

Death and Dying in Traditional Shamanism

By Shaman Elder Maggie



In traditional wisdom and knowledge, life is a continuum that does not end at the moment of death. One of the most important traditional tasks of the shaman is to assist people who are either dying or the spirits of those who have died to make the transition into their new state of being.

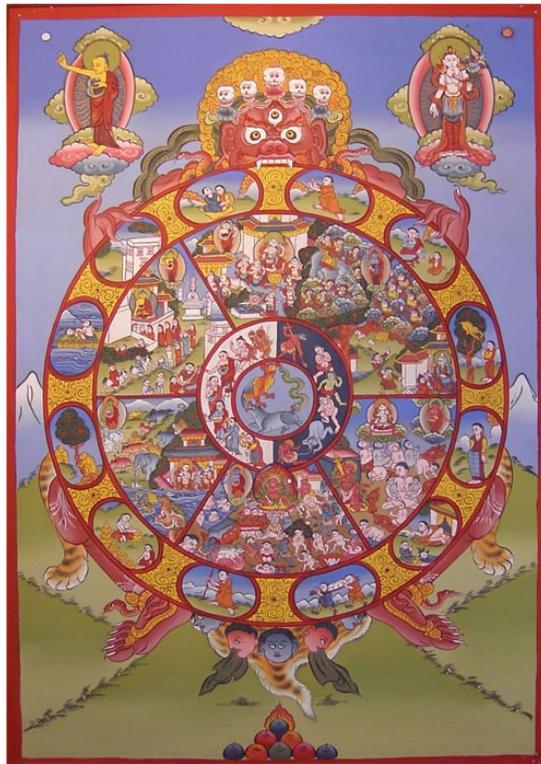
This body of practices is known as Psychopomp, from the Greek word psychopompos, which literally means 'conductor of souls'. In Greek mythology, the god Hermes served as the escort for the dead into the afterlife. This concept of a guide or intermediary between the living and the dead is a collective theme found in most religions and mythologies.



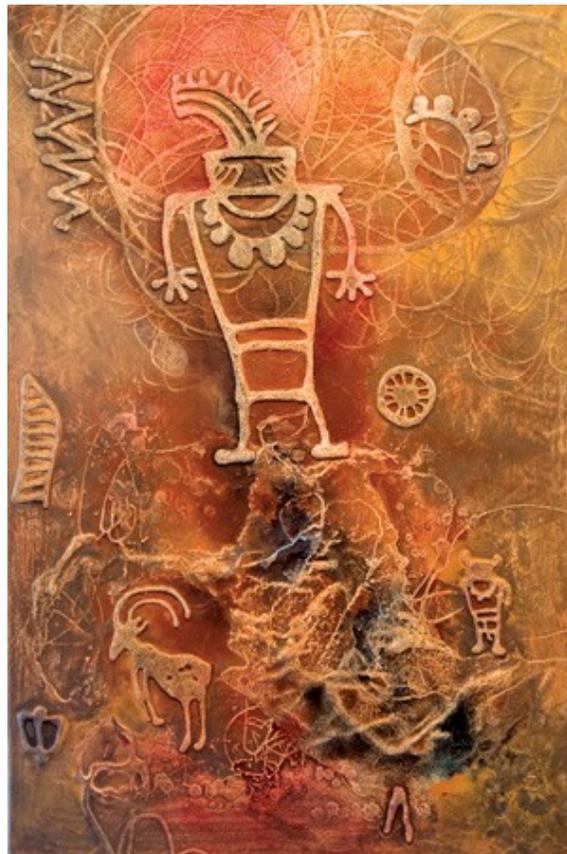
Death and Dying

In Traditional Shamanism death and birth are closely related to each other. My ancestors believed that a continual return to life after life was a way of experiencing Creator under different circumstances.

There are many 'cosmographies' of where souls go when they die, each dependent on the culture and society they originated in.



Shamanism is not a system of belief or faith, it is a system of knowledge, and is directly experienced first hand by the senses. The world that Shamans work in is not a consensus reality, i.e. what we have agreed is reality. The Shaman “sees” or experiences with all the senses, and is the mediator between the everyday physical world created by one’s own beliefs and the unordinary reality that contains All That Is.

