁴⁶⁹ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 240

⁴⁷⁰ White, 211.

⁴⁷¹ J. A. Stewart – Saragerel, *Riding Windhorses*, 52.

⁴⁷² G. Feuerstein, *The Shambala Guide to Yoga* (London: Shambala, 1996), 113.

⁴⁷³ *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, accessed trans. E. Becherer, 1992. accessed 12 April 2020. <https://terebess.hu/english/HathaYogaPradipika2.pdf>

⁴⁷⁴ R. E. Ryan, *The Strong Eye of Shamanism*, 60.

⁴⁷⁵ M. Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.

body in the form of sound (Sansk. *mantra*), which enters the disciple through the subtle channel (Sansk. *śankhinī* – “pearl”), piercing the chakras and transforming him or her through initiation.⁴⁷⁶

The Sushumna has a parting at the brain medulla (Lat. *medulla oblongata*), from whence it parts in the direction of lunar⁴⁷⁷ part of the body towards the point where it connects with the subtle meridian Shankini (Sansk. *śankhinī* – “pearl”), the inner opening, that gives the ability of preserving the nectar. In Buddhism, the role of the master lama (Tibet. *bla-ma*, Sanskr. *guru*) is especially represented in Vajrayana, where the adept is consecrated into the practice of Tantra called the Guru-yoga (Tibet. *bla ma'i rnal 'byor*). During that process a spark of pure light symbolically descends from the third eye of the master, entering into the third eye of the disciple.⁴⁷⁸

The following is a quotation from the *Anguttara-Yoga-Tantra*: “I worship the highest master, as he descends on the crown of my head”.⁴⁷⁹ This is the method of achieving the union of the individual consciousness with the consciousness of the master – the most important practice in Tantra and Dzogchen.⁴⁸⁰

Similarly, in shamanism, the father-shaman (Buryat. *baghsa*, Turk. *baksa*), through a connection with guardian-spirits helps the young shaman to endure the energy of the subtle vibrations descending from above. In this relation, the role of the father-shaman is analogous to the function of the guru in Hindu and Buddhist initiation systems, where the master represents the focus, through which blessing and power, attributed to his ancestral line of succession is transferred to the novice, by transferring of the spiritual eligibility, because mastering the occult sciences without the master is impossible.⁴⁸¹

One of the greatest Tibetan rituals of the secret path, the so-called direct path towards Nirvana, is the practice called the Chod (Tibet. *gchöd* – “renouncement”), concerning the renouncement of egoism. It represents the achievement of freedom from karmic influences through the virtual

⁴⁷⁶ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 321-322.

⁴⁷⁷ The reason why exactly the lunar part is chosen for initiation is, that some portion of the transmigrating human body is basically lunar and fluid in nature; D. G. White, *The Alchemical body*, 30.

⁴⁷⁸ V. R. Tendzin, *Istel'eniye Formoy, Energiyey i Svetom*, 112.

⁴⁷⁹ C. L. Gyaltzen, *Ritual Pochitaniya Uchitel'ya. Shestirazovaya Yoga* (St. Petersburg: Nartang, 2002), 153.

⁴⁸⁰ D. G. White, *The Alchemical Body*, 757.

⁴⁸¹ I. S. Urbanaeva, “Shamanizma Mongol'skogo Mira kak Vyrazhenie Tengerianskoy Ezotericheskoy Traditsiyi T'sentral'noy Aziyi”, 147.

sacrifice of body and mind. The whole process of ritual “dying” is described by visualizing one’s skeleton. This teaching comes from the school of Nyingma (Tibet. *Niṅmapa*); from the tradition of Padmasambhava and the pre-Buddhist shamanic tradition of Bon.⁴⁸²

The Chod has a purely shamanic structure consisting of the sacrificial offering of one’s own body to the Dakini. This process strikingly resembles the pre-initiatory dismemberment of the shamanic adept by the ancestral guardian spirits. The contemplation of one’s own body is a practice, which has been familiar to shamans from ancient times. When acquiring the spirit-helpers, who are inserted into the shaman’s consciousness as new mystical organs, each shaman experiences the visualization of him or herself as a skeleton. Hindu-Tibetan Tantrism has a radically enchanted mortification scheme during the initiation. There are several Tantric meditations, during which the yogin has to visualize their own body as a corpse, contemplating on the fierce Dakini, who symbolically pours out all his inner organs and tears up their skin, stretching it out in order “to cover the Universe”.⁴⁸³

It is obvious, that any initiation takes the form of the processes of death and rebirth. Ritual symbolic death is a form of mortification, followed by the symbolical return into the womb (Lat. *regressus ad uterum*). The equivalence of these methods represents the sacrificial death being identified with a so-called “spiritual conception.” The initiation is the process of sacrifice (as far as the sacrificer offers him or herself) and rebirth (RV VI 2.2).⁴⁸⁴

Each act of spiritual work (including shamanic work) is fundamentally an act involving the transformation of life and death. This kind of work should be accomplished for the benefit of society, and not for personal aims. This concept is illustrated by the following citation: “This type of life is deemed to be one of sacrifice. When the sacrifice is offered, there is no more recognition of the self. This is the sacrifice of the ego”.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² W. T. Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*, 280-284.

⁴⁸³ Mircea Eliade, *Arhaicheskie Tehniki Ekstaza*, 1964. accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/shamanizm_arhaicheskie_tehniki_ekstaza.html

⁴⁸⁴ M. Eliade, *Istoriya Very*, vol.1, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/istoriya_veri_i_religioznih_idey_tom_1_o_t_kamennogo_veka_do_elevsinskih_misteriy.html

⁴⁸⁵ Jenny Blain, “Now Many of Those Things are Shown to Me, Which I Denied Before: Seidr, Shamanism and Journeying, Past and Present”, *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 34 (2005): 81-98.

3.2. A cross-cultural analysis of shamanic trance and mystical experiences

Ancient conceptions of the tree of life are well-known to many indigenous traditions of Europe and Asia, some peoples of Africa, and Indians of North and South America, and left a great influence on various cosmological and religious worldviews. The symbolism of the tree of life can also be found in classical Hindu texts, such as *The Bhagavadgītā*: “There is an eternal tree, called *ashvattam* (Lat. *Ficus Religiosa*), with its roots on the top and branches below, extending up and down the roots, with branches filled with results of their actions”.⁴⁸⁶

Throughout the whole of Central Asia, there is a general conception of there being 7 or 9 skies or levels of the cosmic world tree.⁴⁸⁷ According to mythological systems, these energetic centres in the human body symbolically represent the skies or cosmic levels of the universe, where the real difference between the human and the Cosmos is determined according to the level of consciousness.⁴⁸⁸

The spheres or branches of the tree of life symbolically represent the levels of consciousness that should be transcended by an adept during the awakening of the Kundalini to attain salvation or enlightenment. Many esoteric traditions determine these levels as being energetic wheels in the human body called the chakras. Although those energy fields are widely known to be of Hindu and Buddhist origin, they can also be found in other traditions, under different names and classifications.

In the classical Hindu yogic tradition, there are several reports of the arousal of Kundalini. Lee Sanella, a psychiatrist and psychologist, who has investigated the Kundalini phenomenon, in his work *The Kundalini Experience* describes the awakening of the Kundalini, by quoting various Hindu yogis: Sw. Narayananda reported on the Kundalini experience: “There is burning up the back and over the whole body. One feels a creeping sensation, and sometimes it shakes the whole body. Its ascent is felt like the wiggling of a snake or the hopping of a bird moving from place to place”. Ramakrishna said: “One feels the sensation of the spiritual

⁴⁸⁶ *The Bhagavadgita*, ed. S. Radhakrishnan (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), 326-327.

⁴⁸⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Arhaicheskie Tehniki Ekstaza*, 1964. accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/shamanizm_arhaicheskie_tehniki_ekstaza.html

⁴⁸⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Istoriya Very*, vol. 2, accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/eliade_mircha/istoriya_veri_i_religioznih_idey_tom_2_o_t_gautami_buddi_do_triumfa_hristianstva.html

current, like a soul swimming in the ocean of divine ecstasy”. Swami Muktananda described the experience thus: “My body was heated up, and my head became heavy. My eyes gradually rolled up and became centred. Instead of seeing separately, they saw as one.” Gopi Krishna wrote: “I distinctly felt an incomparable sensation that mounted up the spine and poured into the upper region of the brain.”⁴⁸⁹

Paramhansa Yogananda commented: “My master slightly pushed me on the chest near the heart. My body was strangled and all breath was sucked from the lungs. At that very moment, my soul and breath were freed from the body – flowing out of it as the brilliant light. My body was dead-like, but at the same time, I haven’t felt more alive than at that moment. My soul felt enormous bliss. I figured out that the Divine Spirit is the endless bliss. In the middle of my heart, I realized the centre of the fiery sky and achieved a state of intuitive awareness.”⁴⁹⁰ The *Hathayogapradipika*, further, says: “The Yogin who is freed from all thoughts and who appears as ‘dead’ is liberated without a doubt” (HYP 4. 107).⁴⁹¹

Psychophysiologically, the signs, and symptoms of the awakening of Kundalini energy are described as an unusual motor behavior in the form of spontaneous body movements, including spasmodic, jerky, or vibratory movements; abnormal breathing patterns, accompanied by a period of rapid, shallow and deep breathing; temporary bodily paralysis; sensory experiences of light and sounds; and out-of-body-experiences; unusual pains, which might occur as a resistance to the Kundalini process of clearing away the energetic blockades which had been formed by physical or mental impurities, among others.⁴⁹²

Classically, the Kundalini energy awakens at the base of the spine, and then travels straight up the spinal cord; and completes its journey by reaching the top of the head.⁴⁹³ In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the meditative state and ritual possession trance each uses the same physiology. During meditation, the impurities pass through the central channel and, after ascending (and by exhalation) exit out of the body

⁴⁸⁹ Lee Sanella, *The Kundalini Experience: Psychosis or Transcendence?* (San Francisco: Lee Sanella, 1987), 20-22.

