

**Jörgen I Eriksson**

# **Seidr 5.0**

**A Guide to Nordic Shamanism**

**norrshaman**

Books by Jörgen I Eriksson in other languages than Swedish;

*English:*

**Seidr 5.0: A Guide to Nordic Shamanism**

**Rune Magic and Shamanism: Original Nordic Knowledge from Mother Earth**

*German:*

**Runenmagie und Schamanismus: Ursprüngliches Wissen von Mutter Erde**

*Estonian:*

**Ruunimaagia & Samanism**

Cover: The Völva, picture stone from Gotland.

Back: The sacred mountain Älleberg.

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## Seidr – a dynamic process

The first Swedish edition of *Seidr – A Guide to Nordic Shamanism* was published in 1985, and in 1988 it was followed by an expanded and revised edition. I was one of four co-writers of that book. The main thought behind it was to adapt core shamanism to the old, extinct *seidr* tradition, thereby re-creating Nordic shamanism on a new and modern level. By bringing a renewed *seidr* tradition into our own times we wanted to contribute creatively to the world. The book was very well received in Sweden and sold out within a few years.

I wasn't until 2004 that a new edition was published and now I was the sole author and publisher. Since this new edition in decisive ways differed from the earlier ones it was called *Seidr 3.0*. In this edition I wanted to put shamanism into a wider social, philosophical and evolutionary perspective. *Seidr 3.0* was founded on more than 20 years of experience and knowledge that I had gained by studying Nordic and Saami spiritual traditions, and it also signified a movement away from the rigid concepts of core shamanism.

Further travelling in Sápmi, the Saami areas of northern Sweden and Norway, and in the Navajo Nation in the Southwest of USA gave me unexpected amounts of new theoretical and practical knowledge which made a new expanded and revised edition necessary. It was published in 2010 – *Seidr 4.0*. During the seven years that have passed, the great cosmic dance has generated an abundance of new knowledge and it is time to include it in a new edition which distinguishes it from the earlier editions in substantial ways.

*Seidr 5.0* incorporates new perspectives on synchronicities and archetypes as well as impulses from quantum physics, alchemy and deep psychology in an

attempt to develop Nordic shamanism in an even more creative direction. It is also about time to publish a book on Nordic shamanism in English.

Shamanism is about finding and walking one's own way. The aim of this book is to serve as a manual and a guide to the strange world of the Nordic shaman – a world that is possible to enter for anyone who is willing to let go of self-importance and start walking in humility on Mother Earth.

Jörgen I Eriksson  
Spring 2017

## Using power

Shamanism has been called a pre-technological basic medicine for all of life's critical phases as well as a healing process for thought, body and landscape. But it is much more than medicine. It is a view of life, a way of thinking and living that is bent on balance and harmony – harmony and balance within the human society, between human beings and the surrounding landscape and its swarms of species and relations, and between the human society and the spiritual world, the invisible.

Shamanism is not a religion although it has a deep spiritual dimension. It contains a philosophy on the place and tasks of human beings in the cosmos. It also contains a number of different attitudes and methods that have been used in order to achieve knowledge, preserve health, heal sickness, find game, influence weather and wind and harmonize the relations to the processes and powers of nature.

Shamanism is tens of thousands of years old and originated from the needs of the societies of hunters and gatherers. Shamans have been depicted in rock art that is more than 30 000 years old and even older decorations on mountains and stones indicate shamanic activities. In many areas shamanism has survived well into the agrarian societies and we can find vigorous shamanic traditions even in today's world, the epoch of globalized capitalism, among indigenous peoples, e.g. Saamis, Inuits, Native Americans, Siberian peoples and Aborigines of Australia.

The word shamanism has its origin in the Tungusian language where the word *sa* means *to know*. The shaman is the one who knows. The terms shaman and shamanism have been used by anthropologists about phenomena the world over; phenomena that have certain common basic characteristics although they haven't been in contact with each other (at least as far as we know). *The one*

*who knows* has many different names in different cultures, e.g. *völva*, *viskvinna* or *visman*, *gandman* in the Nordic tradition, *noaidi* among the Saami, *angakoqq* among Inuits, *brujo* or *bruja* among Spanish speaking peoples. Since there are several hundred Native American languages these languages have hundreds or maybe thousands of names for shamans. The anglicized term medicine man or medicine woman is a very feeble translation.

