

## Shamanism - The Psychic Descent

### The Vision Quest and the Totality of Experience

The word shaman comes from the Russian and ultimately Tungusic *saman* which pervades into Sanscrit as *samana* ascetic. Shamanism is a form of communication with natural forms of conscious energy which may effect health and disease luck and misfortune and one's state of awareness in relation to natural phenomena, trance states and the souls of natural entities such as power animals and allies.

Shamanism is very widespread across human cultures in both space and historical time, and has a distinct strong historical tradition sourcing from the Mongol areas from Siberia south. These traditions are very old, and run back into the paleolithic, having a roughly contemporaneous emergence with the earliest fertility goddess figurines, and representing the skills of the hunt as seen in caves such as Lascaux. From the Mongol source area, shamanistic practice spread west to Eastern Europe, south to Tibet, where Bön shamanism underlies Tibetan Buddhism and ever east and south, down the Americas. The correspondence between shaman and the ascetic in Sanscrit illustrates the deep relationship also between shamanism and Eastern mysticism. However the world over, in ethnic tribal societies, shamanistic practices have been commonplace.



Tikuna shamaness referred to by Schultes as 'Old Tikuna Hag' (Schultes 1988)

Shamanism is something sometimes associated with the hunt and with the male hunting figures for example in European cave paintings as opposed to the obvious feminine aspects of the ancient goddess figurines, and with the meditative vision trance associated with stalking and hunting game, however shamanism is not at all confined to men and 'medicine women' have been a recurring feature of widespread cultures, as is illustrated in the copal smoke of Maria Sabina (p 156) and full account (p 124), iboga rites (p 103), morning glory healing (p 101), Huichol peyote pilgrimage (p 91), mother waters (p 98), datura ceremonies (p 146) and the agaric shamaness (p 109). Shamanistic use of plants also links naturally to the

witchcraft tradition (p 111) and to modern wicca nature worship (p 947).

Shamanism is a path which embraces a deep relationship with nature. It respects nature and the power of natural vision. This tradition is especially valuable in a time of crisis between humanity and nature. If we can learn to rediscover the way of the shaman it may make a critical difference to how we cherish the Earth and replenish it. Gloria Orenstein (p 946) makes this point in emphasizing that shamanistic practice should function to carry us into intimate visionary creative and nurturing interactions with nature and not just inner trance visions. Dhyani Ywahoo (p 945) likens the Earth to a womb and see the sacred hoop of harmony with

nature being rebuilt. Rita Nakashima Brock links shamanism to ancient traditions of freedom among Asian women before patriarchal priesthoods (p 322).

Intrinsic to Shamanistic practice is the idea of an interaction with nature spirits in ways which can heal, cause other people to become ill or protect the user in battle. Some shamanistic practices involve the use of a power animal or a second soul. For example in Aztec cosmology one has a birth soul called the *tonal* which represents the persona, and one's astrological destiny. To really become a person of power, one also has to adopt or become possessed by a second ethereal soul, manifested as a power animal ally called the *nagual* or *nahualli*. By relating to the nagual, very surprising things may happen. The tonal represents the ordered, bright clear aspect to existence and the nagual the dark, chaotic uncertain, undefinable aspect (p 157). This in no way equates with good and evil. Rather the entire cosmology of God, good and evil are part of the island of the tonal. The nagual reigns supreme as the 'eagle's gift' beyond ordered perception.

Common to shamanistic practice is entering a trance state, which may be induced by repetitious drumming, dance, hardship and deprivation, illness, madness or a variety of plant substances especially the hallucinogens (p 79). The Siberian shamans both use drumming and the intoxication of *Amanita* mushrooms. Every Amer-indian culture which has come into the ecosystemic domain of hallucinogenic plants has adopted them for sacred use in the shamanistic tradition. Mircea Eliade in his seminal work on shamanism made a serious misjudgment which was the product of an academic not being in the subjective condition of the shaman. He proceeded to describe drumming as the principal source of the shamanic trance and hallucinogens as a degenerate form of shamanism.

A Kunama magician leads entranced women in a ritual dance after consuming a brew believed to contain among many other plants datura.

The reverse is clearly the case. With the possible exception of the Tibetan Bön, the fullest, deepest and most subtle expressions of shamanism route through the experiences gained on power plants. These include the Shivaic swathe of the Indian sadhu tradition with its sacred ganga, European witching herbs, the diverse varieties of hallucinogens from the ayahuasca and epena snuffs of the Amazon, through peyote and teonanactl, flesh of the Gods of the Mexican tradition. Although these substances are used for casting good and bad spells in ways which can promote conflict and retribution, virtually all of these power plants are also used to give access to deeper strata of conscious experience, accessing the 'spirit world', to heal illness, perceive far of places as in flight and to unfold the path of wisdom.



A central theme of the shaman coming of age is the vision quest, which may be a hardship or a vigil of endurance in which the shaman descends the axis mundi into

the abyss. Sometimes, in becoming a shaman, the initiate, if they are male, takes on a Dionysus-like feminine persona and clothing, but in other cultures the shaman is the traditional spiritual head of the tribe and a central father figure. Often shamans are treated as medicine men - spirit healers who live somewhat apart from the main group and are respected and sometimes feared for their powers.

Shamans often display significant psychic faculties of clairvoyance, dreaming of faraway events, becoming aware that a relative has died or having uncanny visions of future events or far away places. Some of these 'siddhis' are very similar to those expressed in the traditions of Vedantic mysticism and Tibetan Buddhism which is founded on the earlier shamanism of the Bön.

Shamanism is for me a more natural meditative tradition than the rituals of the Eastern tradition. Shamanistic trance can be entered into very much as types of mind-brain state which form a natural spectrum through, meditative samadhi, dreaming, hypnogogic reverie, hallucinogenic vision and so on. Natural wilderness settings are very evocative of deep communion and wordless states of sensory awareness, listening to the winds in the grass, the crickets and wildlife calls. One may interact with wild animals or have coincidental experiences in the synchronicity of natural events. Some shamanistic techniques use the intensification of senses in the veiled atmosphere of the night to induce vision, sometimes through fright or panic. Shamans often display feats such as jumping dangerous chasms and rain-making in which consciousness and circumstance are attuned.