⁴⁹⁰ Yogananda Paramahansa, *Autobiografija Jednog Yogija* (Zagreb: Hermes Izdavastvo, 2005), 155-156.

⁴⁹¹ *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, trans. E. Becherer, 1992, accessed trans. E. Becherer, 1992. accessed 12 April 2020.

<https://terebess.hu/english/HathaYogaPradipika2.pdf>

⁴⁹² Lee Sanella, *The Kundalini Experience: Psychosis or Transcendence?* 45-50.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 55.

through the opening of the fontanel. The ninth and last level of meditation, Shamatha, clearly exhibits shamanistic elements. During this state, the mind is completely under the control of consciousness, which departs the body. It is a feeling similar to that of a bird opening its wings in order to fly away to freedom.⁴⁹⁴

All shamans enter a trance in which they experience an alternate reality of the spirit world. Australian aborigines call trance the “Dreamtime”,⁴⁹⁵ Shamans in such societies are called “men of high degree”, “medicine men”, and “clever men”.⁴⁹⁶ These concepts describe the role of the shaman, or *Karadji*, within the context of Aboriginal society. “Seizing the imperceptible” comes nearer to a description of the *Karadji*’s ability to bridge the gap between the mundane world and the world of dreaming.⁴⁹⁷ The clever man is given power in his initiation through direct contact with the beings of Dreamtime, the Rainbow Serpent, sky gods, and some spirits of the dead. His existential transformation is thrust upon him in his initiatory experiences, where he is “killed and reborn” and (in the end) is swallowed by the Rainbow Serpent.⁴⁹⁸ In his transformation into a shaman, his internal organs are removed and replaced by the insertion of multi-coloured rainbow-like crystals that evoke the primordial Rainbow Serpent.⁴⁹⁹ The initiation follows a general pattern that involves six stages. First, the candidate is called by a spirit. Then, they are “killed” by the initiation of this spirit. Whether this is perceived as death or as trance varies by region and tribe. After that comes the symbolical dismemberment, where body parts, usually the internal organs and bones are “purified and renewed”. In the fourth stage, magical objects like crystals and pearl shells, representing the Rainbow Serpent, are ritually placed over their body. Then, the candidate

⁴⁹⁴ G. D. Tinley, *Shamatha: Osnovy Tibetskoy Meditatsiyi* (1995), accessed 12 April, 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/geshe_tinley/shamatha_osnovi_tibetskoy_meditatsii.html
⁴⁹⁵ R. M. Place, *Shamanism (Mysteries, Legends, and Unexplained Phenomena)* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2008), 18.

⁴⁹⁶ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 860-862.

⁴⁹⁷ J. Cowan, “Wild Stones: Spiritual Discipline and Psychic Power among Aboriginal Clever Men”, *Studies in Comparative Religion* 17, nos. 1-2 (World Wisdom, 1985): 1-3.

⁴⁹⁸ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 107.

⁴⁹⁹ Michael E. J. Witzel, “Shamanism in Northern and Southern Eurasia: Their Distinctive Methods of Change of Consciousness”, *Social Science Information* 50, no. 1 (2011): 39-61, accessed 12 April 2020.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0539018410391044>

is restored to life. After that, they establish contact with the spirits.⁵⁰⁰ One attribute of clever people is their ability to “see with the inner eye” or “to have a strong eye”. Clever men are noticeably different from others because of the light radiating from their eyes.⁵⁰¹ During healing and divination rituals, the *Karaji* observes with their “inner eye”—a gift of the initiating spirits (Aborig. *rai*) with the ability to use it for observation.⁵⁰² Clever people can also participate in shamanic journeys while their physical bodies are asleep. At that time, the shaman’s spirit might exit through the navel and fly away.⁵⁰³ Shamanic power (Aborig. *miwi*) is located in the pit of the stomach, which must be considered as being a generalized symbolic location of inner magical heat similar to the concept of Kundalini.⁵⁰⁴ B. Sharma also equates deep inner awareness (Aborig. *kulini*) amongst the Pitjantjatjara people in Central Australia with the concept of Kundalini in Sahaja Yoga.⁵⁰⁵

The South Indian oracular representatives of the goddess Kali (Tamil. *veḷiccappāṭu*) describe similar feelings during a ritual possession trance by the Goddess: “After the entrance of Kali, we feel a lot of special energy coming into us. Our head is very heavy with no other thoughts. After losing self-consciousness, we experience a lot of heat in the body”.⁵⁰⁶

In the Native American Laika tradition, the chakras are called “the eyes of light” (Laik. *ojos dez lus*). Incas call them “light wells” (Inc. *pukios*).⁵⁰⁷ Alberto Villoldo explains the first five chakras as being the earth chakras, and the next four as being the sky chakras,⁵⁰⁸ where the

⁵⁰⁰ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 30-34.

⁵⁰¹ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 865.

⁵⁰² J. Cowan, “Wild Stones: Spiritual Discipline and Psychic Power among Aboriginal Clever Men”, *Studies in Comparative Religion* 17, nos. 1-2 (World Wisdom, 1985): 5-6.

⁵⁰³ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 865.

⁵⁰⁴ J. Cowan, “Wild Stones: Spiritual Discipline and Psychic Power among Aboriginal Clever Men”, *Studies in Comparative Religion* 17, nos. 1-2 (World Wisdom, 1985): 7.

⁵⁰⁵ B. Sharma, “Awakening of the Serpent Energy: An Indian Aborigal Exchange” (MA Diss., University of Western Sydney, 2001), 16.

⁵⁰⁶ J. S. Hawley and D. M. Wulf, eds. *Devi: Goddesses of India* (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996), 198-202.

⁵⁰⁷ Alberto Villoldo, *Shaman, Healer, Sage* (London: Bantam Books, 2001), 52.

⁵⁰⁸ K. Medouz, *Shamanskiy Opyt*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/medouz_kennet/shamanskiy_opit.html

lower earth represents the realm of the unconscious.⁵⁰⁹ The eighth chakra is called “the sacred source” (Laik. *wiracocho*), and it resides in a luminous energy field located above the head described in the form of a “spinning sun”. It is our connection with the Great Spirit—the place where God dwells within us. The ninth chakra corresponds to the Great Spirit and God, which is impersonal and infinite.⁵¹⁰ *Wiracocho* is the supreme creative energy through which divine will is transmitted to humans. When a child is born, the soul, in the form of energy (Laik. *ánimu*), enters from the top of the head, giving life to the child. At the point of death, it leaves through the top of the head and melds again with the cosmic weaving of *Wiracocho*.⁵¹¹ Many Native American traditions speak of the symbolism of the sacred Serpent. In Mayan symbolism, the double-headed Serpent is found entwined within the branches of the tree of life (May. *wacah chan*).⁵¹²

P. Amaringo's paintings of Ayahuasca visions often depict a beautiful queen with the body of a blue serpent with disc-shaped marks. This is a splendid vision in which the sublime powers of the invisible world are visualized in trance as luminous rays in colors like those of the rainbow.⁵¹³ Subjects under the influence of Ayahuasca often describe experiences of light: “Everything became so bright. I felt radiance at my crown centre, at the top of the forehead, and the brow centre. Then I had an incredible experience of having this iridescence poured into my eyes and later into my heart.”⁵¹⁴

C. Pratt quotes Mazatec shamaness Maria Sabina, who describes the world she enters while in a trance: “There is a world beyond ours, a world that is far away and invisible. And there is where God lives, where the dead dwell, the spirits and the saints, a world where everything has already happened and everything is known. That world talks. It has a language of its own. I report what it says».⁵¹⁵

In mystical Islam, when the master deems his pupil to be ready, he permits him to master the powers of the occult. These powers are obtained

⁵⁰⁹ Alberto Villoldo, *Mending the Past and Healing the Future* (New York: Hay House, 2005), 36.

⁵¹⁰ A. Villoldo, *Shaman, Healer, Sage*, 73-74.

⁵¹¹ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 379-380.

⁵¹² Pratt, 18.

⁵¹³ Pablo Amaringo, *Ayahuasca Visions* (1999), accessed 6 July, 2012. <https://www.scribd.com/document/51793872/The-Ayahuasca-Visions-of-Pablo-Amaringo-Article-from-Sacred-Hoop-Magazine-Issue-71>

⁵¹⁴ Rebecca Stone, *The Jaguar Within: Shamanic Trance in Ancient Central and South American Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 31.