Even if the names differ, shamanism is basically a similar phenomenon the world over. It is a way of thinking and living, a collection of ideas and methods that humanity has developed and refined over the millennia and that has survived since it has worked well.

Both men and women can become and work as shamans, even if anthropologists and other Western scholars primarily have been studying male shamanism. From their own prejudices they have come to the conclusion that shamanism above all is a male business and that women in some cultures weren't even allowed to become shamans. It isn't like that and it hasn't been like that. On the other hand we may find a strict gender division within the shamanic tradition of a given society. Then the male shamans will have no real insight into the activities of the female shamans and vice versa. But that is something quite else!

The old Nordic shamanism, the tradition of *seidr*, was primarily practiced by women. To be sure *Oden* was the mythic master shaman but he had learnt the essence of the art from *Freja*. Remnants of Nordic shamanism survived – however in a diluted form – right up to modern times through the nature healers, the old wise men and women.

A number of social and economic factors contributed to the weakening of the *seidr* tradition and even forcing it underground. Among these factors we find the patriarchal development of the *asa-tru* towards a more centralized “state religion”, the introduction of Christianity, the reformation, the witch trials, the urbanization, industrialization and development of the materialistic science of modern medicine and the pharmaceutical industry.

At the same time it is important to call attention to the fact that the *seidr* tradition from its onset was an *esoteric* spiritual tradition. It was never a mass phenomenon but was practiced and passed on by a small and knowledgeable minority.

From the 1980's and onwards we have seen several efforts to recreate the *seidr* tradition. The first organized attempt was made by people who were active in the Swedish shamanic network *Yggdrasil*. Nowadays a growing number of people are practicing and teaching parts of the *seidr* tradition, individually as well as collectively in separate groups. It is difficult to say how many *seidr* practitioners there are today, but considering all shamanic courses and ceremonies that have been carried out since the beginning of the 80's I guess that several thousand persons have got a taste of the tradition in one way or the other. However, it is difficult or even impossible to tell if that means that the new *seidr* tradition will be long-lived and exert any considerable influence.

The shaman is a man or a woman who through a voluntary or involuntary initiation and confrontation with death receives extraordinary abilities to control what is usually called "power". The methods to become *the one who knows* are more often than not filled by sacrifice, suffering and hardships in solitude. The classic shamanic initiation takes place via a severe sickness when the initiate, the chosen one, believes himself or herself to be very close to dying but also receives strong visions with knowledge of how to be healed and then be able to heal others. The initiate is usually very reluctant to become a shaman since it is associated with sacrifices and a great responsibility for your fellow human beings. But since the only alternative could mean death most of the initiates choose to accept the task.

The shamanic initiation can also be voluntary and contain elements of fasting, sleep deprivation and isolation in the wilderness while waiting to meet the spiritual teachers, the guardian spirits of the landscape and the individual guardian spirits. The initiate might also have to ingest drugs in order to call forth visions. Several different methods can be combined in order to dissolve the boundaries of the ego and bring about a rebirth with new and greater knowledge.

In some cultures the shamanic vocation is hereditary. Certain necessary characteristics and abilities are considered to be especially frequent within specific families. Saamis e.g. can talk about "fast blood" as a prerequisite of practicing shamanism. The shamanic knowledge can also be linked to a certain power animal, a totem, of the family. Usually only one of the sons or daughters is considered to be fit for the initiation and the job. It should be stressed that also in the hereditary traditions the initiate usually has to pass a process of suffering and confrontation with death.