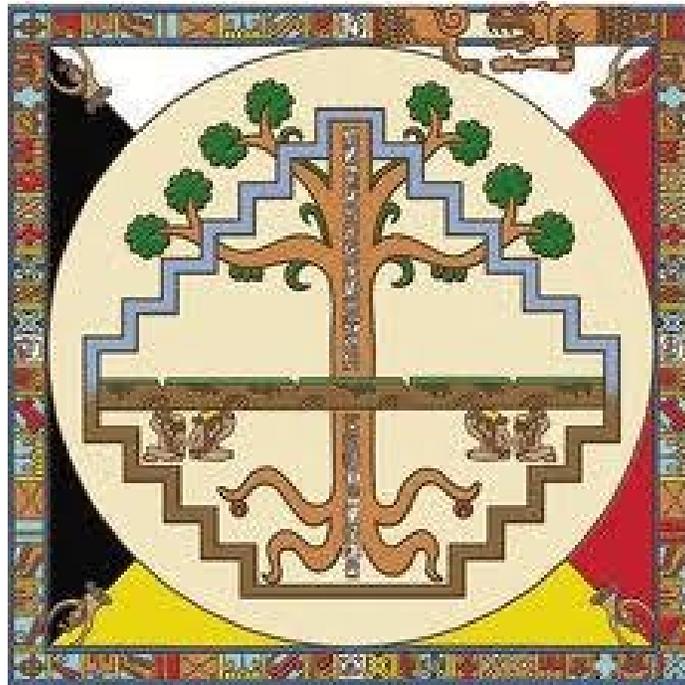


The roots of Traditional Shamanism pre-date recorded history. The earliest findings date back over 40,000 years. Shamanism is the ancestral healer of the human distorted reality experience.

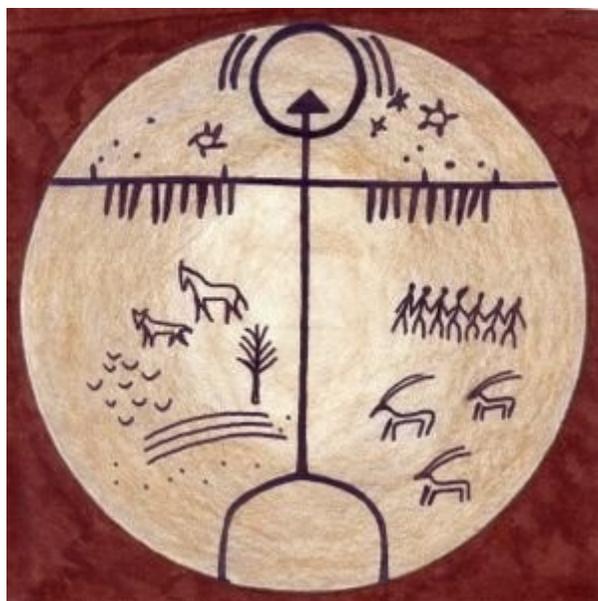


In the great panorama of creation, many cultures have structured and formed a navigable cosmography. The shaman navigates and journeys in a cosmos experienced as three great realms revolving around a great axis, known as the great

tree, or axis mundi. They are known as the, Upper World, Lower World, and Middle Worlds. Central to all these realms is the Axis Mundi, All That Is which is the central axis and connects these three realms.



These realms have been structured and implemented in ways relevant to our culture and the world we live in; in other words, are created by man. These three worlds have been renamed but are still present.



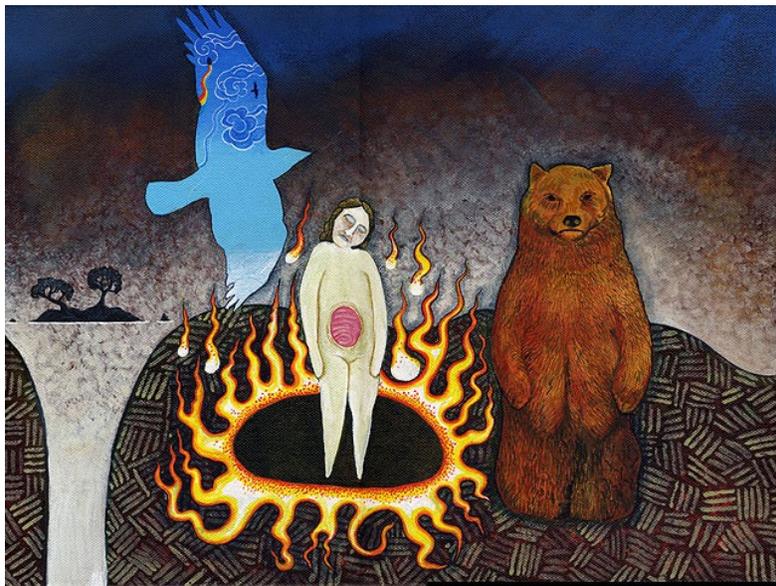
The Upper World is the realm of our ancestors, angels, enlightened beings and the spirit guides.