⁵¹⁵ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 491.

after initiation into the teachings of the Quranic verses (Pers. *chilla neshastan*). During initiation, the master instructs his pupil to draw seven circles on the ground, one circle within the other. When he performs the ritual formulae, the initiate must sit at the centre of the innermost circle. Such circles are believed to be barriers against spirit invasion. For each one, the initiate has been taught special formulae, which simultaneously force particular spirits (Arab. *jinn*) into submission. During the ritual ceremony (Arab. *dhikr*), the initiate recites passages from the Quran, magical formulae, or simply the name of Allah. The *jinn* manifests in front of his eyes beyond the outermost circle, trying by using tricks and illusions—to have him leave the safety of his circles. Even a momentary pause may allow the spirits to break the magical barriers—and, thus, to kill him. As the initiate continues his recitation, he passes through various mental states, during which he may feel himself to be dying or burning up in flames. These are illusions created by malicious *jinn*. Each time the initiate encounters a particular rank of *jinn* and can withstand its supernatural assaults, it is considered that he has succeeded in enslaving a particular spirit, and thus, becomes able to transcend to another level of consciousness.⁵¹⁶

Sufi orders (Arab. *tariqah*) in many parts of Central Asia and Afghanistan use many techniques for inducing ecstasy (Arab. *haal*) and mystical union with the divine (Arab. *fana*).⁵¹⁷ The Sufi stays within himself, sunk in the sea of the soul, and, for this reason, it has been suggested that the Sufi's ecstasy should more appropriately be called an "intasy." E. J. Neumann-Friedman refers to Navoi, a Naqshbandi mystic, who recognized the sexual background and connection of the shamanic practices with the *dhikr* ceremonies. The interaction between shamanism and Sufism has been demonstrated in several areas, such as the cult of saints; healing rituals; ecstasy; ritual clothing; and the preparation of charms. There are legends from Inner Asia, the Caucasus, and Anatolia concerning outstanding Sufi saints who could bring the dead back to life—an ability that orthodox Islam ascribes only to Allah. In both regions, the central ceremony of Sufi rituals—a ceremony with a name meaning "the remembrance of God" (Arab. *dhikr*)—was integrated into shamanic rituals.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁶ M. H. Sidky, "Malang, Sufis and Mystics: An Ethnographic and Historical Study of Shamanism in Afghanistan", *Asian Folklore Studies* 49 (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1990): 275-301.

⁵¹⁷ Sidky, 278-279.

⁵¹⁸ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 240-241.

In Upper Tibet, spirit-mediums are referred to as god-carriers (Tibet. *lha-pa*) and heroes (Tibet. *dpa'-bo*).⁵¹⁹ During a *dpa'-bo*'s trance, the drumming, and singing become faster and faster and the body of the *dpa'-bo* begins to shake. Just before the deity enters, the spirit medium has to send away his consciousness (Tibet. *rnam-shes*).⁵²⁰ While Lha-pa mediums are in a state of trance, their consciousness (Tibet. *rnam-shes*) departs from the body via the central subtle channel (Tibet. *dbu-ma*, Sanskr. *avadhūtī*), the opening of which is in the fontanel. The possessing deities are said to enter and exit via the subtle nerves (Tibet. *rtsa*, Sanskr. *nadi*), known as the collateral subtle channels (Tibet. *rkyang-ma and ro-ma*), which begin in the ring-like portal or entry point of spiritual energy located in each fingertip.⁵²¹

In the Bon tradition, during the trance of the Tibetan State Oracle, who enters into a state of possession to advise the Dalai Lama and his pupils, their breathing begins to shorten and they start to hiss violently. When the breathing stops, the medium is possessed and the ritual is considered as being complete.⁵²² The possession of the spirit-medium is referred to as the “deity descending” (Tibet. *lha 'bab-pa*) and the “deity residing” (Tibet. *lha-bzhugs*), and is marked by radical changes in speech and behaviour. Under the influence of a deity, the Lha-pa commonly exhibits profuse perspiration, signs of extraordinary strength, seizures, foaming at the mouth, and disappearance of the irises as the eyes roll in towards the back of the head. At the end of the trance, there is no recollection or memory of the events.⁵²³ Some of the most commonly invoked deities are the enlightened tutelary deities (Tibet. *yi-dam*). The *yidam* represents the deified early masters of Vajrayana Buddhism, Guru Rinpoche and the Mahasiddhas (Tibet. *grub-chen/grub-thob*).⁵²⁴ Arriving in a flash of rainbow light, the *yidam* enters into the medium, who begins

⁵¹⁹ J. V. Bellezza, “Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet”, *Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library*, vol. 8 (Leiden, 2005), 4.

⁵²⁰ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 796.

⁵²¹ J. V. Bellezza, “Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet”, 72.

⁵²² Lotsawa T. Rinzin and T. Tsering, *Seized by the Spirit: An Interview with the Venerable Thupten Ngodup State Oracle of Tibet* (2005), accessed 24 February, 2018, <http://www.3world.co.uk/articles/tibetan-oracle.pdf>.

⁵²³ J. V. Bellezza, “Spirit-Mediums, Sacred Mountains and Related Bon Textual Traditions in Upper Tibet”, 7.

⁵²⁴ Bellezza, 14.

to shake.⁵²⁵ The shamans of Bon (Tibet. *bon'-po*) describe the state of trance as “residing in the heart, while the gods speak through you”.⁵²⁶

In ancient Japan, the shamans were predominantly female. In historical records of the time, they were known under the general term “honorable ones who conduct shamanic practices” (Japan. *tuskur*).⁵²⁷ There is a distinction between ancestral shamans and contemporary mediums.⁵²⁸ Japanese shamanistic practitioners have various names (Japan. *itako*, *gomiso*, *kamisama*, *yuta*, and *noro*). Itako shamanesses are all women and are mostly known for their ability to enter into the state of ritual spirit possession (Japan. *kuchiyose*).⁵²⁹ Through her mystical marriage with spirits, the Itako becomes a “spirit-woman god” (Japan. *miko* or *mikogami*).⁵³⁰ While undergoing training before the initiation, the Itako practices austerity, and, when she becomes exhausted from cold, sleeplessness, and lack of food, she sinks into the condition of a semi-trance in which figures of ancestral spirits (Japan. *kami*) appear before her eyes. While falling into possession, the girl starts to experience tremors, to shiver, and to fall into a convulsive shaking which overtakes her behaviour culminating in a dead faint.⁵³¹

According to Neumann-Friedman, T. Nakayama refers to the two types of Mikogami: firstly, the official type as being a priestess, that serves a deity (Japan. *kannagi miko*) and secondly, the popular type, through whose mouth a spirit speaks (Japan. *kuchiyose miko*). Full possession takes place when the Miko summons the spirits of the dead ancestors and has them speak in the first person through her mouth. The first rite is known as a calling down of the *kami* (Japan. *kami oroshi*), and the latter rite is known as a calling down of the souls of the dead (Japan. *hotoke oroshi*) or a calling into the mouth (Japan. *kuchiyose*). In these cases, the Miko often claims not to remember what she has said because the spirit has replaced her consciousness with its own.⁵³²

⁵²⁵ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 14.

⁵²⁶ Pratt, 320.

⁵²⁷ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 659.

⁵²⁸ G. Harvey and R. J. Wallis, eds. *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism*, 14-15.

⁵²⁹ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 670.

⁵³⁰ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 240.

⁵³¹ Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (Surrey: Japan Library, 1975), 145-147.

⁵³² N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 676-678.

Japanese shamans are also initiated into the symbolism of the tree of life, representing the road to the gods. The Hindu Kundalini, adopted into esoteric Buddhism, became Kuvdali (Japan. *gundari*).⁵³³ The initiation itself is symbolized by the construction of a bridge composed of seven arrows and seven boards that connect the earthly realm with the spirit world, and is represented by the colours of the rainbow. The shamaness must complete this dangerous passage and successfully establish communication with the spirit world. The completion of this initiatory test demonstrates her mastery of the trance.⁵³⁴

A. R. Marshall quotes the text *Lord of the Clouds* (Chin. *Yunzhong jun*), which describes a medium who takes a spiritual journey on the back of a dragon.⁵³⁵ The Goddess of the Luo River (Chin. *Fu Fei*) is associated with the invention of the drum, which is used to aid the Wu in entering altered states. She manifests herself in the form of a serpent, dragon, or swan. Trance states were considered by the ancient Chinese to be a *yin* activity—one used by the women as part of their spiritual practice.⁵³⁶

According to the second-century Chinese dictionary *Shuo-wen* (compiled by Xu Shen), the character for “Wu” is a pictograph representing a woman who serves the “formless” and who, by dancing, can cause the deities to descend.⁵³⁷ The Wu was a person upon whom “the bright spirit” had descended as they entered a state of trance.⁵³⁸

The state of possession is ritually demonstrated by signs of loss of control over one’s body—signs such as intense shaking and ritualized violence, which is self-inflicted upon the body without getting hurt (such violence is also called self-mortification). While possessed, the medium utters unintelligible speech, which is supposedly the divine tongue of the deity. Their shaking is interpreted as being a sign that the deity has started to take possession of the medium’s body.⁵³⁹

In the Chinese Taoist tradition, the process of Kundalini shows psycho-physiological characteristics similar to shamanic trance. As the vital principle Prana sufficiently accumulates in the lower belly, it then

⁵³³ Hori Ichiro, “Shamanism in Japan”, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 2, no. 4 (1975), accessed 12 April 2020. <https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/2386>

⁵³⁴ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 240-241.

⁵³⁵ A. R. Marshall, “Engendering Mediumship: When Youths Performed the Rain Dances in Han Dynasty China” (2003), accessed 12 April 2020. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/000842980303200105>

⁵³⁶ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 16.

⁵³⁷ Margaret Stutley, *Shamanism: An Introduction*, 22.

⁵³⁸ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 544.