The knowledge that is needed for the shaman's work as a healer and ceremonial leader is usually hidden from the majority. In order to attain this knowledge another way of *seeing* is required, a non-ordinary way of seeing, that makes it possible for the shaman to see the real quality of everything, the spiritual essence or inner form of everything. This clear-sightedness is associated with an altered state of consciousness which is attainable in many different ways. The shaman may be taught how to switch to the non-ordinary way of seeing with the help of a simple on-off button in his or her own mind. This was the simple way used by the Nordic nature healers and in those cases we might talk about a slight change of consciousness. But the shaman could also be taught how to achieve a deeper change of consciousness and leave the body making a soul journey into the non-ordinary reality. In this dimension of the world it is possible to meet beings that in the shamanic world view are known as *rådare* (approximately = rulers), guardian spirits, helping spirits, ancestral spirits and spiritual teachers, but also as procreators of sickness and destroyers. The shaman must be skilled enough to be able to handle these beings without pains.

Before continuing, it might be necessary with a few words about those spiritual beings. In order to be able to discuss the world of the shaman we need to move into the shamanic map of the cosmos and there we will be confronted by concepts of *spirits* and the like that the Western culture a long time ago threw into the wardrobe of superstition. However, the Western scientifically inspired map of reality is not superior to the shamanic map. We can't interpret the one map with the help of the other. They both describe parts of reality; like all other maps they are approximate and describe different aspects of reality. In this book I will continue using a shamanically inspired map and vocabulary. If the reader has problems using concepts such as *spirits*, try instead of thinking in concepts such as *energies* or *power* if that feels better. Further on I will show how we can move *beyond* all these notions.

No shaman can do without guardian spirits. He or she can have one or several guardian spirits or power animals as they are called in core shamanism. This indicates that these spirits often take on an animal shape. In the Nordic tradition the guardian spirits were called *fylgjur*, followers, and they could also appear in a human shape. In other shamanic traditions even trees, plants, mountains, lakes and the like could serve as guardian spirits.

As the name implies, the task of a guardian spirit is to protect "its" human being from sickness and other negative effects and give her power and knowledge to

manage the ups and downs of life. In shamanic cultures it is generally believed that if you have survived childhood it is a proof of the fact that you do possess a guardian spirit. Even today in Western cultures there is talk about guardian angels when human beings have survived accidents or severe sicknesses. Besides protecting “its” human being, the guardian spirits can assist with advice and answers to problems arising in everyday life. They can also accompany “their” human being on soul journeys.

Many grownups, especially in Western cultures, have lost their guardian spirits. A guardian spirit wants to be maintained in order to stay with “its” human being. It is all about an exchange of energy. The humans simply “feed” the guardian spirits with energy. That can be done in quietness by meditating on the power animal, or by singing the song of the guardian spirit or by dancing the animal. This is a freely choreographed dance where you welcome the power animal into your body and start moving around quite intuitively. The guardian spirit then becomes body and the human being simultaneously moves into the invisible, into the non-ordinary reality.

Helping spirits are another category of the invisible often taking the shape of birds and insects. Their task is to help the shaman, e.g. when healing or doing weather magic. But the helping spirits can also accompany the shaman on soul journeys and the boundaries between guardian spirits and helping spirits are fluid. In the Saami shamanic tradition it is said that the *noaidi* have different helping spirits for different journeys: a fish for journeying into the lower worlds, a reindeer for journeys in the middle world and a bird for journeying into the upper worlds.

Another category of invisible beings that shamans cooperate with is *rådarna*, the rulers. You can meet them anywhere in the landscape. Most of the phenomena in the landscape have rulers, e.g. mountains, brooks, springs, lakes. *Rådaren* is the spiritual essence, the spiritual quality of the mountain or the brook, being responsible for its existence and appearance. *Rådaren* can materialize in stones or in other tangible forms in the landscape – objects that are called *seitar* in the Saami tradition. Human beings can communicate with *rådarna* when entering an altered state of consciousness; as is the case with all spiritual beings.

*Rådare* can also be responsible for a wider geographical area and humans have given them different sorts of “offerings”, trying to obtain good luck in hunting or fishing. The notion of “offering” might take the thoughts in a wrong direction

and I prefer to use the words conversation or dialogue to define what really takes place during ceremonies for *rådarna*. The ceremonies are not about making offerings in order to appease *rådaren* of a lake or a forest. Instead it is a mutual conversation and exchange of energy where the fisher/hunter tries to achieve harmony and balance with *rådaren* and the place. What is important here is to let go of self-importance and to treat *rådaren* with respect and humbleness.