The Middle World is the conglomerate of all the self created realities based on what we believe individually and as a group that we call our physical world or Earth. Here also we find those people who have crossed over but have not found their way to the Upper Worlds.



The Lower World is, the traditional place of all the “man-created” non physical beings live here. The story of the Garden of Eden fundamentally underlies this separation. In that myth, a human makes a choice based on ego separation and we see the consequences. Well those things in the lower worlds are also those things that man has created through separation from Creator and are based on egotism and self importance. These creations of man, based on greed and hate and anger and fear, are dangerous and can cause a viral separation from Creator for the rest of us as well.



We have also lost, along the expressway to modern civilization, this concept of the transition from the microcosm of the personal human soul in the physical world into the great states of being in the macrocosm where we originated. People who die in sudden death, accident, confused, unhappy, drugged, people who lack power, murdered, killed in war, often disappear in the Middle World. Although they are able to, they choose not to make their transition, or may not have an awareness of where and who they are. The work of the conductor of souls is to help these deceased individuals make that journey. There are some Traditional Shamans who specialize in doing only this work.



The shaman would embark on a spirit journey, to find the person who had died in unfortunate circumstances such as an accidental death. They would start from the place that the person died, and in their experience of controlled expanded awareness, spiral outwards in concentric circles to find them. Once located, it is then the work of the shaman to help them make that transition to another place, and be welcomed and re-united with loved ones.



This is Soul Escorting, helping the deceased to another world. There is an enormous fear of death in our society, and a renewed interest in this kind of work could provide re-assurance to those who are dying, and their loved ones.



My point here is not to teach you how to help people cross over but rather to show you the reason to realize you are going to die.

What is wrong with human beings since time immemorial is that we think we are immortal and will never die. But even more injurious- that living a life based on this completely false belief is what comes with that; the belief that we can engulf this inconceivable universe with our minds.



I don't admire people who are living under these false beliefs. I talk to them and get to know them, sure. I see where they are coming from and I can establish points of reference with them sure.

But I view any kind of activity with people, no matter how minute or unimportant, as a battlefield. It is the human being who is the most dangerous being in the universe and when we have human beings walking around creating their own realities based on the beliefs that they are never going to die and can perceive the entire universe mentally.

That creates danger.



The darkness of such deluded beliefs and the ensuing beliefs that come from those create more darkness and that makes that person my opponent. The trick to being at ease with these people in my opinion is that I face them openly. I am impeccable in everything I think do and say. NO shaman would ever shy away from interaction. Many people do shy away from interaction to the point where even though they interact, they merely infer or deduce, in terms of their own psychological states, what is going on without actually perceiving what is really going on. They interact without ever actually being part of the interaction. “Always look at the man who is involved in a tug of war with you. Don’t just pull the rope. Look up and see his eyes. You will know then that he is a man, just like you. “



Perceiving energy directly as if flows in the universe is a unit of cognition that Traditional Shamans live by. We see how energy flows. And we follow its flow. (floating with me down the river of life!) If its flow is obstructed, we move away to do something entirely different (there are more than 3 ways to do anything)



Shamans see energetic lines in the universe. Our art, or my job is to choose the line that will take me in my ability to perceive, to regions that have no name (the higher planes). You can say that I react immediately to the lines of the universe. I see human beings as luminous balls, and I look inside you for your flow of energy. And I react to the flow of that energy inside you.