Eastern techniques also embrace the shamanistic approach particularly Tantric methods of the left-hand path, which includes meditating in dangerous out of the way places, in graveyards and at a variety of Himalayan pilgrimage spots. However Eastern meditation methods often relate more to recitation of mantras, repetition of prostrations and elaborate visualizations. The end is the same but the natural approach is well-tuned to the natural conditions of trance the mind is capable of. Insect song is both synchronous and mesmerizing, as is the chaos in the breezes and the water lapping on the ocean, the cry of the hunting owl. All these factors combine to a form of conscious merging with nature which has an implicitly different aim than the transcendental meditative path, for instead of surpassing nature, we are merging with it.

The shamanistic path is also a path which embraces and pays respect to the most diverse cultural traditions of any psychic tradition. It thus acknowledges a deeper more universal description of reality which gathers in its orbit the diverse creation myths of many cultures and pays proper respect to the way cultures across the globe have come to terms with existential reality in the natural context. It teaches the major traditions a sense of humility toward so-called 'primitive' cultures and a much deeper intimacy with, and reverence for, nature and the natural expressions of consciousness.

Shamanism is also implicitly the interaction with the quantum realm in terms of the relation between subjective awareness, free-will and circumstance. Many of the techniques of shamanic trance could also be interpreted as entering into relationship with quantum-nonlocality. In the broadest sense shamanism is the natural science of the subjective condition, a position it shares with gnosticism and Taoism.

For me shamanism is a continuing state of existence. Everywhere I go I am interacting with the karmic flow. This is something occurring on endless fractal scales. At the same time as often being lost in thought, I try to leave a part of my mind which is somewhere out in the 'atmosphere', echoing with the distant sounds. Both at work and in reverie, the shamanistic state of mind is like a cat ready to pounce, and an eagle soaring, an extended awareness of oneself in the existential flow, listening, if you like to the 'sound' of quantum non-locality.

In many ways one descends into the inner reality that subtends everyday sensory experience, lying at night listening to the fridge motor chaotically whirring, deep in the eucharistic trance of velada, visions come to a climax of both focus and abandon, losing conscious deeply within its own disembodied vista of existence. Suddenly one exists, perceiving as from eternity, compassionately as if looking back in on incarnation from the 'God's eye view', as if a door had swung open and cast you out and back into the cosmic totality from which we come..

The same abyss expresses itself in dreaming, in precognitive intimations in nightmares, in lucid dreams where the will begins to assume limitless power, and the body floats up almost violently driven by an insatiable psychic levity. And in the gaps between sleeping and waking.

Most of us in the post-modern world are trained to invest all our attention in the 'island of the tonal' and pay hardly any attention to the abyss of the nagual. Modern electronic media are preoccupied with materialistic fantasy. The scientific description of reality omits the subjective state altogether. Careers and fortunes in the everyday world require an absolute commitment to the tonal. Many aspects of consciousness which are quite familiar to a so-called 'primitive' shaman are thus esoteric or unavailable, and people have to re-invent such methods by degrees, working from the superficial back down towards the abyss.

The dilemma of post-modern existence is in fact the crisis of free will. People have been lulled by deterministic science into half-believing that free-will is an illusion, that we are really machines struggling through a sea of randomness. The first step of shamanism is taking personal responsibility and assuming free-will. Once will is assumed - and here I mean actively adopted by intent, it is immediately recognized as the source of historicity. Will is world-changing. This is a fundamentally new and different creative situation.

Aspects of the shamanistic descent trance can be seen in many traditions from Tibetan Buddhism to Sufi and Gnostic illumination. It is also the descent of Orpheus, Dionysus, and of Inanna and Dumuzi without the need for blood sacrifice.

### **Coyote: The Trickster as Culture Hero**

"The superhuman culture heroes of North American mythology also behave as tricksters, using cunning and stealth to steal fire, outwit monsters or play tricks on others. Many peoples have developed these trickster tales into a separate body of myth, and in some areas, such as the Northwest coast, the culture hero and trickster are sometimes regarded as separate beings. ... Because the trickster is usually the same as the culture hero, he is usually called by the same name: Great Hare, Nanabush or Glooskap in the Woodlands, Rabbit in the Southeast, Coyote on the Plains and in the West, Spider on parts of the Plains, and Raven, Blue jay or Mink

on the Northwest coast. Despite his different guises, he exhibits similar characteristics across the continent, the same tales occurring in widely separated areas. He can be a crafty joker and a bungler, who is usually undone by his own horseplay or trickery, ending up injured or even dead - only to rise again, seemingly none the wiser for his experience. At times utterly irreverent and idiotic, the trickster's doings highlight, in an entertaining context, the importance of moral rules and boundaries. Many trickster myths are extremely vulgar” (Willis 227).



Haida grey shale chest bearing human and animal trickster motifs (Willis).

One character who behaves simultaneously as shaman culture hero and trickster on many levels is Carlos Castaneda in his allegory with Don Juan. Here he ranges from the extremes of the nagual - as superhuman shaman to the trickster as coyote the tall-tale spinning allegorist. For the clarification of the tradition we will investigate this paradox carefully.

### **The Waterfall**

“Indigenous traditions deserve accurate and respectful preservation, and these records must be distinguished from imaginative works ... It is the obligation of the lettered to make written records of the lore of the unlettered, simply a record - not a mirror of ourselves or our needs and fantasies.” - Barbara Meyerhoff (DeMille 2).