⁵³⁹ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 733.

bursts out and begins to flow in the main psychic channels—causing involuntary movements and shaking. It is often experienced as a feeling of enormous heat ascending from the base of the spine to the top of the head, then down over the face and throat to the stomach. The whole body turns and twists, and this torque is accompanied by visions of internal lights.⁵⁴⁰

In Korea, the shamans (Kor. *mudang*) are all female, too. Their rituals involve dancing, music, deep embodiment trance, or intentional spirit possession. The power of the Mudang is acquired from spirits while in a state of ecstatic trance.⁵⁴¹ Shamans are known in Korea by various names such as Mudang and Mansin.⁵⁴² A Mansin must be chosen for the role by possession (Kor. *sinbyong*) which is often a severe trauma bordering on insanity, or she must be hereditarily in line to receive the art.⁵⁴³ Meanwhile, the Mudang are selected for their profession by the shamanic deities through the induction of a spirit sickness (Kor. *sinbyöng*) known as a shamanic illness (Kor. *mubyöng*). The symptoms of *sinbyöng* are initially manifested through mysterious dreams, unusual eating habits, and a gradual weakening of the body. As the initial symptoms intensify, other indications of having been selected—such as experiencing visual and auditory hallucinations arise. The only method for relieving the symptoms is holding an initiation (Kor. *naerim kut*), which inaugurates one into the ranks of the Mudang.⁵⁴⁴

The initiatory rite for the deity's descent (Kor. *naerim-kut*) heals the spirit illness. The power of deities working through the Mudang becomes manifest in some initiation rites when she metaphorically “rides the blades”. Korean shamans are not imagined as journeying to the spirit realm. Rather, the spirits descend to, and speak through them. They may go into a mild trance, but they always remain keenly aware of the psychological state of the audience.⁵⁴⁵ Dance and music play a significant role in the practice of the Mudang's healing arts (Kor. *musok yesul*). Ecstasy (Kor. *Mu-A*), induced by dance and singing, is the essence of the

⁵⁴⁰ Lee Sanella, *The Kundalini Experience*, 18.

⁵⁴¹ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 257.

⁵⁴² M. J. Pettid, “Shamans, Ghosts and Hobgoblins amidst Korean Folk Customs”, *Working Papers in Korean Studies* 6 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 2009), 2.

⁵⁴³ J. Ware, “The Use of Muga in Korean Shaman Kuts,” *Intercultural Communication Studies* 1, no. 2 (1991): 138.

⁵⁴⁴ M. J. Pettid, “Shamans, Ghosts and Hobgoblins amidst Korean Folk Customs”, *Working Papers in Korean Studies* 6 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 2009), 4-5.

⁵⁴⁵ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 682-683.

Mudang's ritual performance. It is a sensation that arises from the heart, allowing her to see and hear with her heart. *Mu-A* is only possible after the death of the ego—a death, which is forced upon the initiate by the initiation spirits.⁵⁴⁶ The sacrifice of the ego is the critical stage in the shaman's initiation. It is when the initiate first experiences such an altered state, and their return to life is uncertain. The initiate now “sees” in the same way the shaman “sees”.⁵⁴⁷

The shamanic tree of life (Lat. *axis mundi*), in Siberian traditions, is often depicted as having seven or nine layers. The basic postulates of Yakutian white shamanism, which is called Tengerism—is that every human sees God in the form that is most relevant to his or her spiritual development. The divine compassion (Yakut. *algysy*) descends into the human being through special circles—the chakras (Yakut. *oybon*).⁵⁴⁸

In Buryat and Mongolian shamanism, the energy from the uppermost chakra on top of the head (Buryat. *zulay*) flows down into the human individual's soul, the heart chakra (Buryat. *setgel*).⁵⁴⁹ The Buryats distinguish white shamans from black shamans (Buryat. *hara boo*), who enter deep trances and descend into the underworld, as the mission of black shamans is to heal illnesses and deal with malicious spirits. White shamans (Buryat. *sagaan boo*) do not enter trances. They are more like priests, and they seek blessings from the upper world.⁵⁵⁰

Within Tengeri culture, the soul of an initiate undergoes a process of training among the West Tengeri, if they are to be a white shaman, and undergoes training among the East Tengeri if they are to become a black shaman.⁵⁵¹ Buryat shamans form a very intimate relationship with their spirit helpers. M. Hoppal refers to R. Hamayon that they may even enter into sexual relationships with spirits.⁵⁵²

According to Neumann-Friedmann, Pliny the Elder regarded the Old Irish term “Druid” as originating from the Greek word for oak (Greek.

⁵⁴⁶ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 257.

⁵⁴⁷ Pratt, 156.

⁵⁴⁸ L. Afanasyev, “Tengrizm Yakutov”, *Materialy 4 Mezhdunarodnoy Nauchno-Prakticheskoy Konferentsiyi Teneigranstvo i Epiheskoe Nasledie Narodov Evraziyi: Istoki i Sovremennost* (Ulaan-Baatar: Mezhdunarodny fond issledovaniya Tengri, 2013), accessed 1 May, 2014. <http://tengrifund.ru/tengrizm-yakutov.html>

⁵⁴⁹ J. A. Stewart – Saragerel, *Zov Shamana*, accessed 12 April 2020.

https://royallib.com/book/saragerel/zov_shamana.html

⁵⁵⁰ G. Harvey and R. J. Wallis, eds. *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism*, 202.

⁵⁵¹ M. A. Czaplicka, *Shamanism in Siberia: A Study in Social Anthropology* (Oxford: 1914), accessed 12 April 2020. <https://sacred-texts.com/sha/sis/index.htm>

⁵⁵² Mikhail Hoppal, *Shamans and Traditions* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 2007), 25.

drus), combined with the Indo-European root “to know” (Indo-Eur. *wid*).⁵⁵³ Druid (Irish. *drui*, Welsh. *derwydd*, Sanskr. *veda*, Gaulish. *dervo*) religion is deeply associated with the oak tree. Druids worked in the other world with guardian spirits (Gael. *coimimeadh*) and possessed the ability to achieve divine knowledge through shamanic trance.⁵⁵⁴

Mantic powers of divination, soul flight, and prophecy were integral parts of the Celtic Druids’ repertoire. The greatest-known Celtic magician from the Arthurian saga, the wizard Merlin, was so accustomed to undergoing soul journeys into non-ordinary realms that he was reputed to live backwards through time. Trees, which appear across the globe in shamanic practices as a means of reaching other spiritual realms—are of central importance to Druidic magical practice. Pliny observed that the Druids perform no rites without the oak, as it is believed, that the oak tree has been chosen as sacred by the gods.⁵⁵⁵ The Celts believed that the soul was immortal and that the physical seat of the soul was in the head. Celtic legends metaphorically describe the experiencing of an altered state of consciousness as a feeling of having “fire in the head”.⁵⁵⁶

D. Macek & H. Palsson quote Snorri Sturluson, who in his depiction of Medieval times in Scandinavia, refers to Óðinn as the master of magic (*Ynglinga Saga*, 7): “Óðinn ruled the most powerful art, called the Seiðr.”⁵⁵⁷ Óðinn is described as being able to transform his shape, while his body would lie as if dead or asleep. He had the abilities of shapeshifting and of journeying to distant lands.⁵⁵⁸

Seiðr practices do not only imply trance-divination, but also the ability to “mess with people’s minds”, in other words, to influence human destiny.⁵⁵⁹ The ancient Druidical teachings of the Celts define ten spheres in the form of concentric rings on the cosmological tree of life. These

⁵⁵³ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 470-475.

⁵⁵⁴ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 150.

⁵⁵⁵ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 470-475.

⁵⁵⁶ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 97.

⁵⁵⁷ D. Macek, H. Palsson, and R. Simek, eds. *Staronordijska Mitologija i Knjizevnost* (Zagreb: Art Tresor Naklada, 2003), 121.

⁵⁵⁸ Jenny Blain, “Seidhr as Shamanistic Practice: Reconstituting a Tradition of Ambiguity” (1999). Accessed 20 April 2020. <https://www.academia.edu/38273574/seic3b0r-as-shamanistic-practice-reconstituting-a-tradition-of-ambiguity-jenny-blain-19993.pdf>

⁵⁵⁹ Jenny Blain, “Now Many of Those Things are Shown to Me, Which I Denied Before: Seidr, Shamanism and Journeying, Past and Present”, *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 34 (2005): 81-98.

are: (1.) the hidden (Welsh. *celi/kay-lee*); (2.) the cause (Welsh. *perydd/per-uth*); (3.) the tamer (Welsh. *dofydd/dov-uth*); (4.) the namer (Welsh. *ener/enn-er*); (5.) the over (Welsh. *modur/mod-ir*); (6.) the lord (Welsh. *muner/minn-er*); (7.) the living (Welsh. *byw/beoo*); (8.) the eternal (Welsh. *byth/bith*); (9.) the mighty (Welsh. *ner/ner*); and (10.) the shaper (Welsh. *naſ/nahv*). These spheres of the tree of life are assigned to the three circles of existence. The first circle is the circle of release (Welsh. *abred*), and represents incarnate life. The second circle is the circle of luminous life (Irish. *gwynfydd*)—the astral plane associated with the circle of discarnate life. The third (and final) circle is empty (Welsh. *ceugant*) and represents the divine presence—a level that can be traversed by no created being.⁵⁶⁰

Ancient Slavic mythology depicts the world axis as a tree, particularly an oak.⁵⁶¹ In folk tales, there is often a description of the mythical island, Buyan, with a great oak and a bird sitting at its top.⁵⁶² Under the roots of the tree lives the serpent (old Slav. *Veles*), and on the highest branch lives the sky-god (old Slav. *Perun*).⁵⁶³ There is a constant fight between these two. Perun, in the form of an eagle, kills or beats the Veles/serpent with lightning.⁵⁶⁴ The Book of Veles identifies the holy bird with the Hindu Garuda.⁵⁶⁵ O. N. Trubachev sees the possibility of interpreting the mythical bird Garuda as the destroyer of the watery monster (Greek. ὕδρα – “hydra”). Garuda is popular in Hindu and Buddhist myths, and is also present in the folklore of Central Asia and South Siberia under the names Khan Garudi and Khan Garid, where he is depicted as the conqueror of the serpent. In times of the principdom of Kyiv Rus', he was considered as equal to the heavenly bird (old Slav. *zhar-ptica*), (Chek. *pták ohnivák*) (Aves. *hšaena mereyo*) and was connected with sky fire.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁰ J. M. Greer, *The Celtic Golden Dawn: An Original and Complete Curriculum of Druidical Study* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2013), 27-28.