Scientists are interested in building more and more complex machines. But these are not what changes an individual's life course from within. Science is not geared to reaching the vastness of the universe as a personal, experiential affair. The stupendous machines in existence, or those in the making, are cultural affairs which must be enjoyed vicariously even by the creators of those machines themselves. The only reward for them is monetary.



And here let's look back to the beginning of this teaching again where I remind you that we are not immortal human beings. This fact is something you ought to bear in mind every second of your existence here. We are beings on our way to dying. We are not physically immortal, but we behave as if we are. This is the flaw that brings us down as individuals and will bring us down as a species someday.



The majority of people today are accustomed to fighting the thought of their death. And even when we come across facts of passing away of other people, we by no means try to imagine ourselves in their place. We assure ourselves that even if this is going to happen to us, it is still very long time ahead.



But, if each of us asks oneself now: “When will I die?” — the dates will be very far-off, although theoretically everyone knows that people die at any age.

So, Don Juan Matus suggested that we imagine that our personified death is always by our side. And if one looks back quickly over the left shoulder — one can spot it as a shade that has flashed. “At the moment, death is sitting next to you on the same mat, waiting for your mistake”, he said to Castaneda. And no one is aware of the moment when he is going to die, that is why we should not have any unfinished affairs.



Below is what Don Juan Matus said about death.

“...How can anyone feel so important when we know that death is stalking us?

... The thing to do when you're impatient is to turn to your left and ask advice from your death. An immense amount of pettiness is dropped if your death makes a gesture to you, or if you catch a glimpse of it, or if you just have the feeling that your companion is there watching you.