*Rådaren* can also be the ruler or master of an entire species of animals or insects. A hunter who wants to be successful e.g. when hunting moose must of course first talk to the master of the moose. Natural phenomena like the wind, the rain, the thunder, the cold, the heat can also have their own *rådare*. A shaman must learn how to talk to them in order to be allowed to share their inherent knowledge and power and possibly to influence them.

Spiritual teachers are beings in non-ordinary reality with important knowledge and the ability to appear in human or animal guise. If you make contact with such a teacher it is important to preserve this relation in order to have continuous access to knowledge that would otherwise be very difficult to attain. In both Nordic and Saami traditions, teachers of this kind usually reside in sacred hills and mountains, and they are considered to be spirits of deceased shamans or other knowledgeable people. Vision quests or ceremonies on such sacred mountains could be the best way to make contact with spiritual teachers.

In many shamanic cultures the world is divided into three dimensions – the lower world (which also contains the realm of death), the middle world (the spiritual aspect of ordinary reality) and the upper world (heaven). Each world can have subdivisions (most often three) so that the total number of worlds is seven or nine or even more. In Nordic myths we find nine worlds and they are from below upwards: *Nifelheim* (the abode of coldness and the horrifying but wise frost giants), *Helheim* (the kingdom of the dead), *Jotunheim* (the world of the “ordinary” giants), *Svartalvheim* (with the fertility beings of the earth), *Mannheim* (the world of human beings), *Ljusalvheim* (with the fertility beings of the light and the air), *Vanaheim* (the world of water and the *Vanir* gods), *Asgård* (the abode of the prevailing powers, the *Aesir* gods) and *Muspellheim* (the abode of heat and fire guarded by the terrific fire giant *Surt*).

The shaman can seek out different levels of non-ordinary reality depending on which knowledge that he or she needs at the time. With growing experience the shaman will have a rather clear picture of the landscapes in the other worlds, but

he or she can never know exactly what kind of beings that will show up or what will happen. That is part of the shamanic adventure!

Many anthropologists and even students of shamanism have interpreted the stories of the old shamans as stories that really are about different worlds. Much of the neo-shamanic theories are founded on this three-parting of the world, which implies that the shaman has to use different drumming rhythms and different mental images to direct the soul journey either “upwards” or “downwards”. But these soul journeys do not bring the shaman into other worlds; they simply expand the consciousness of the shaman which facilitates non-ordinary experiences. Steering the journey “upwards” or “downwards” or into different “worlds” is a way of tricking the expanded mind from meandering about aimlessly.

In his book *The Way of the Shaman*, Michael Harner makes great play of the differences between the upper and lower worlds, their different qualities and different sorts of knowledge and helpers. My own analyses of a great number of soul journeys that I have made during nearly 40 years of shamanic work show that there aren't any big differences between experiences in the different dimensions of non-ordinary reality. Is it possible at all to really tell if you are in the upper world and not in any of the lower ones? The boundaries between the different dimensions are very thin or even fluid or shifting and it is quite possible to move your consciousness from the “lowest” of worlds (*Nifelheim*) directly into the “highest” of worlds (*Muspellheim*). The worlds are not situated along a vertical line, or along the trunk of an imagined world tree but rather like a number of spheres intervening and transforming into each other in a huge cosmic dance.

My practical experiences showed that all worlds are connected and in fact are one and the same. More and more I have understood that one of the fundamentals of shamanic philosophy is that “all is one and connected”. There is only one world and when shamans talk about several worlds or layers they simply mean different aspects, dimensions and qualities of this one world. The talk about different worlds has been a metaphor and anthropologists don't seem to believe that so called primitive humans can think in metaphors and symbols.

The world is an organic whole and by expanding our consciousness (= making ourselves accessible to other dimensions) we can see, hear and experience aspects and qualities of reality that we can't perceive in our ordinary state of

consciousness. The terminology around this could be a bit tricky. My view is that talking about upper and lower worlds leads the thoughts in a wrong direction. Carlos Castaneda wrote in his books about the ordinary and the non-ordinary reality, and these are notions that are much closer to what this is all about. But also those notions are problematic since ordinary reality is a part of the greater non-ordinary reality, another aspect of non-ordinary reality. It is obvious that Castaneda shared this view. A lot of the practices that he had to perform under the guidance of his mentor don Juan Matus started out from everyday situations and places, such as a square in Oaxaca. By altering his state of consciousness, Castaneda experienced these everyday settings as quite different and alien, but still they are parts of the same whole.