“Don Juan was looking straight at don Genaro. His gaze was fixed. His eyelids were half-closed. He was sitting very erect with his hands resting between his legs, on the edge of the rock. I leaned over a little bit to see the two young men. Don Juan made an imperative gesture with his hand to make me get back in line. I retreated immediately. I had only a glimpse of the young men. They seemed to be as attentive as he was. Don Juan made another gesture with his hand and pointed to the direction of the waterfall. I looked again. Don Genaro had climbed quite a way on the rocky wall. At the moment I looked he was perched on a ledge, inching his way slowly to circumvent a huge boulder. His arms were spread, as if he were embracing the rock. He moved slowly toward his right and suddenly he lost his footing. I gasped involuntarily. For a moment his whole body hung in the air. I was

sure he was going to fall but he did not. His right hand had grabbed onto something and very agilely his feet went back on the ledge again. But before he moved on he turned to us and looked. It was only a glance. There was, however, such a stylization to the movement of turning his head that I began to wonder. I remembered then that he had done the same thing, turning to look at us, every time he slipped. I had thought that don Genaro must have felt embarrassed by his clumsiness and turned to see if we were looking. He climbed a bit more toward the top, suffered another loss of footing, and hung perilously on the overhanging rock face. This time he was supported by his left hand. When he regained his balance he turned and looked at us again. He slipped twice more before he reached the top. From where we were sitting, the crest of the waterfall seemed to be twenty to twenty-five feet across” (Castaneda 1971 125).



Don Genaro jumping the ravine (Castaneda).

“It is my impression that this special condition of the shaman cannot be faked - that not only he himself but his companions really do know whether or not a man who lays claim to being a mara’akáme has what the Huichol call ‘balance’ - that special, ineffable capacity to venture without fear onto the ‘narrow bridge’ across the great chasm separating the ordinary world from the world beyond” (Furst 152).

“In the summer of 1966 Ramon (p 93) gave us a memorable demonstration of the meaning of ‘balance.’ He took us to a spectacular waterfall, with a sheer drop of hundreds of feet to the valley below. This, he said, was ‘specially for shamans.’ While the other Huichol grouped themselves in a semicircle in a safe place some distance from the edge, Ramon removed his sandals and, after making a series of ritual gestures to the world directions, proceeded to leap - ‘fly’ might be more appropriate - from one rock to another with arms stretched wide, often landing but a few inches from the slippery edge. Occasionally he would disappear behind a great boulder, only to emerge from an unexpected direction. Or he would stand motionless at the extreme limit of a massive rock, wheel about suddenly and make a great leap to the other side of the rushing water, never showing the slightest concern about the obvious danger that he might lose his balance and fall into space. We were frankly terrified, even annoyed, at such ‘foolhardiness,’ but neither his wife nor the other Huichol watching showed any real apprehension. The demonstration ended as abruptly as it had begun, without any explanation of Ramon’s strange behaviour.” (Furst 152-3, Meyerhoff 44) “The mara’akáme must have superb equilibrium otherwise he will not reach his destination and will fall this way or that” - Barbara Meyerhoff (Halifax 233, Meyerhoff 44)

“The following day he asked if we thought he had been showing off. He said,

“Perhaps you thought, ‘Ah, Ramon is drunk with too much beer.’ But no. I took you there to show what it means ‘to have balance.’ So you could see and understand. Because when one crosses over as a shaman one looks below, and then one perceives this great abyss filled with all those animals waiting to kill one. Those who do not have balance are afraid. They fall and are killed.” In order to render intelligible something he feared our cultural experience might not have prepared us to understand, he had decided to give us a physical demonstration—a kind of literal translation-of a phenomenon basic to shamanism wherever it occurs” (Furst 153).



Ramon Medina Silva: Huichol shaman jumping the ravine (Meyerhoff).

Conversation between Richard de Mille RdeM and Barbara Meyerhoff BGM (DeMille 1980 341-54):

RdeM: I suppose his biggest trick on you was feeding your waterfall story right back to you.

BGM: That was a very interesting incident. I mean, it never crossed my mind that his description of don Genaro on the waterfall proved anything except that I was doing good fieldwork because I had come up with an observation and interpretation so much like his. When he said, “Oh, that’s just like don Genaro,” it was very validating for me.

RdeM: How do you feel about it now?

BGM: The feeling of validation remains, the feeling that we were both talking about the same serious and important manifestation of Mexican shamanism.

RdeM: Even though his part of it was made up on the spot, the feeling of mutual understanding and significance remains.

BGM: Yes.

RdeM: He must have a remarkable ability to resonate to things people tell him.

BGM: Oh, he does.

RdeM: The stories he makes up exactly fit the person he is talking to.

BGM: They're mirrors. It's happened over and over. So many people describe their conversations with Carlos, saying, "I know just what he's talking about." But each one tells you something different, something that is part of his or her own world, which Carlos has reflected. ... His allegories, the stories he tells, seem to validate everybody.

BGM: That's right, and the first day we met he did it with me. I was telling him about the sprinklers on the VA-hospital lawn near UCLA. They're that old-fashioned kind that send sprays whipping around, sparkling in the sun. I told him about driving down the freeway and being dazzled by the beauty of the sunlight on the whirling water, and almost feeling I was being drawn into it, and then he described it to me from above, the way he had seen it as a crow, when he was flying over it.

RdeM: Right after you had said it.

BGM: Yes. (LAUGHING) We saw a lot of each other toward the end of that summer because we were both working every day in the library. And this is where my feeling of deep gratitude and affection for him comes in, because my father was dying of cancer, very horribly, and Carlos was kind and very helpful to me. We were two vulnerable, pitiful, impotent, confused little creatures together in that horrible time and place.

RdeM: How was he kind? He let you talk about it, and he understood?

BGM: More than that. He was genuinely giving and consoling. He talked to me about things I didn't know anything about. About death "being with you, beside you on the mat."

RdeM: He helped you to cope with the impending death of your father.

BGM: Yes, very much. And I helped him too. He was struggling - and I really think he was I don't think that part was bull. He was struggling with the idea, as he put it, that he was somewhat crazy. He kept saying he was struggling with madness. I never saw him look so miserable. He didn't think he was going to make it through UCLA. He had lost his little boy. Many of his colleagues and associates on campus were cold, stuffy, positivist types. He wasn't being well treated. Every day he'd come chugging up to the campus with his briefcase, and no matter how poor he was and in the hottest weather he always wore proper, three-piece, dark flannel suits. All day, every day, he'd sit from nine to five in one of those little carrels in the library writing his book, like a business man.