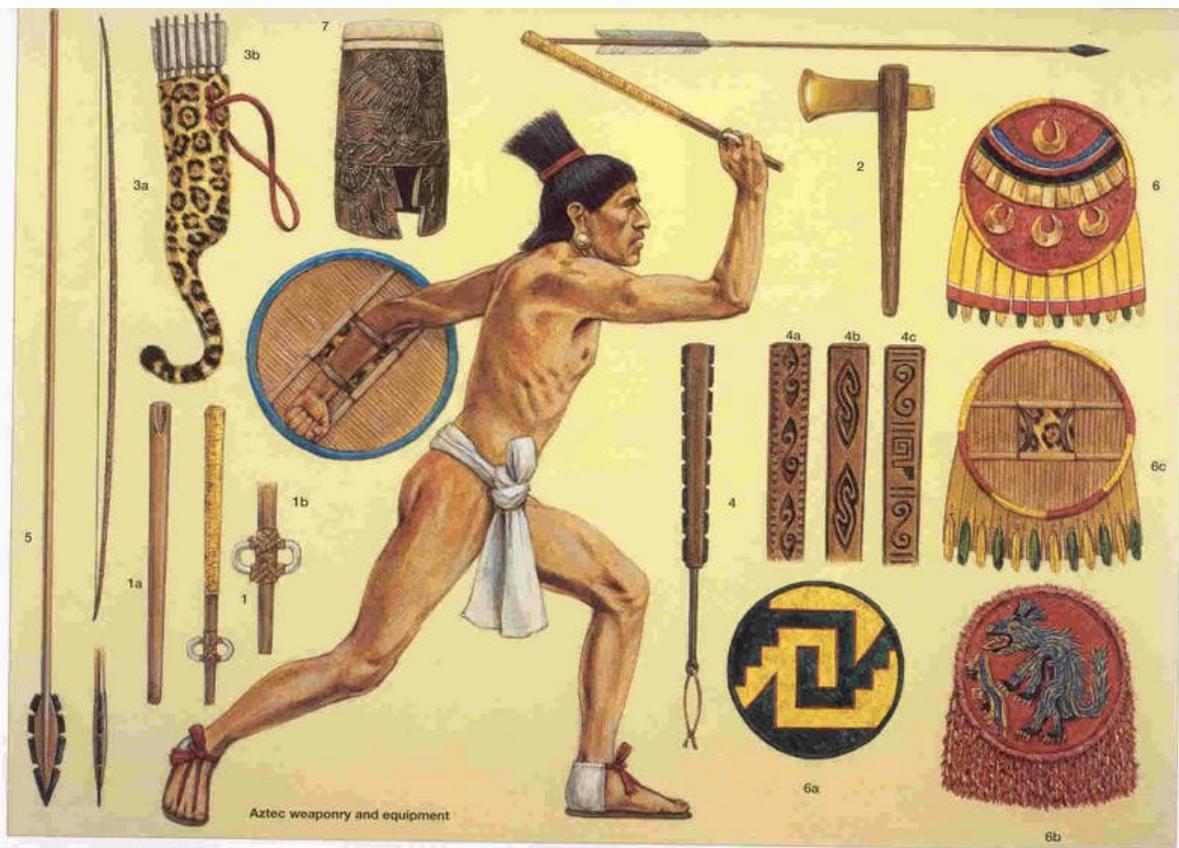


Death is the ...wise adviser that we have... One... has to ask death's advice and drop the cursed pettiness that belongs to men that live their lives as if death will never tap them.



If you do not think of your death, all your life will be just personal chaos.

“(A warrior) knows his death is stalking him and won’t give him time to cling to anything... And thus with an awareness of his death,... and with the power of his decisions a warrior sets his life in a strategic manner... and what he chooses is always strategically the best; and so he performs everything he has to with gusto and lusty efficiency.”



Life for a Shaman is an exercise in strategy.

Without the awareness of death, everything is ordinary, trivial. It is only because death is stalking us that the world is an unfathomable mystery.

You have little time and no time for crap. A wonderful state! The best of us always comes out when we are against the wall, when we feel the sword dangling overhead. ...I wouldn't have it any other way."



Lets do a short focusing exercise to become grounded and centered right now. Just take a few breaths in and out to completely relax your body. Allow your mind to be quiet.

This meditation will deepen your connection with Mother Earth and allow her unconditional loving energy to flow into you, developing your sense of grounding to the earth.

Allow yourself to be aware of your physical body. Focus on the weight of your body on your chair right now. Focus on the rhythm of your breath. Feel your connection to Mother Earth's energy below you. Feel her unconditional love and approval as she holds you in her perfect vibration.