The old Nordic definition of wisdom is “insight into the invisible” or “insight into what’s hidden”. The notion of “the invisible” or “what’s hidden” comes much closer to what this is all about. The invisible is simply other aspects of existence that is available to the wise men and women. This is what traditional Navajos call “inner form”. Sacred sites and mountains have an inner form, they have hidden qualities and powers that we can share in by expanding our consciousness, e.g. through a ceremony, a vision quest, a magical song or using a drum or a bullroarer. Also among the Saamis and many other “Arctic” and “Subarctic” peoples there is talk about “the Invisible”. When their shamans alter their state of consciousness they enter into this hidden and invisible dimension of the world, that is situated right here, right now and not in some distant upper or lower world. In this state the shaman sees, hears and feels the presence of spiritual beings like power animals, *rådare*, guardian spirits, ancestral spirits, *vittra* or whatever name you give them. Among other indigenous peoples this “hidden” dimension of reality is known as Dreamtime or The Great Reality. These are notions that I myself use more and more. Ordinary reality could then be described as embedded in Dreamtime, as an aspect of Dreamtime. It is Dreamtime that is the original foundation of everything that is.

I choose this way to view the world since it shows that the shaman is present in this world, that he or she is a creative co-participant in this world instead of being primarily active in “other” worlds. It is in this world, which is the only world, that shamans find their power and knowledge, it is in this world that shamans have their different spiritual helpers and it is in this world that they also have their tasks.

The shaman can use many different means to go into an altered state of consciousness, the shamanic trance that is a prerequisite of soul journeying: drums, rattles, bullroarers, power songs, runes, dancing, fasting, vision quest, *sauna*, sweat lodge, shamanic attire, visualization, drugs.

Trance is associated with ecstasy, but the shamanic trance is a very special kind of ecstasy since it is controlled with the help of a strong act of volition. The shaman's ecstasy differs in fundamental ways from more "ordinary" states of ecstasy, e.g. ecstasy on the dance floor, during rock gigs or in religious communities. In those cases I guess it would be more appropriate to talk about elation or friskiness.

Shamans use their will to steer the ecstasy and their own movements during ecstasy. In this way they manage to get through the more chaotic phase of ecstasy into a state that is serene and visionary. In this state the shamans will be accessible to knowledge and power. This is quite the contrary of struggling and fighting for power. Even if shamans attain their knowledge and power via suffering and sacrifice, it is important to understand that the decisive steps are taken in a state of inner stillness, of listening and observing. The aim of all the suffering and of the methods of ecstasy is to make the shaman receptive and accessible. Knowledge may come only if the shaman has the right attitude.

There is an ongoing shamanic renaissance. Among indigenous peoples the shamans have entered the stage in ways that were unthinkable before the 1970's. This is part of a larger movement among indigenous peoples for self-determination, liberation and cultural independence. Indigenous peoples have come forth as subjects of history and the rebirth and return of the shamans is part of this dynamic process.

Also among modern Westerners we can see a steadily increasing interest in the ideas and activities of the shamans. The causal connections are very complex. I will point to a few factors: feelings of discomfort in a more and more secularized and superficial culture of machines and entertainment; aversion to industrial repression of animals and nature; discontent with a materialistic medical service; indignation about oppression and exploitation of indigenous peoples; increasing possibilities in a globalized world to choose your own spiritual identity and way; better possibilities to take part of the spiritual and philosophical traditions of indigenous peoples via Internet and other modern means of communication.

I have already mentioned two of the individuals that have influenced the growing interest in shamanism among Westerners: Carlos Castaneda and his books about his period of apprenticeship with the Mexican shaman don Juan Matus and Michael Harner and his Foundation for Shamanic Studies that on a mass scale has taught Westerners some of the basic shamanic methods. Furthermore a number of other individuals travel around giving courses in shamanism. Some of these individuals falsely pose as Native Americans teaching from secret traditions that they claim are several thousand years old. Some others are really of indigenous descent but it is questionable if what they teach really is authentic spirituality. The really traditional wise men and women seldom or never travel around in order to diffuse secret and powerful knowledge.