BGM: We kept telling each other we were the serious, important, imaginative, powerful ones, and all those others, those idiots who were torturing us, were the crazy ones. We said one day we'd show them, and our biographers would laugh at them as we were laughing. It was a grand conceit. You can imagine the fun we had years later when we met and told each other it had come true. In a way. More for him than for me, of course. But we exulted in the partial realization of our childish vision of omnipotence. By then we had both completed our degrees and published



our books.

RdeM: When did you first see the manuscript of *The Teachings*?

BGM: That August. He was so disgusted with it he threatened to bum it. I took it home with me for a few days and told him I was going to xerox it and keep a copy. I was afraid he might actually destroy it. We went over a lot of it together. I remember telling him it was pointless to put in that awful "Structural Analysis." And the term "sorcerer," which I felt he misused. And "Yaqui," for which there seemed no cultural justification. I didn't like the name "don Juan," which I thought was too much like the literary prototype and therefore confusing. Since it was only a pseudonym, he could easily have changed it. I wanted him to call the book *A Path with Heart*, and leave out "sorcerer" and "Yaqui" altogether. We argued endlessly about those things, but he went ahead and did everything his own way. I think history has proved my criticisms right, but that's another story. Anyway, it was the beginning of a long and curious friendship. Later we would have sporadic, intense meetings every six months or so, when we'd talk all day or through the night.

Barbara Meyerhoff receives her name from the female deity Utuanaka - Our Mother Maize in Ramon's peyote vision (Meyerhoff).

RdeM: How did Carlos meet Ramon?

BGM: It was in the spring [of 1971]. Ramon had come up to Los Angeles to exhibit his yam paintings at the Museum of Natural History, and he and Lupe [his wife] were staying at my house in the San Fernando Valley. They were camping in my son's bedroom. Literally. They moved all the furniture to the sides of the room and built a little cooking fire in the middle of the room.



RdeM: How could they do that?

BGM: They used a little metal sheet. And they threw their trash and orange peels all over the room. It was a mess like you would not believe. My son couldn't fathom what was going on.

RdeM: How old was he?

BGM: Three. He was astonished. Anyway, I told Carlos, and he was eager to meet Ramon. He had often talked about taking me down to meet don Juan-in fact, we'd made two dates to do it, which didn't come off-and I had said, "One day you must meet Ramon." We'd always done this "comparing of other shamans." So Carlos came right out. I was glad to have him there, because I was teaching full time and couldn't be with Ramon and Lupe as much as I wanted. Ramon was an incredible trickster. Each morning that I drove him to USC, just when we'd get to the freeway

interchange, where you have to pay close attention to the merging traffic, he'd begin to tell me some ethnographic tidbit that put several other things into place that I'd wanted to know, and I'd be caught between the need to learn and the need to survive. Very much like don Juan's trickster style of teaching which is one of the most valid things Carlos has portrayed. It's typical of North American and Central American shamans. Ramon's certainty of his own powers was very impressive to see. I gave a party for him at my house, and when it was over and the guests were talking gracious leave of him, he said, very nicely without any arrogance, that it had been a pleasure for all of them to meet him.

RdeM: What happened when [Ramon] and Carlos met?

BGM: They saw -each other!

RdeM: What did they see?

BGM: They were the same kind of person. We had dinner at a funny little Mexican restaurant, and they started to laugh at once and didn't stop. They both saw the world from the same lofty position that made it look ridiculous. Being around the two of them was like entering a separate reality. They really saw and believed and dwelt in another realm. Once I walked with Ramon through the May Company [a big department store] when he was dressed in very ordinary American clothes because he had sold all his Indian clothing to buy tape recorders and transistor radios. People stopped and stared at him. He looked like a Mexican fruit picker, but he had a presence that was extraordinary. Talk about the glance of kings! There are people who have this sense of another realm, and they move differently through this realm because of it. Carlos and Ramon had that.

RdeM: What else happened between them?

BGM: They capered around a lot, playing like children. They exchanged gifts. One day Carlos took Ramon to a "power spot" he had discovered in the Santa Monica Mountains. Carlos wanted to know if Ramon really saw it as a power spot. Ramon agreed that it was a wonderful power spot. He started jumping up and down and farting, and he said, "I'll show you what a power spot it is!" And, in Carlos's words, he took a crap in it. He had been unhappy that there was no place at my house to go to the bathroom. That is, there was a bathroom, but he thought it was not a proper place to defecate. He was reluctant to use my garden, and so he had been very uncomfortable. Carlos's power spot was a marvellous solution. If Carlos had taken himself too seriously, he might have been offended. He had invited Ramon up there in a very serious mood, to validate the power spot, and here was Ramon using it for a toilet. Carlos thought that was absolutely hilarious, and afterwards he would tell this funny story on himself.

RdeM: Did you hear the story from Ramon too, or just from Carlos?

BGM: Just from Carlos. In June 1971, Ramon Medina Silva was shot and killed during a drunken quarrel at a party at his rancho. Barbara Meyerhoff, died suddenly at the age of 49.

### **The Little Smoke**

Extracts of a letter from Gordon Wasson to Carlos Castaneda sent on 26th August 1968, with replies from Carlos summarized by Richard de Mille (DeMille 1980

319-33):

GW: I have been asked to review *The Teachings of Don Juan for Economic Botany*. I have read it and am impressed by the quality of the writing and the hallucinogenic effects you have had. Perhaps you are not yet overwhelmed with letters from strangers and you can discuss with me the use of mushrooms by don Juan. My professional life has been chiefly concerned with the hallucinogenic effects of the Mexican "sacred mushrooms." It was my wife and I who publicized the re-discovery of the cult in Oaxaca, and it was on my invitation to Professor Roger Helm that he came over and studied them with us. We three have written books about them and innumerable articles.