⁵⁶¹ Radoslav Katicic, *Stara Indijska Knjizevsnost* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1973), 72.

⁵⁶² A. N. Afanasyev, *Yazycheskie Predaniya od Ostrove Buyane* (1851), accessed 12 April 2020. <https://www.rodnovery.ru/knizhnaya-polka/580-afanasev-a-n-yazycheskie-predaniya-ob-ostrove-buyane>

⁵⁶³ Tomo Vinscak, *Vjeronanja o Drvecu u Hrvata u Kontestu Slavistickih Istrazivanja* (Jastrebarsko: Naklada Slap, 2002), 16-18.

⁵⁶⁴ Vitomir Belaj, *Hod kroz Godinu: Pokusaj Rekonstrukcije Prahrvatskoga Mitskog Svjetonazora* (Zagreb: Tehnicka Knjiga, 2007), 91.

⁵⁶⁵ Mirolyubov Y. P., *Kniga Velesa* (Moscow: Fair-Press, 2001), 324.

⁵⁶⁶ A. F. Zhuravlyev, *Yazyk i Mif* (Moscow: Indrik, 2005), 261.

Some Kurgans depict the sevenfold seals with the symbol of a deer, together with the symbol of a bird flying with open wings.⁵⁶⁷ V. N. Toporov explains the isomorphism of the prenatal development of mythological symbols as a world tree which were taken as symbols of mystical anatomy and physiology, pointing out the role of the spinal brain and navel in their mythical correspondence as forms of the serpent Kundalini.⁵⁶⁸

The Old Slavic system contains 144 chakras, but only eight of them are considered as being the most important. First is (1.) the scalp (old Slav. *rodnik*), representing the true self (old Slav. *temnits'a ya, ya esm' duh* – the dwelling place of the self, the Spirit), from whence the divine energy falls into a human being. This is followed by the chakra located at (2.) the place between the eyebrows (old Slav. *chelo*), which gives the ability of extrasensory perception. Below, there is (3.) a throat chakra (old Slav. *usta*). (4.) The left part of the chest (old Slav. *leyla*), which is connected with the heart and manifests intuition, while (5.) the right part of the chest (old Slav. *lada*) is associated with mechanical perception. (6.) The solar plexus is associated with the navel (old Slav. *zhivot*). The last two chakras correspond to the reproductive organs (7.) (old Slav. *zarod*) and the base or coccyx (8.) (old Slav. *istok* meaning “the origin”). If the energy freely flows through all the chakras on the axis parallel with the spine, the person gains supernatural psychic powers.⁵⁶⁹

In Africa, the Kung people of the Kalahari Desert in Northwest Botswana engage in long dances characterized by powerful singing and rhythmic clapping, which activates the awakening of the spiritual energy (Kung. *n/om*). *N/um* is analogous to the Hindu concept of Kundalini, and it is said to reside in the pit of the stomach. As it warms up, it rises from the base of the spine up to the skull, where the state of *Kia* then occurs. *Kia/Aia* is the state of transcendence equal to the Buddhist concept of enlightenment—Satori.⁵⁷⁰

The healers describe the arousal of *n/om* as feeling like searing pain as it vaporizes and rises along the spine, which brings an intense fear of

⁵⁶⁷ B. A. Rybakov, *Yazychestvo Drevnyh Slavyan* (1981), accessed 12 April 2020, https://royallib.com/book/rybakov_boris/yazichestvo_drevnih_slavyan.html

⁵⁶⁸ V. N. Toporov, *Mif. Ritual. Simvol* (Moscow: Izd. Grupa Progress-Kul'tura, 1995), 608.

⁵⁶⁹ Rusalov A., *Azy Sokrovennyh Znaniyi Slavyan i Ariev: Struktura Cheloveka. Energeticheskaya Sistema* (2010), accessed 17 November, 2015, <http://via-midgard.info/news/article/nasledie/vedi/7383-azy-sokrovennyh-znaniy-slavyan-i-arijev-struktura.html>.

⁵⁷⁰ Lee Sanella, *The Kundalini Experience*, 14.

death. For the heart to be open to the "boiling energy of" *n/om*, and for the shaman to enter into the trance state of *Kia/Aia*, one must be «willing to die».⁵⁷¹ When the boiling *n|om* reaches the base of the shaman's skull, he enters into the state of *Aia*. In *Aia*, the soul—*moa*—leaves the body and travels into the spirit realm (just as it does at the time of death). The difference between the final death and the death of *Aia* lies in the fact that his soul returns when he comes alive again.⁵⁷²

Some tribesmen once reported that while dancing, the *n/um* lifts in the belly and the back, after which time the person starts to shiver. *N/um* makes one tremble, as it is hot. Rapid, shallow breathing draws *n/um* up until it enters each part of the body. In the backbone, a feeling of concentrated energy that works its way up is aroused. Then, the base of the spine starts tingling and makes thoughts particularly clear, as the head is completely at peace and free from thoughts.⁵⁷³ Only a few individuals emerge as shamans or healers (Kung. *n|omkxaosi*) by becoming masters of *n|om*, who—after fully learning its power—surrender themselves towards the service of others.⁵⁷⁴

In modern African esoteric schools, the so-called technique of "the snake swallowing its tail" (Greek. *uroboros*) is an exercise in which energy is generated in the lower abdomen and is directed by the breathing. Upon inhalation, one focuses on the perineal area and directing the energy up the spine towards the back of the head. After it splits at the centre point between the eyebrows, it curves over the skull—and, with the expired breath, turns back downwards.⁵⁷⁵

Ancient Egyptian mythology, with its concepts of multiple souls and various forms of priests, shows clear shamanistic elements.⁵⁷⁶ Magical texts and spells in tombs worked on the principle that words triggered the primeval potency that empowered their creator (Egyp. *h.k:w, heka*).⁵⁷⁷ *Heka* represents pharaonic magic in its full divine personification.⁵⁷⁸ The

⁵⁷¹ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 231.

⁵⁷² C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedoa of Shamanism*, 245.

⁵⁷³ Lee Sanella, *The Kundalini Experience*, 14.

⁵⁷⁴ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 245.

⁵⁷⁵ Lee Sanella, *The Kundalini Experience*, 19.

⁵⁷⁶ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 907.

⁵⁷⁷ G. Wheeler, *Ancient Egypt's Silence about the Exodus* 40, no. 2 (Andrews University Press: 2002), 260.

⁵⁷⁸ R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanisms of Ancient Egyptian Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1993), 15.

belly is understood to be the repository of *heka*, as the Pyramid texts say: “I have filled my belly with magic” (Coffin Text spell no. 239).⁵⁷⁹

The ancient Egyptian Osiris mysterium determines the process of rebirth and refers to the human soul's drama. It is the prototype for the initiation of adepts, who endeavour to awaken the eternal within themselves. Parts of Osiris's body were dissected into 14 parts—seven active and seven spiritual psychic potencies. From there originated the Egyptian teaching of the seven souls. The soul, after death, had to travel through seven chambers, symbolically representing human nature in the seven spiritual-psychic potencies: (1.) Amun Ra (Egyp. *chu/khu*); (2.) the eye of Horus (Egyp. *chiab*); (3.) Thot (Egyp. *ba*); (4.) Osiris (Egyp. *ab*); (5.) Set-Typhon (Egyp. *ka*); (6.) Hathor-Isis (Egyp. *anch*); and (7.) Geb (Egyp. *chat*). The mummy and the vital principle (Egyp. *ankh*) in the form of the sycamore of Hathor together represent the tree of life. If all chambers are transcended, the initiate becomes “an enlightened one”.⁵⁸⁰ Egyptians associated the spine (in the form of the *Djed* pillar) with magical powers, in connection with the seven magical knots of protection.⁵⁸¹

The Egyptian Book of the Dead classifies seven levels of consciousness, the so-called Seven *Arits*, with their doorkeepers. When the spirit of an adept reaches the seventh *arit*, the crown, where the knowledge and magical power of the great eye of Horus are stored, it symbolizes the accomplishment of Osiris's journey, which is often represented by ascending into the sky (Egyp. *tuat/duat*).⁵⁸² Egyptian priests (Egyp. *kher heb*), by using the power of the spells, held various ceremonies to make the souls of the dead ascend into heaven in the form of Osiris or Ra and to resurrect their spirit body.⁵⁸³ The function of the Pyramid Texts was to enable the soul of the deceased (Egyp. *ba*) to reunite with its double (Egyp. *ka*) and to become an eternal spirit (Egyp. *ankh*).⁵⁸⁴ A divinity in serpent form is in the retinue of Ra and serves as a guardian. J. N.

⁵⁷⁹ J. A. Lansbery, *Egyptian Serpent Power* (2010), 14-18, accessed 12 April 2020. <http://www.joanlansberry.com/setfind/s-power2.pdf>

⁵⁸⁰ J. Helmond, *Alchemy Unveiled* (1997), accessed 12 April 2020.

http://www.alchemypottery.com/articles/Alchemy_Unveiled-Helmond.pdf

⁵⁸¹ J. A. Lansbery, *Egyptian Serpent Power* (2010), 14-18, accessed 12 April 2020. <http://www.joanlansberry.com/setfind/s-power2.pdf>

⁵⁸² Budge, E. A. Wallis, trans. *The Papyrus of Ani (The Egyptian Book of the Dead)*, 240 BC (trans. 1895), accessed 17 November, 2015.