If we can say that the movement among indigenous peoples is a source of joy to all mankind it is much more complicated to evaluate the new shamanic movement among Westerners. After all it contains a positive potential and motive force that might contribute to balance and harmony in the world, but I can also see considerable risks. Castaneda for instance has mystified shamanism and made it strangely exclusive without connections to the world and its condition. With Castaneda as a source of inspiration there is a great risk that shamanism turns into a big ego-trip, even if he keeps on preaching how vital it is to let go of your self-importance.

The Michael Harner method of mass-producing shamanic courses on an industrial scale contains dangers of considerable magnitudes. Although he has an admirable intention of preserving and disseminating important shamanic knowledge, he might in reality be conducive to impairing shamanism when he transforms it into a commodity to be sold among other commodities of adventure and entertainment. It is a good thing that many people can study and experience the world of the shaman but within Harner's core shamanism things seem to work all too easily. Core shamanism has developed into a kind of shamanism light for Western urban dwellers. Knowledge that originally was only available to those who were chosen by the spirits, which was attained through suffering and sacrifice in the wilderness and which was bound up with great responsibilities, is now available to anyone who can provide a nice little sum of money. How do these mass-educated new "shamans" use the knowledge? What responsibility for the condition of world do they take?

I was myself once taught basic shamanic methods by Michael Harner and this was of great benefit to me. So I want to emphasize that there also is a very positive dimension in his work. But my doubtfulness has increased during the years, both regarding the methodology and the phenomenon of shamanic courses as such. From the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties I taught quite a number of courses in Nordic shamanism, but gradually I grew more and more doubtful about this way of teaching and learning shamanism. So I put this part of my activities on ice and it wasn't until ten years later that I took it up again, in a new, different and more infrequent shape.

Of course it is possible to begin studies in shamanism by attending a course here and there but be on your guard against teachers trying to tie you up. There are no leaders or gurus in the shamanic world. Shamanism is democratic. It is founded on each individual's own spiritual experiences and responsibilities. In a sense shamanism is anarchistic since it is non-authoritarian and doesn't accept that some people will boss around telling others what to think and do. Taking part in a course might help you find suitable working methods, but most of the work within shamanism must however be done on your own and to the best of your own judgement. It is also possible to learn methods by reading about them, e.g. in this book. The senior teacher in shamanism is Mother Earth.

What you can learn from others, besides basic methods, is above all *attitude*. Then it is a matter of learning mostly all by yourself during vision quests, soul journeys and ceremonies but also in encounters with ordinary people in ordinary reality. Each shaman can only walk his or her own path. It is only you who can find your own way.

There is a risk that Westerners interested in shamanism might take part in the exploitation of indigenous peoples. Not in the sense of land grabbing or plundering of natural resources but as a way of exploiting the spiritual resources of indigenous peoples. Many traditional wisdom keepers are closely guarding their spiritual heritage and are most unwilling to share their secrets with Westerners. This attitude is quite understandable and we as Westerners looking for shamanic knowledge have no alternative but to feel our way back into the shamanic traditions that once were here in our own cultures. For my part this is about Nordic shamanism which is part of the same circumpolar tradition as Saami shamanism.



We Westerners must however keep in mind that we can never recreate the old shamanism that once was practiced in our own neighborhoods. We have to create something new of what is still left from and known about the old tradition. This renewal will at best result in a shamanism that is rooted in the old tradition and in our landscape and at the same time adapted to new times and new challenges. I will not conceal that we face big problems since our old shamanic tradition has been practically extinct for quite some time. We can of course be inspired by shamanic traditions that are still alive and well, but we can't copy them and we have to balance their impact with our own past. I am not a Saami or a Navajo and I can't start practicing *yoik* or the *Blessing way* ceremony or else I would turn shamanism into a spectacle.