CC: It was a great pleasure to receive Wasson's letter, for Castaneda is "very familiar" with his work and is honoured by his attention. Wasson must bear in mind, however, that Castaneda is not an authority; his knowledge is limited strictly to the data he has collected. His fieldwork was never anthropological fieldwork proper but an "inquiry product" of his own interest, which is "content" and "meaning." He therefore became absorbed in don Juan's "innuendoes" rather than in "specific ethnographic details." Since he was dealing with a "dramatic and serious" system of beliefs, he intentionally blurred such details. It would be "superfluous" to try to remedy that vagueness in a single letter without first preparing a better "ethnographic context," but Castaneda "will do his best to answer Wasson's questions.

GW: Am I right in concluding from your narrative that you never gathered the mushrooms, nor indeed ever saw a whole specimen?

CC: Castaneda has gathered the mushrooms. He has held in his hands "perhaps hundreds" of specimens. He and don Juan went every year to collect them in the mountains "southwest and northwest of Valle Nacional." [Huautla de Jiménez, where Wasson first ate the mushrooms, is in the mountains northwest of Valle Nacional. ... Castaneda wanted to describe the collecting ritual in *The Teachings*, but since, unlike peyote and jimson weed, the mushrooms contained don Juan's "ally (*aliado*)", don Juan imposed a rule of "total secrecy about specific processes."

GW: Once you embarked on a trip to Chihuahua for honguitos, but your quest turned out to be for mescalito. When you first mention the mushrooms they are "possibly" *Psilocybe mexicana*, but later they are that species. Did you satisfy yourself that you were dealing with *Psilocybe mexicana*?

CC: No. The identification was tentative and "terribly unsophisticated." The definite identification in *The Teachings* is - an "editorial error."

GW: This mushroom would normally, in don Juan's hands, macerate into shreds, rather than a powder, whereas the hallucinogenic puffballs used in certain spots in the Mixteca would give a powder. Do you know where your mushrooms grew, whether in pastures, corn fields, bovine dung, on the trunks of dying trees, or elsewhere?

CC: Yes. On trunks of dead trees, but more often on decomposed shrubs.

GW: Don Juan ... seems to have spoken perfect Spanish and to have lived in many places-the U.S. and southern Mexico, perhaps elsewhere, as well as Sonora and Chihuahua. ... I ask this because the use of the hallucinogenic mushrooms has

never previously been reported in Sonora or Chihuahua. In fact they have never been found there, and one would think that if specimens were found, in the conditions prevailing in those States, it would be hard to find enough for ceremonial use, or at any rate to count on finding enough. There may be restricted areas known to the Indians where the Indians might expect to find them, places well watered and fertile. Perhaps the species is one not yet known to science and that grows in and country. It would be thrilling if you could pursue this further and make a discovery.

CC: Don Juan is a marginal man, whose personality has been formed by many influences outside the Yaqui culture. ... His mother was a Yuma Indian. He was born in Arizona, where he lived six or seven years before moving to Sonora. Some time after being deported from Sonora by the Mexican government, he went to the Valle Nacional area [of Oaxaca], where he stayed more than thirty years. Castaneda believes he went there with his teacher, "who must have been Mazateco." Castaneda has not been able to find out who the teacher was or where don Juan learned sorcery, but the fact that Castaneda must take don Juan to Oaxaca every year to collect the mushrooms strongly suggests where don Juan learned to use them.

The mushrooms are passed through the smoke of burning copal as part of an ancient ritual by María Sabina (p 124) (Riedlinger 1992).

GW: In the book they are always in powder, perhaps already mixed with other ingredients, are they not? Don Juan carried the powder around his neck in a sack. When he utilized them, they were smoked. The practice of smoking the mushroom powder is hitherto unknown to me. Had you brought back the powder, or the mixture in which the mushroom powder was an ingredient, we might have identified the species under the microscope, since there must have been spores present, and if the species is a known one, the spore suffices to place it. We now have almost a score of hallucinogenic species from Mexico.



CC: No - but Castaneda is sure he could obtain a very small amount, "perhaps a dab of it." If that would be enough for examination under the microscope, he could send it to Wasson before the end of 1968. [Although Carlos smoked the mushroom powder eight times after Castaneda wrote this letter, the promised "dab" never arrived.]

GW: "A man of knowledge" - did don Juan say, "hombre de conocimientos" or simply "un hombre que sabe"? In Mazatec a curandero is cho-ta-chi-ne, "one who knows."

CC: "Here" Wasson has given Castaneda "the most fascinating piece of information." ... Mazatec Indians call a curandero "one who knows." ... Though don Juan

used three different terms, Castaneda preferred “man of knowledge”.

From the Mazatec linguist Eunice Pike “You ask what Maria Sabina meant when she chanted, “Woman who stops the world am I.” Actually that is not the way I would have translated her Mazatec. The verb she used is se-nqui and the same verb is used with a cornerpost under a roof. I would prefer the translation “holds up” or more literally “Stands under.” So the sentence might be translated, “Woman who supports the world am I.” This is exactly the shamanic identification with the World Tree - the Tree of Life.

### **The Party of the Nahualli**

From the introduction to *The Sorcerer's Crossing*:

“Taisha Abelar is one of a group of three women that were deliberately trained by some sorcerers from Mexico, under the guidance of scion Juan Matus. I have written at length about my own training under him, but I have never written anything about this specific group, of which Taisha Abelar is a member. It was a tacit agreement among all of those who were under don Juan's tutelage that nothing should be said about them.” Carlos Castaneda (Abelar vii)

From “Being-in-Dreaming” Florinda Donner:

“With whom have you been holding hands?” “Carlos held my hand as we stepped into this room.” “There you are, Mr. Flores said, gazing at me with rapt approval, as if I had solved a particularly difficult riddle. Then seeing my still-mystified expression he added, “Carlos Castaneda is not only Joe Cortez, but he is also Charley Spider. ... “Who is Isodoro Baltazar?”. “Isodoro Baltazar is the new nagual” ... I looked at him pleadingly and said “Where is Carlos?” ... “Carlos, also known as Isodoro Baltazar went to visit” (Donner 101-2)

“Little by little, I began to acquire enough energy to dream. This meant I finally understood what the women had told me: Isodoro Baltazar was the new nagual. And he was no longer a man” (Donner).