⁵⁸³ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 906-908.

⁵⁸⁴ J. P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 8-9.

Lansbery quotes the *Coffin Texts*, Spell 313, in which the god Horus states: “I made my eye, a - living serpent.”⁵⁸⁵ On pictures where the god Anubis holds the mummy, there often appears a depiction of the spirit of the deceased in the form of a Bennu bird—representing the soul of Ra, a symbol of rebirth.⁵⁸⁶

Rituals of the ancient traditions of Greece and Rome also show a number of shamanistic elements. Many ancient historical figures and philosophers appear to have engaged in shamanic practices.⁵⁸⁷ Characteristics of teleportation, metamorphosis, and descent into the underworld were ascribed to individuals, like Aristaeus, Epimenides of Crete, and Pythagoras. Concerning Orpheus, the sorcerer of Apollo, his mythology is full of shamanic activities.⁵⁸⁸

According to Neumann-Friedman, Pythagoras established a religious community devoted to spiritual practices, including descending into caves for a spiritual quest that would assure the achievement of metempsychosis. Empedocles was said to be able to summon storms or calm them at his will and to be capable of leading souls back up from Hades. Such shamanic soul retrievals are also described in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Parmenides left an account of his soul’s journey, detailing his encounter with a goddess who imparted her teaching of the Gnostic vision.⁵⁸⁹ The most influential Greek religious institution, the oracle of Delphi, owed its influence entirely to the powers attributed to an entranced woman, the Pythia.⁵⁹⁰ The great Eleusinian myth about Amor and Psyche has a deep allegorical meaning because the name “Psyche” in Greek means “the soul”, representing a symbological purification of the soul from worldly illusions. The ascent of Psyche into the world of the gods and her transformation from a mortal being into an immortal and divine represents the higher level of initiation of the human soul into the mysteries.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁵ J. A. Lansbery, *Egyptian Serpent Power* (2010), 14-18, accessed 12 April 2020. <http://www.joanlansberry.com/setfind/s-power2.pdf>

⁵⁸⁶ E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1901), 115.

⁵⁸⁷ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 478.

⁵⁸⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Istoriya Very*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Kriterion, 2002), 126-127.

⁵⁸⁹ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 480-483.

⁵⁹⁰ Gabor Klaniczay and Eva Pocs, *Demons, Spirits, Witches: Communicating with the Spirits* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 220.

⁵⁹¹ L. Apulej, *Zlatni Magarac* (Zagreb: CID, 1997), 4-7.

Greek mysticism corresponds to the system of seven chakras, whose structure is described in Plato's account of the parts of the soul in the *Timaeus*. According to J. Opsopaus, the crown represents a connection between heaven and the human brain (Greek. *koruphe*, Lat. *vertex*), and is identified with the symbol of illumination. The brain, psyche (Lat. *anima*), or vital spirit (Greek. *enkephalos*, Lat. *cerebrum*) corresponds with the third eye. The neck is the boundary between the divine and the mortal soul (Greek. *trachelos*, Lat. *collum*) and is associated with the purification process. The heart and lungs (Greek. *phrenes*, Lat. *cor*) correspond with the higher part of the mortal soul and represent the vital breath (Lat. *animus*) of the heart chakra (Greek. *pneuma*, Lat. *spiritus*, Sanskr. *prāṇa*). The navel (Greek. *gaster*, Lat. *abdomen*) represents the lower part of the mortal soul. The gonads (Greek. *gonades*, Lat. *genitalia*) signify the life essence, which is associated with procreation. The sacrum is called the holy bone or life force (Greek. *hieron*, Lat. *osteon sacrum*) and is connected with the base chakra. The spine, symbolically representing the tree of life, is called the “holy tube” (Lat. *hiera surinx*).⁵⁹²

In many Gnostic myths, man is given an autonomous task of creation. To heal the sick organism which is connected with the material world, an adept must lead it to the divine sparks of light emanating from the alchemical or spiritual gold, through the seven planetary spheres of the Ptolemaic cosmos. The outermost sphere of Saturn corresponds to the sullied layer of the soul—the most base material. Passing through this sphere meant physical death and the putrefaction of matter, which is a necessary pre-requisite for transformation. To ease the soul's passage through the seven gates of the planetary demons, gnosis—the knowledge of astral magic practices—was required.⁵⁹³ The seven degrees of initiation equate to the last seven stages of the great work of alchemy.⁵⁹⁴ The great work” is a term borrowed from alchemy's *Magnum Opus*. It refers to the path of spiritual illumination.⁵⁹⁵ The divine messenger Hermes was associated with the moist, mercurial principle, which was called the “beginning and end of the work”.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹² J. Opsopaus, *The Parts of the Soul: A Greek System of Chakras* (1995), accessed 12 April 2020. <http://opsopaus.com/OM/BA/JO-TEP.html>

⁵⁹³ Alexander Roob, *Alchemy and Mysticism* (London: Taschen, 2005), 11.

⁵⁹⁴ S. Nettleton, *The Alchemy Key: The Mystical Provenance of the Philosophers' Stone* (Sydney: S. Nettleton, 2002), 412.

⁵⁹⁵ Israel Regaride, *The Middle Pillar: The Balance Between Mind and Magic* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2004), 255.

⁵⁹⁶ Alexander Roob, *Alchemy and Mysticism* (London: Taschen, 2005), 13.

A Kabbalistic view of the chakras corresponds to Jacob's ladder on the Yeziratic tree. The base (Hebr. *yesod*) is connected with the lower karmas and with painful experiences. The sacral plexus (Hebr. *hod-nezah*) represents the realm of the unconscious, in the form of purgatory. The navel (Hebr. *tiferet*) is the realm of heaven, while the heart (Hebr. *gevurah-hesed*) represents free will and unconditional love. The throat (Hebr. *da'at*) signifies manifested individuality. On Jacob's ladder, it would relate to the *yesod of beriah*. The third eye (Hebr. *binah-hokhmah*) is the higher intellect, which is the last level before the achievement of enlightenment. The crown of the head is associated with expanded awareness (Hebr. *keter*) and represents the source of all chakras. In the Kabbalah, an individual whose chakras are all fully awakened is called the Messiah.⁵⁹⁷ The Kabbalistic teaching reveals that the lower animal soul (Hebr. *malkuth*) should be raised through harmony (Hebr. *tiphereth*) to the throne of understanding (Hebr. *binah*), when she is again united with wisdom (Hebr. *chokmah*)—thus absorbing all into the crown, the pure light of the dove, which descends upon their union. This is the mystery of redemption and the Great Work—the uniting of the microcosm with the macrocosm, of a human with God.⁵⁹⁸

Christianity, on several occasions, described the early prophets exhibiting shamanistic characteristics. Neumann-Friedman quotes the First Book of Samuel, which describes groups of people, seized by the spirit of Yahweh, who have experienced ecstatic states of consciousness (1 Sam. 19:20–24). In the New Testament, St. Paul said, “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh unto God” (1 Cor. 14:2).⁵⁹⁹ Klanizcay and Pocs refer to Thomas Aquinas, who in his *Summa Theologicae*, concluded that speaking in tongues (Lat. *glossolalia*) belonged to the past and was a supernatural gift.⁶⁰⁰

Neumann-Friedman describes various Christian saints referring to shamanic experiences: Paul saw a light from heaven, heard a voice, and was struck blind for several days. Some passages in the Gospel according

⁵⁹⁷ R. Kenton, *A Kabbalistic View of the Chakras* (2004), accessed 17 November, 2015,

<http://www.kabbalahsociety.org/wp/articles/a-kabbalistic-view-of-the-chakras>.

⁵⁹⁸ Frater Achad, *The Chalice of Ecstasy Being a Magical and Qabalistic Interpretation of the Drama of Parzival* (1918), accessed 12 April 2020.

https://www.academia.edu/35173932/The_Chalice_of_Ecstasy.pdf

⁵⁹⁹ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 37-38.

⁶⁰⁰ Gabor Klanizcay and Eva Pocs, *Demons, Spirits, Witches: Communicating with the Spirits* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 223.

to Mark, likewise, indicate Jesus as having powers that may be considered by some as being shamanic (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). Ezekiel was lifted into the air by the spirit and was borne upon wings (Ezekiel 3:12, 3:14, 8:3, 11:1). The New Testament mentions an ascent into heaven by Jesus himself (Mark 16:19, Luke 24:51, Acts 1:9–11).⁶⁰¹

The symbolism of the ladder was also used by some Christian mystics. Jacob dreamed of a ladder reaching Heaven on which angels ascended and descended (Genesis 28:12). St. Therese of Lisieux was said to have gone into a state of ecstatic rapture, which felt like being immersed in a soft cloud or being carried away by a giant eagle.⁶⁰² She experienced a state similar to that of shamanic illness. On several occasions, she began to shiver uncontrollably. Then, she was stricken with a strange melange of hallucinations, comas, and convulsions. She appeared to be in delirium and was tossed violently, hitting her head as if some strange forces were assailing her. Throughout all of this, she never lost awareness, even during the fainting—but she had no control over her actions.⁶⁰³

In Christianity, there is a tale in the Book of Revelation about the seven seals. In *Codices Illustres, The Douce Apocalypse* in miniature shows the revealed Lord God Almighty on his throne—and at his feet, the Lamb with the book sealed with seven seals: “When the Lamb had opened the seventh seal, seven angels stood before the God, and to them were given the seven trumpets”.⁶⁰⁴

In Orthodox Christianity, Pavel Florensky explains the seven secrets as being levels of a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Baptism, anointment, communion, marriage, martyrdom, clergy, and penitence constitute the seven secrets. These levels symbolically represent the ascent of the soul on its way to illumination, in the form of the Logos and the True Light, which represents the very nature of Christ.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰¹ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 37-38.