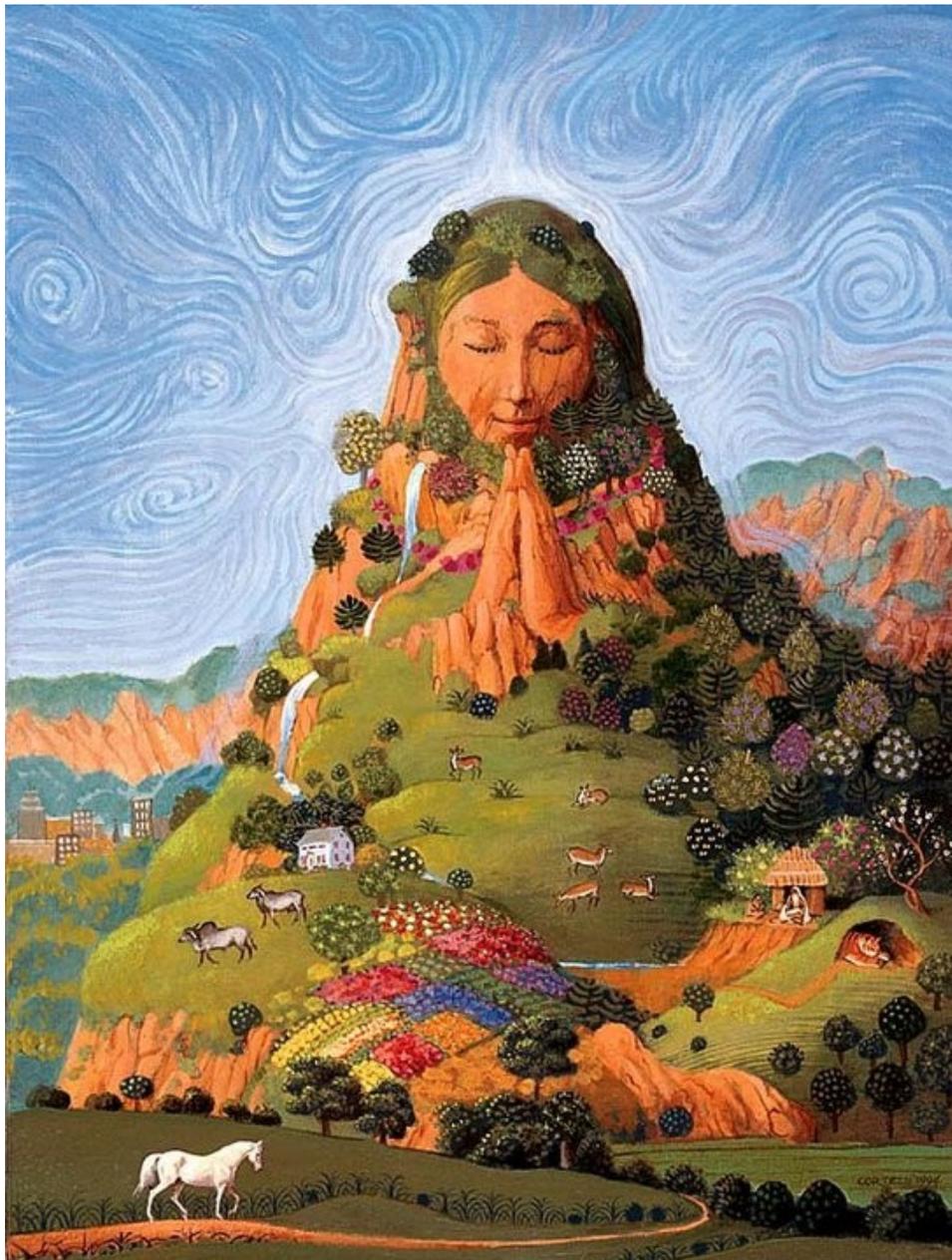


Focus inward, allowing your breath to deepen and slow. Allow the air you take in to travel to the very core of your body and relax you down to the smallest cell.

Visualize Mother Earth beneath you; beyond the floor and construction of the building you are now in, her dark earth accepts you. Envision growing roots deep down into that earth, and into the very center of the Earth Mother. Allow yourself to be in vibration with nature and absorb from your roots the warmth and loving energy that is your gift from her.



Fill yourself with this unconditional love and know that the energy is your gift, and will be there whenever you need to revisit this place. Feel the heartbeat of the Earth Mother beneath you and harmonize with her grounding vibration.



Allow your mind to be still and accepting of the wisdom of the Mother Earth. Be in the color red, and when appropriate, allow your Root Chakra to absorb it fully.



Be thankful and give reverence for the gift you have just received.

I don't know if you are like me, but, when I was a child, I thought that I was here on earth to live in peace, to be happy and to be in harmony with myself and with others. I soon realized that day to day reality was quite different. I travelled the world over in search of my childhood dreams. I can tell you this much: people who are truly happy and totally fulfilled are hard to find. If you are lucky enough to meet such a person, you must ask him his secret.



One day, body and soul aching, burnt by the sun and the high altitude, somewhere in the Himalayas, I came upon such a person... a very simple person. He didn't wear a long white beard, he didn't carry a sacred book in hand

either; he was just like you and me. But he fascinated me: in his look, there was love and serenity, in his manners, peace and in his interactions with others there was harmony. His answers to my questions can be summed up in only a few words: "My sanctuary is inside me..." This was the beginning of a beautiful adventure.

It's so simple...

Believe it or not, it's not necessary to go so far to find what is so close. We know it but we tend to forget that everything is inside us, paradise as well as hell. Everything depends on the arrangement of our "inner sanctuary".

Spirituality is the art of learning, day by day, how to decorate your inner world with qualities such as beauty, gentleness, strength, generosity... It's having real comfort inside oneself. It's cleaning up and getting rid of everything that is useless in your life or preventing you from making room for the Light

which purifies the atmosphere and brings out all inner virtues into full bloom from your inner garden.

The ingredients are simple: time, silence and love. You will have the pleasure of rediscovering someone that you had long ago forgotten: yourself. Not the person that runs around all day or that is constantly worried. But rather the real you, the person that was once happy and who used to laugh.

Everyday, I now make a special appointment with myself and I take a holiday with that special person. I must admit it, I enjoy this very much.

The Source

I won't tell you anything more. Words, in spite of all their beauty and their melody can't express the depth of such an ineffable experience. It's your universe, your inner

space. May it be filled with his Presence, with serenity, joy, good humor, strength and light!

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