“A third colleague, Carol Tiggs, was mentioned in Castaneda's latest book, *The Art of Dreaming*,” in which he described how, while “dreaming together” with him in a Mexican hotel room, Tiggs disappeared from this world, borne on the wings of “intent.” The “gales of infinity” blew her back to this dimension ten years later, when Castaneda discovered her wandering in a daze in Santa Monica's Phoenix Bookstore. Her improbable return had “ripped a hole in the fabric of the universe” (Donner).

### **The Tonal, the Nagual and the Luminous Bubble of Perception**

Two important aspects of conscious existence are captured by the Aztec or Nahuatl terms tonal and the nagual. These have a confusing history. Aguirre Beltran describes the nagual as “an animal spirit into which the priest transforms himself. The nagual only has the power of metamorphosis during the night. If it captured in the form of an animal and kept in such a situation until dawn it dies. In tonalism the animal and individual exist separately and are only united by a common destiny.”

Harner states of the tonal “This word referred especially to one's vital soul, and the sign of one's day of birth, which was frequently an animal. The tonalli was part of

an elaborate calendrical system with implications of predestination' somewhat like one's astrological sign (Harner 1980 63). By contrast the term *nagual* refers to a guardian animal spirit that is summoned through visualization or shamanic trance. One can thus possess both tonal and *nagual* animals. Harner practices a form of visualization exercise accompanied by regular slow beating of a deep drum to induce a shamanic trance state where a personal power animal is seen and caught in a journey through a tunnel to the underworld. It may also be danced, and can be sung in a power song. As it is a spirit animal, it may be of mythical form, like the *daimon* of the Greeks, and *genius* of the Romans. The power animal represents an extension of the shaman's psyche which is not bound by the physical confines and acts as a vehicle for supernatural will and energy. For María Sabina the term *soerte* coming from the Spanish *suerte* or luck means the fate and luck, destiny of one's life in a form which is also capable of leaving the human body as an animal, and causing dreams of distant places (Estrada 85). Harner also sees big dreams, powerful, repeated or prophetic dreams as visitations from the power animal. Such shamanic activities are often accompanied by affirmations from the world, such as synchronicities in which nature appears to respond through coincidence. These may vary from seeming accidents through to shared or prophetic visions.

The relation between the tonal and the *nagual* is refined by Castaneda into complementary principles of order and chaos, day and night, forming together the bubble of perception. Through the haunting and riveting allegory of an encounter with the sorcerers don Juan and don Genaro on many long nights staring into the shadows of the desert night, Castaneda illustrates a series of techniques and attitudes which function to summon personal power and set the apprentice on the impeccable path of the warrior. These include looking for affirmations in the happenings of the world, creating a mystery and uncertainty in our lives through erasing personal history, losing self-importance, and using death as a mortal adviser. Feeling and seeing are brought into the domain of the *nagual* by techniques which carry the attention beyond ordered form, using peripheral vision with crossed eyes including finding one's spot and the right way of walking, practising the gait of power, a way of feeling running in the night, and not doing, perceiving the complements of form such as the holes between the sounds of the night. The techniques of seeing lead to stopping the world in which the tonal is brought to a standstill.

The technique of setting up dreaming by looking at one's hands leads to interaction between the dreamer and the dreamed in which dreaming and waking events become intertwined. Castaneda also refers to the *nagual* as an ally, similar to an animal spirit, which may come lurching frighteningly into existence on long night seances in the desert.

By impeccably applying the will, our personal power will result in synchronicities in which the act of knowledge results in affirmations from the world around us such the cry of a bird, a gust of wind, an accident of fate, a prophetic or a shared vision. The fluid state of indeterminacy required by the *nagual* requires dissolving the fixed routines of life. A personal history is the defining form of our lives. The relationships we form and our work leads us into a state of fixity from which erasing personal history is pivotal in releasing us to the *nagual*. The power of this becomes very apparent when one cuts off one's personal history by travelling alone in a foreign land, as I found when I wandered India as a *sadhu*. Losing self-importance allows escape from the confines of the ego and its resulting drives and

desires so that we can concentrate on will. Don Juan shows Castaneda how to lose self importance beautifully by getting him to talk to some small plants and making him recognize them as equals.

Since all actions are controlled folly, by assuming responsibility for our actions, we cease to blame the world and can turn even misfortune into an act of power. By becoming a hunter we can use our cubic centimeter of chance to seek situations and events which provide extraordinary opportunities. The attitude of the hunter includes such tasks as feeling one's spot through looking indirectly with crossed eyes. By choosing to be accessible or inaccessible we can have either minimal impact on the flow of the world around us or attract its power. Using the two in alternation is essential in hunting power. Don Juan illustrates this by calling the spirit of a water hole through blatant acts, which later manifests as a vision of a beaked animal in some wind-blown branches. By disrupting the routines of life we remain available to power at all times. Using death as an adviser is a powerful technique which keeps us tuned to our mortality and hence our impeccability. Death is before us on our left side, and reminds us to live as if we were fighting our last battle on earth. Don Juan shows this to Castaneda through seeing a white falcon in Castaneda's childhood, which had escaped death through an act of power, and through forcing Carlos to kill a rabbit. In such a state we have no cause for regrets and by attaining power can adopt the mood of a warrior.

Seeing is a state in which visualization extends into clairvoyant vision as illustrated by seeing a plant which is actually hidden on the other side of a hill. Not doing involves perceiving in terms of what is left behind by form such as holes between the sounds or shadows underlying the features of the world. "Seeing is attained only when one has stopped the world through the technique of not doing". The ally is a power being similar to the power animal. Rather than being perceived by internal visualization, it is an apparition which may appear lurching from the wilderness when one has learned to see. By wrestling with the ally one is transported irreversibly into the super-reality of the sorcerer. A perspective from which nothing can ever be the same again.