⁶⁰² Margaret Stutley, *Shamanism: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), 32-33.

⁶⁰³ Lee Sanella, *The Kundalini Experience*, 16.

⁶⁰⁴ I. F. Walther and N. Wolf, eds. *Codices Illustres: The World's Most Famous Illuminated Manuscripts – 400 to 1600* (Koln: Taschen, 2005), 186.

⁶⁰⁵ Pavel Florenskiy, *Filosofiya Kul'ta* (2004), accessed 12 April 2020. https://royallib.com/book/pavel_florenskiy/pavel_florenskiy_filosofiya_kulta.html

CONCLUSION

According to the gathered statistics from 488 societies across the globe, figure which represents 57% of the total societies in the world, and determined that 90% of these have one or more institutionalized, culturally patterned form of altered state of consciousness.⁶⁰⁶ These altered states, in connection with mystical or religious experiences are generally divided into the categories of trance, ecstasy, mystical union (Lat. *unio mystica*), embodiment, and spirit possession.⁶⁰⁷

Ecstasy refers to the experience of an extreme emotional exaltation that overpowers reason and lifts the soul into a trancelike state of rapture. It is not just bliss or joy, because it involves the sense of being pulled out of oneself, expanded beyond the limits of one's ego. Ecstasy is singled out as being the inescapable ingredient of shamanism. Some authors have proposed that true shamanic ecstasy implies possession by spirits, while others take an alternative view, believing that a true shaman only experiences soul flight.⁶⁰⁸

The most contradictory phenomena—on account of which many discussions among scholars are held—are trance and possession. R. J. Wallis quotes M. Eliade and L. de Heusch, who categorically distinguish these two phenomena due to their definition of possession as involving a loss of control and a concomitant inability to master the spirits.⁶⁰⁹

E. J. Neumann-Friedmann refers to E. Bourguignon, who pointed out that possession could not be defined in terms of certain behaviors, states, and personal experiences, but rather in terms of cultural interpretation. The general definition speaks of the concept of possession as a cultural explanation in terms of spirit intrusion. The intrusion may be viewed as the spirit inhabiting the human body and taking it over completely so that the actions and speech of the possessed are those of the spirit. Possession can also be viewed simply as being the spirit's exerting

⁶⁰⁶ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2007), 8.

⁶⁰⁷ G. Harvey and R. J. Wallis, eds. *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 77.

⁶⁰⁸ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 155.

⁶⁰⁹ G. Harvey and R. J. Wallis, eds. *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 77.

control or influence over the person. G. Rouget has mapped out a series of useful contrasts that M. Eliade, R. Firth, and other scholars have made between what they call “true shamanism” versus spirit possession. In shamanism, the human soul journeys to visit the realm of the spirits, whereas, in spirit possession, the spirits come to visit the human. The shaman’s interaction with spirits is voluntary, in contrast to the involuntary interaction on the part of someone who is possessed.⁶¹⁰

According to I. M. Lewis, the anthropologist Luc de Heusch has argued that possession can only occur if, at the same time, there is a dispossession of the self, as is implied by the doctrine of soul loss.⁶¹¹ Neumann-Friedmann refers to Lewis, as he disagreed with de Heusch’s suggestion that soul loss, or dispossession of the self, is always a precondition for possession.⁶¹² He states that shamans might be defined as people who welcome possession as an aspect of marital relationship with spirits and should be distinguished from the victims of unwanted possession, who may be the subject of exorcism.⁶¹³

Lewis further agrees with S. Shirokogoroff, who declares that the shaman’s body is a receptacle for the spirits. It is through his power over the spirits that he can treat and control afflictions caused by pathogenic spirits.⁶¹⁴ Possession can be defined as being an altered state of consciousness, according to which the individual may come under the influence of an alien spirit or energy. The latter can enter his body and reside in it and change his personality; the alien spirit becomes embodied in the host, whom it controls.⁶¹⁵ A spirit may take over the person’s body as its vehicle of expression. During these possessive episodes, the spirit is often said to climb, ride, or sit on the person.⁶¹⁶

These concepts relating to the body and soul, to life and death, may have different cultural interpretations—just as the trance itself has. In

⁶¹⁰ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 228-229.

⁶¹¹ I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 42-43.

⁶¹² N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 228-229.

⁶¹³ G. Harvey and R. J. Wallis, eds. *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 170.

⁶¹⁴ I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 45.

⁶¹⁵ Gabor Klaniczay and Eva Pocs, *Demons, Spirits, Witches: Communicating with the Spirits* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 80.

⁶¹⁶ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 231-233.

different belief systems, the free soul can also take on an animal or human form. Furthermore, it has bodily/physical and soul-like/spiritual versions or manifestations that serve as an escorting soul, in addition to a guardian spirit. Living people can also possess living people through their spiritual *alter ego*, and we can also include—among the list of the potentially possessed—the bodies of dead people—a spirit can inhabit a corpse. Dead spirits frequently possess the living, in the guise of the so-called “essence possession form” (Lat. *obsessio*). The appearance of evil dead beings or hostile ghosts as *poltergeists*, and the abduction of the living during the time of death to earthly other-worlds are phenomena present in a rich variety of cultural legends in contemporary Europe.⁶¹⁷

It is not always possible to clearly define boundaries between the possession trance and the shamanic trance. Shamans are usually in complete control of their trances, which they enter into and come out of at will.⁶¹⁸

It is usual to categorize types of possession according to the nature of the spirits and the direction of the human–spirit relationship: for instance, the combative penetration of the psyche by a malicious supernatural force, and the aggressive reign of evil spirits are in contrast to divine possession, in which a deity enters the body as if it were a holy vessel, or protects the human being or controls him or her. This type of possession is often, at the same time, a mystical union (Lat. *unio mystica*). Divine possession and mystical union are partially overlapping categories, which are underscored by the representation of the deity in the course of collective rites, mediumship and mediumism—when the human transmits the will or message of the deity, as if he or she were a mediating vessel. In the case of divination, this takes place in response to people’s questions. According to the technique of establishing the connection in a way compatible with its bio-psychological specificity, the possession can be spontaneous or according to ritual. Collective ritual trance—where the spirit/deity is ritually invited to enter the body—belongs both to possession cults and to various forms of mediumship (such as the possession techniques of shamans), as well as to various religious specialists, who need to reach the state of possession at will in order to fulfil their duties to society. Elements of possession may occur equally in

⁶¹⁷ Gabor Klaniczay and Eva Pocs, *Demons, Spirits, Witches: Communicating with the Spirits* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 91-95.

⁶¹⁸ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 251.

both shamanic and non-shamanic religious systems, just as out-of-body experiences and spiritual journeys can appear in systems of possession.⁶¹⁹

Other spiritual practitioners have often been misidentified as shamans. They include mediums, psychics, oracles, prophets, and diviners who, through possession, allow spirits to utilize their bodies as vehicles to convey information. They use intentional possession trances to embody the helping spirits or “the spirit helpers”.⁶²⁰

During the possession trance, shamans assume characteristics of the being that has possessed them. Shamans will take on traits such as a change in voice and the use of incomprehensible or unfamiliar languages. The second type of shamanic trance is the journey to other cosmic zones, during which the shaman’s body remains on the earth while his soul travels up to the heavens or down to the underworld. This is no longer a case of possession - but, rather, is a state in which the soul of the shaman moves out of the body to visit “these places”, often together with an auxiliary spirit. As has already been indicated, the physical manifestations of both types of trance can be very similar. The shaman’s body jerks and trembles. They begin to sweat profusely and experience a sensorial detachment. In both instances (possession and shamanism), the practitioner goes on a journey. However, in a state of possession, the journey is undertaken by the supernatural being toward the shaman, whereas, in the case of a shamanic journey, the shaman travels toward the world of the supernatural.⁶²¹

There is a clear distinction between shamans and mediums, as they both use possession states as a means of connection with spirits to gain energy for healing or to gain information. The primary distinction is action. Both have developed the discipline necessary to utilize the presence of spirits for divination. However, the shaman also takes action in the altered state to transfer energies towards a particular aim, such as the aim of removing harmful spirits in an exorcism or healing the flow of blocked energy. By contrast, mediums are conscious or unconscious channels through which the spirits can speak, and mediums do not take action in the altered state. Mediumistic abilities alone do not make an individual a shaman. Shamans are potentially mediums, but all mediums are not shamans.⁶²²

⁶¹⁹ Gabor Klanizcay and Eva Pocs, *Demons, Spirits, Witches: Communicating with the Spirits* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 85-88.

⁶²⁰ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 17.

⁶²¹ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 254.

⁶²² C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 26-27.

There are two types of spirit mediums. One type consists of shaman-like healers and diviners who use possessive trance to contact the deceased ancestors of their clients. The second type is institutionalized trance mediums who are possessed by deities during temple ceremonies. Mediumistic possession by the spirits of the dead is also present in the spiritualist tradition, which gained a large following in the 19th century in the Western world. On the contrary, spirit possession has often been explained as a psychological pathology. Possessed people were described as being mad or crazy. Those, who were possessed, were described as suffering from weak nervous integration or mental problems of neurosis—quite often, hysteria or psychosis.⁶²³

Possession by an external agency or spirit may be one explanation of trance. However, it does not follow that all conditions in which spirit possession is postulated necessarily involve trance. In many cultures where possession by a spirit is the main or sole interpretation of trance, it may be diagnosed long before an actual state of trance has been reached.⁶²⁴ Within a single healing session, shamans often move between the trance states of journeying and possession.⁶²⁵

I. Lewis prefers more neutral, analytical terms in this regard, like “uncontrolled” and “controlled” possession, or “unsolicited” and “solicited” possession. In many cultures, we find the notion that, in a state of latent or incipient possession before actual trance, the spirit is perched on the shoulders or the neck of its host. It climbs into the head or some other part of the body, though assuming full possession of its receptacle only when complete trance occurs. Full possession itself is widely perceived as a form of temporary death, sometimes called the “half-death” or “little death”. At the same time, ecstatic possession seizures are sometimes explicitly interpreted as acts of mystical sexual intercourse between the subject and the possessing spirit. The shamanic gift of illumination, in return for surrendering of self or a part of the self, is described in the classical language of mysticism as “gnosis”—a fusion of man and divinity—and is considered as being part of controlled spirit possession.⁶²⁶

As for different kinds of mental techniques used within any given category of possession, there are different types of possession (Lat.