Dreaming is similarly performed with a view to witnessing the reality of the waking world from the world of the dream. Looking at one's hands forms a link to remind oneself that one is dreaming and bring on a state of lucid dreaming. Repeated looking at the dream and back to the hands can act to help prevent one becoming again lost in the dream. A very deep and unexplored aspect of dreaming is the potentiality of the dreaming and waking realities to interpenetrate. The dreamer is expected to learn to witness 'real' events of the waking world and their dreaming body to become the double capable of astounding feats. Although the warrior experiences only one reality at a time either himself or the double, later in recollection linear time unfolds to reveal the web of experiences shared by the self and the double. "No sorcerer knows where his other is....A sorcerer has no notion that he is in two places at once. To be aware of that would be the equivalent of facing his double, and the sorcerer that finds himself face to face with himself is a dead sorcerer". "No one develops a double. All of us luminous beings have a double. All of us! The double is oneself and cannot be described in any other way". "Once it has learned to dream the double, the self arrives at this wierd cross-road and a moment comes when one realizes it is the double who dreams the self" (Castaneda 1974 48). The double is also a feature of Tibetan dream yoga and med-

itative techniques of India.

Castaneda relates accounts of don Genaro first dreaming his double. "I lay down on the side of the trail in the shade of a tree and I fell asleep. I heard then the sound of some people coming down the hill and woke up. I hurriedly ran for cover and hid behind some bushes ... I looked across the road to where I had been sleeping ... I was still there asleep! I touched my body. I was myself! By that time the people that were coming down the hill were upon the me that was fast asleep while I looked helplessly from my hiding place. But they went by me as if I were not there at all. I woke up by the road where I had fallen asleep. I can almost say that I was still looking at myself waking up, then something pulled myself to the side of the road and I found myself rubbing my eyes. I ran down the hill after them. I asked them if they had seen my friend sleeping by the side of the road. They all said they hadn't" (Castaneda 1974 65).

"...when confronted with unusual life situations...the warrior acts as if nothing had ever happened, because he doesn't believe in anything, yet he accepts everything at its face value. He accepts without accepting and disregards without disregarding. He never feels as if he knows, neither does he feel as if nothing had ever happened" (Castaneda).

"The bubble of perception exists for each sentient being from birth, and becomes increasingly dominated by the ordered tonal as we mature into talking beings, to the point where we can perceive only the manifestations of the tonal and those of the nagual are invisible, alien spirits, or the chaotic twists of fate. The subjective manifestations of the tonal and nagual, are reason and will. As shown in the diagram, reason is directly connected to talking and indirectly to feeling, seeing and dreaming, while will is in turn directly connected to these three and indirectly to talking. The task of sorcery constitutes opening the bubble of perception to the workings of the nagual through refining the will. While reason provides our description of reality often in binary opposites, will is the source of the unknown and of power. By shutting off talking through stopping the internal dialogue, it is possible for seeing, feeling and dreaming to shrink the tonal and manifest the nagual" (Castaneda 1974 253).

"The tonal is everything we know ... and that includes not only us persons but everything in our world. The moment we breathe the first gasp of air we also breathe in the power of the tonal. So, it is proper to say the tonal of a human being is intimately tied to his birth. ... The tonal begins at birth and ends at death. ... the tonal makes up the rules by which it apprehends the world. So in a manner of speaking, it creates the world, although it doesn't create a thing. The tonal is an island. There is a personal tonal for every one of us and there is the collective tonal of the times which unites us" (Castaneda 1974 118).

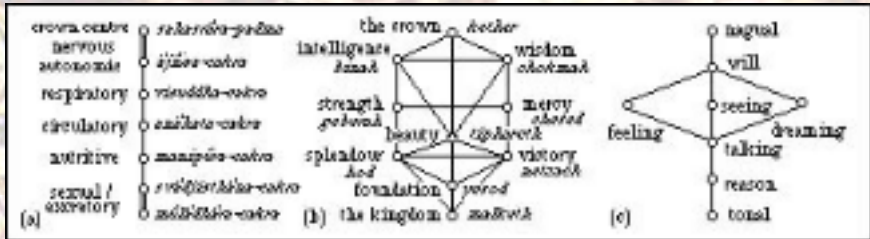
"The nagual is the part of us which we do not deal with at all. The nagual is the part of us for which there is no description - no words, no names, no feelings, no knowledge. The mind, the soul, even god are all items of the tonal. The nagual on the other hand is at the service of the warrior. It can be witnessed but it cannot be talked about'. The nagual is there ... surrounding the island, there where power hovers" (Castaneda 1979 124).

"At the time of birth and for a while after, we are all nagual. Then the tonal starts



to develop and it becomes utterly important to our functioning, so important that it opaques the shine of the nagual and overwhelms it. From that moment we begin making pairs. We sense our two sides, but always represent them with items of the tonal. We say that the two sides of ourselves are the soul and the body. Our mind and matter” (Castaneda 1979 126).

“For the sorcerer the Conquest was the challenge of a lifetime. They were the only ones who were not destroyed by it, but adapted to it and used it to their ultimate advantage. After the tonal of the time and the personal tonal of every indian was obliterated, the sorcerers found themselves holding on to the only thing left uncontested, the nagual. In other words their tonal took refuge in their nagual. The men of knowledge of today are a product of those conditions”.



(a) The Kundalini Chakras, (b) Tree of Life of the Kabbalah and (c) Castaneda's Bubble of Perception (King)

“The nagual can perform extraordinary things... that do not seem possible for the tonal. But the extraordinary thing is that the performer has no way of knowing how those things happen. The secret of the sorcerer is that he knows how to get to the nagual but once he gets there your guess is as good as his as to what takes place. ‘Would don Genaro feel like he's walking up the trunk of a tree?’” as Castaneda saw him appear to do. “‘No’ he said in a forceful whisper. ‘Not in the way you mean it’. ‘Did you yourself observe what don Genaro was doing in the trees?’ ‘No I just knew because I saw , the movement of the nagual gliding through the trees and whirling around us. The rest of the show was for you alone’. ‘When one meets the nagual face to face one always has to be alone.’ ‘I was around only to protect your tonal’. ‘What of someone who doesn't see?’ ‘He would witness nothing, just the trees blown by a wild wind perhaps.’ By whispering tonal and nagual messages in each of his ears, Castaneda splits and is led to fly with Genaro. ‘Leap, leap. Your legs will reach the treetops’. I could only distinguish an enormous mass of the most extraordinary lights. At times their glare diminished and at times the lights became more intense. I was also experiencing movement. The effect was like being pulled by a vacuum that never let me stop. I could see two separate worlds, one that was going away from me and the other that was coming closer to me” (Castaneda 1974 250).

The depiction of agaric - *Amanita muscaria* as the mainstay of the heavens, holding earth and sky apart, resembles the world tree of life of the Kabbala uniting the material and mental above and below, with the two sexes on either side. Here god as 0 represents the void, limitlessness and the great light complements the ten spheres of the tree, spanning 1 the conscious crown of kether through to 10 the material world of malkuth. The first 3 spheres represent the creative worlds and

the remaining 6 the world of form. There are many paths through the tree and the spheres also represent astrological and elemental symbols.

Having led Castaneda to the culmination of his apprenticeship, don Juan finally declares the sorcerer's explanation. He reveals that he has tricked Carlos into the warrior's path through obscuring the significance of some of the key lessons and flaunting other unattainable pseudo-tasks. In the new perspective, the central task is sweeping the island of the tonal clean of obstructing self-descriptions. Stopping the internal dialogue is pivotal to this quest, and is furthered by two key techniques, erasing personal history and dreaming. Erasing personal history is in turn strengthened by losing self-importance, assuming responsibility and using death as an advisor. The other pseudo-tasks such as seeing were really just descriptions of interaction with the nagual which cannot be learned, but served however to take Carlos out of his usual line of reasoning and by having to concentrate on the immediacy of don Juan's actions in the desert, he adopted the strategy of the warrior without fully realizing it (Castaneda 1974 269).



Stamping sticks (Reichel-Dolmatoff)

By cleaning the island of the tonal so that it is regrouped on the side of reason, the bubble of perception is polarized naturally into its tonal and nagual complement. By so freeing the tonal, it becomes capable of responding to the effects of the nagual so that the sorcerer can enable the sentient bundle of awarenesses that has become linked in the incarnation of the individual to become loos-

ened, not as completely as in death when the associations of the bundle separate again, but just sufficiently for the nagual to be witnessed by the tonal. The teacher and benefactor then work together to open the bubble, so that the totality of the self can be apprehended. "There was no longer the sweet unity I call 'me'. I was a myriad of selves which were all 'me', a colony of separate units that had a special allegiance to one another and would join unavoidably to form one single awareness, my human awareness. The unbending solidarity of my countless awarenesses, the allegiance that those parts had for one another was my life force... suddenly the "me" I knew and was familiar with erupted into the most spectacular view of all the imaginable combinations of beautiful scenes. Finally it was as if I were witnessing the organization of the world rolling past my eyes in an unbroken, endless chain."

In a penultimate gesture, Carlos is enticed to 'leap' into a hundred foot ravine, using fibres emanating from the bubble of perception at the navel. "Then some

strange mood overtook me and I jumped with all my corporeality. I saw as if through a fog the walls of the narrow gorge and the jutting rocks at the bottom of the ravine. I did not have a sequential perception of my descent, I had instead the sensation that I was actually on the ground at the bottom. Don Juan and don Genaro made me perform the leap over and over. I was watching some bushes when I heard a sudden noise, a good sized rock rolling down ... don Genaro throwing it. I had an attack of panic and an instant later I had been pulled to the site on top of the rock. "The secret of the double is in the bubble of perception which in your case was at the top of the cliff and the bottom of the gorge at the same time." "The cluster of feelings can be made to assemble instantly anywhere." "Think about your hat" he said. I had a shocking moment of realization.' During the same time sequence, Carlos had also been standing on the cliffs watching Genaro playing with his hat. "The leaps certainly were an uninterrupted unit, and so was Genaro's cavorting with your hat" he said. "Those two memories cannot be made to go one after the other because they happened at the same time" (Castaneda 1974 250).

The ultimate aims of the path of a man of knowledge extend beyond sorcery as the pursuit of power into the great voyage of witnessing the totality of this ineffable mysterious world and ultimately to depart from its confines altogether. Although this may seem a fanciful goal, it is in fact the journey that all mortal beings make during their incarnation.

In assessing Carlos, one should take account of the lesson of the Coyote. Castaneda is approached in the desert by a coyote and thus discovers that his power animal is the symbol of untrustworthiness. Just as don Juan tricked Carlos into embarking on the warrior's quest, so Carlos tricks the reader into the same journey through the allegory of don Juan and don Genaro, nevertheless the core lesson is an impeccable act of unparalleled power. However one should beware! Carlos is himself a flagrant indulger and the latter books descend from the sublime into the ridiculous.

The approach of the shaman, by contrast, is concerned with healing, rather than the pursuit of power or ultimate knowledge in itself. It thus has a less terrifying aspect of caring for life and the precious diversity of nature. Generally a shaman effects cure through entering the super realities of the sky and under-worlds and finding the supernatural cause of an affliction, (often sorcery). Power plants or more generally a hypnotic drumming rhythm are used to enter shamanic trance. Catching and breathing in a power animal, and sucking to remove a supernatural dart are two techniques distilled by Michael Harner from several cultures. He comments that "shamanism represents the most widespread and ancient methodological system of mind-body healing known to humanity, [being] up to twenty thousand years old with common motifs spanning the continents. A true master shaman does not challenge the validity of any one else's experiences. [He] never says that what you experienced is a fantasy" (Harner 1980 20). He points out that this tolerance of many realities differs from the pursuit of the single reality of science, but stresses that the shaman is like the scientist in their empirical investigation of the mysteries of the universe and its hidden causal levels and in their freedom from political domination. Harner identifies the shamanic trance with Castaneda's non-ordinary reality and the visualizations with seeing, which can adopt a number of techniques, including using the forms seen in a rock as an oracle to guide a solution to problems.