⁶²³ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 231-233.

⁶²⁴ Andrey Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

⁶²⁵ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 22.

⁶²⁶ I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 49-52.

possessio, circumpossessio), while the concept of *unio mystica*, which subsumes divine possession, partially goes beyond this.⁶²⁷ According to Eva Pócs, such forms of possession are collectively considered as being divine - when a human comes under the control of a superior spirit or a God. This control, in contrast to the negative intent of demonic possession, is positive.⁶²⁸

The concept of mystical experiences (Lat. *unio mystica*) is the experience of feeling the ecstatic truth of being absolutely inseparable from every other aspect of creation. It is the experience of union with the divine, and represents the existential unity or Samadhi of Hindu practices, the enlightenment of Eastern practices, and the illumination of Western spiritual practices. It is also the result of the shaman's mastery of the techniques of ecstasy.⁶²⁹

A similar term for divine or ritual possession is the concept of spiritual embodiment. Embodiment is a trance state, characterized by an intentional, controlled possession of the shaman by a spirit or a healing form of energy. Embodiment trances are induced to serve a particular purpose in the healing ritual, where the shaman can direct the trance experience toward their purpose. Through this intentional possession or embodiment, the shaman serves as a vehicle or mouthpiece for the gods and allows the patient to witness a manifestation of the divine. Embodiment trances are invoked by the same variety of techniques by, which induce the other shamanic trance states.⁶³⁰

On account of the various kinds of trance states induced by altered states, Michael Winkelman classifies the following trance types: 1) a soul flight or vision quest, which involves an active seeking of trance states which are accompanied by visions, but without there being possession or a dialogue between the practitioner and spirit; 2) a trance state without a soul flight, vision quest, possession or a dialogue with spirits; 3) a soul flight or vision quest, which involves possession or dialogue; and 4) possession or dialogue with spirits. Many ethnographers use the term "possession" in terms of trance without meaning the displacement of the personality of the practitioner. "Possession" here is defined as trance, interpreted by the culture as being a condition during which the practitioner's personality is temporarily displaced by the personality of another entity. If the presentation of spirit personalities has an interaction

⁶²⁷ Gabor Klanizcay and Eva Pocs, *Demons, Spirits, Witches: Communicating with the Spirits* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 132.

⁶²⁸ Gabor Klanizcay and Eva Pocs, 124.

⁶²⁹ C. Pratt, *An Encyclopedia of Shamanism*, 525.

⁶³⁰ Pratt, 158.

with a voice manifestation identified as the shaman's normal personality, this is coded as being a dialogue, not possession. Amnesia occurs in conjunction with possession, but not with soul flight. Tremors and convulsions, in almost all cases, were labeled as involving possession, as was spontaneous onset leading to trance. Compulsive motor behavior is apparently beyond the control of the practitioner, with excessive and violent movements being labeled as a hysterical seizure and something associated with possession. Concerning the classification of ecstatic traditions, there are three major types of trance traditions: 1) the yogic or meditative tradition, characterized by sleep deprivation, austerities, fasting, social isolation, and auditory driving; 2) the shamanic tradition, which takes into account the entrainment of sleep, unconsciousness, soul flight, and excessive motor behavior; and 3) the mediumistic tradition, which is mostly characterized by amnesia, convulsions, possession, and spontaneous onsets.⁶³¹

R. Walsh classifies a number of key dimensions for mapping altered states and mystical experiences, including: 1) a degree of awareness of the environment; 2) the ability to communicate; 3) a degree of concentration, whether the attention is fixed on a single object or on a momentarily fluidic state, where it is allowed to shift between shamanic journeys; and 4) a degree of control. There are two types of control: 1) the ability to enter and leave the altered state at will, and 2) the ability to control the content of experience while in the altered state. This classification also includes: 1) a degree of arousal; 2) a degree of calm; 3) sensitivity of sensory perception; 4) a sense of self or identity; 5) effects of the experience, which can be pleasurable or painful; 6) out-of-body experiences; and 7) the content of inner experiences, which can be either formless or present visual images.⁶³²

Whereas, on the one hand, the shaman has a measure of control over the out-of-body experience or ecstasy, yogis, on the other hand, may lose awareness of the body due to the elimination of sensory input. According to Roger Walsh, yoga cannot be confused with shamanism or be classed among the techniques of ecstasy. The goal of classic yoga remains the achievement of perfect autonomy (Greek *enstasis*), while

⁶³¹ Michael Winkelman, "Trance States: A Theoretical Model and Cross—Cultural Analysis", *Ethos* 14, no. 2 (1986): 193-195.

⁶³² Roger Walsh, "Phenomenological Mapping and Comparisons of Shamanic, Buddhist, Yogic and Schizophrenic Experiences", *Journal of the Americal Academy of Religion* 61, no. 4 (1995): 746-747.

shamanism is characterized by an effort to attain the state of a spirit to accomplish ecstatic flight.⁶³³

According to Neumann-Friedman, R. Hamayon has discussed the question of whether concepts such as shamanic trance and ecstasy are, in fact, of any use in understanding the significance of shamanism.⁶³⁴ Wallis also quotes C. Humphrey, saying that the important matter for shamans is rarely their inner state of mind (which is considered as being inaccessible to others), but, rather, the fact that particular actions, which are identifiable as being related to states of possession or trance, indicate that the shaman is communicating with spirits.⁶³⁵

Although some scholars believe that trance and ecstasy are not necessarily attributes of shamanism, for many spiritual seekers they are the basic aim of spiritual practice.⁶³⁶ It is important to note the universality of mystical experiences and the remarkable uniformity of mystical language and symbolism. A. Znamenski notes the requirement of a neutral term to denote the mental state of the subject of such experiences, filling this requirement by employing the word “trance”.⁶³⁷ Both trance and possession, if they can be distinguished from each other, are culturally recognizable patterns of behavior that demonstrate the presence and activity of otherworldly beings or spirits.⁶³⁸

In conclusion, we can assume that almost all altered states, which are regarded as mystical experiences are connected with the process of the Kundalini awakening. The Kundalini phenomenon, with its tree of life symbolism, is widely known to various cultures, including indigenous and shamanic traditions. M. Witzel points out the similarity between the African San and Bushmen shamans, noting that they ought to master their inner-bodily heat that moves upward from the base of the spine, leading to a state which fully resembles the process of Kundalini awakening.⁶³⁹

I. S. Urbanaeva also acknowledges that the Buryat-Mongol shamanic initiation works with the principle of Kundalini energy.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³³ Walsh, 757.

⁶³⁴ N. M. Walther and E. J. Friedmann, eds. *Shamanism: An Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices and Culture*, 252.

⁶³⁵ G. Harvey and R. J. Wallis, eds. *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism*, 170.

⁶³⁶ Andrey Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 8.

⁶³⁷ Znamenski, 33.

⁶³⁸ G. Harvey and R. J. Wallis, eds. *Historical Dictionary of Shamanism*, 233.

⁶³⁹ Michael E. J. Witzel, “Shamanism in Northern and Southern Eurasia: Their Distinctive Methods of Change of Consciousness”, *Social Science Information* 50, no. 1 (2011): 39-61, accessed 12 April 2020.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0539018410391044>

⁶⁴⁰ I. S. Urbanaeva, *Shamanskaya Filosofiya Buryat-Mongolov*, vol. 2, 143.

M. Witzel adds to this discussion significant European Upper Paleolithic artistic depictions of a shaman going into a trance—a process depicted with geometric or button-circle formed figures, which represent the classical Hindu chakra model.⁶⁴¹

It can be acknowledged that all contemplative experiences share similar characteristics, representing their form of transcending the ordinary, profane, and individual life—doing so by overcoming the borders defining what it means to be strictly human. What they have in common is the need to find the origin of spiritual life. At the same time, in their essence, they represent the truth about life and the sense of truly living.⁶⁴²

It seems that various religious traditions, if analyzed according to their outer cultural characteristics, have different methods of induction into their own mystical experiences—experiences, which, for them, have different aims. However, from the esoteric point of view, regarding the energetic classifications of the different chakra systems, it can be assumed that different spiritual traditions, in their essence, are equal. Shamanism differs from other systems with regards to its technique of entering into an ecstatic trance. That is why the peculiarity of shamanism is not to be found in its hierarchical structure of the cosmos, but, rather, in the special nature of the shaman's contact with those cosmic spheres. In that sense, shamanism is unique.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴¹ Michael E. J. Witzel, “Shamanism in Northern and Southern Eurasia: Their Distinctive Methods of Change of Consciousness”, 39-61.

⁶⁴² M. M. Davy, ed. *Enciklopedija Mistika*, vol. 1 (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1990), 50.

⁶⁴³ A. Rigopolous and R. Mastromattei, eds. *Shamanic Cosmos: From India to the North Pole Star* (Venice: D. K. Printworld, 1999), 32.

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