But neither am I a 1 000 years old Scandinavian adhering to the *Asatru* religion so if I start sacrificing to *Frej* or *Oden* that would be just as much of a spectacle. There are definitely many shamanic features in the old Nordic myths that can inspire us, but *Asatru* is in itself not a practicable path for those primarily interested in the shaman's world. The varieties of *Asatru* that are practiced today are mainly to be regarded as contemporary constructions without any deep connections to daily life. In fact there has never been any systematized and uniform *Asatru* religion.

Another difficulty for those interested in shamanism is that some of the shaman's traditional tasks are not in great demand today, e.g. tracking game or finding the reasons behind bad fishing luck or failure of crops. To prevent and heal sickness is indeed still an important task, as well as making peace with the earth and all other species. Helping mankind to find a tender way of living on Mother Earth seems more and more to be the main task of today's shamans, even if there is only a small minority of human beings asking for this kind of help. However we don't know which future challenges that shamans will have to face or if they will have the guts and abilities to meet these challenges.

Anyhow the role of the shaman is different today than it was only a hundred years ago. This is true also for the social status of the shaman. Certain anthropological literature makes a great fuss about the shaman being a deviant person, but generally the shamans are well-integrated members of the community. Like everybody else they are working with reindeer herding, fishing, hunting, corn planting, weaving, sewing etc. In addition to that they also, on behalf of their community, have to perform important shamanic tasks in a responsible way.

With the best will in the world it is not possible to say that the Swedish society (or any other Western society) in an active or conscious way is requesting shamans and their skills. To be sure the society has an *objective* need of shamans who can help regulating the balance in relation to nature, but that is something quite else. Shamans in Western societies today are self-appointed in a wholly new way and that gives rise to delicate problems regarding tasks, self-image and the like. To build a shamanic network or group and pretend that it can serve the same purpose as the tribe once did in the old shamanic traditions is just a way of evading the problem instead of solving it.

Shamanism is today a much more individual phenomenon than it was in the old days. Certainly it will make things easier if you have a circle of like-minded people to discuss with, to drum with and to make ceremonies together with, but the really important thing is how you implement shamanism in your own everyday life. Shamanism is an everyday technique that can be used in all sorts of situations. The more you use this power and knowledge for good purposes, the more power and knowledge you can get back. Besides alleviating the suffering of other human beings modern shamans can do ceremonies in order to promote balance and harmony in the world or use the energies of shamanism to become active in the crucial questions of our time. Another task I can see is to develop the ideas and philosophies of a shamanic world view as an alternative to the destructive excesses of industrial civilization.

Shamanism is not what many anthropologists have described it as: a collection of methods or techniques. It is a world view and a way to think and live where a spiritual dimension permeates everything worldly. Traditional shamans live in cultures that can be characterized as deeply spiritual. The earth is regarded as a sacred, living being – our mother – for whom all species are responsible. All species have their special obligations in the great web of life. One of the obligations of mankind is to renew the world through ceremonies. It is our responsibility not to use up the earth as a resource but live in such a gentle way that survival is forever guaranteed all other species. This earth organism, The Great Mother, is characterized by an immense diversity; it is teeming with animals and plants but also with spiritual beings. The task of human beings is to promote the preservation of this diversity.

Even if shamanism is a comprehensive system of ideas and actions it differs in crucial senses from all religions, which have dogmatized and formalized the contacts with the spiritual sphere so that only certain appointed or salaried

functionaries are in charge of the relation between humans and gods. Shamanism gives *everybody* a chance to experience a spiritual world without any intermediary agents.

The power that the shamans learn to control and work with is not good or evil. The power just *is*. The shamans however choose to use the power for the best of their community, mankind and the earth. The knowledge and power is *from* Mother Earth and *for* Mother Earth. Those who choose to use the power against others or to enrich themselves will become black magicians and run the risk of having to pay a high price for this choice. Those who send evil will get evil back – often sevenfold stronger, as it is said in shamanic traditions.

The aim of *Seidr 5.0* is to be a source of inspiration and spur the reader on to the shamanic path – a path that the shaman has to find individually and walk on his or her own. Those, who have learnt the basic methods and walk in humbleness are guided along the path by constantly new knowledge. Right attitude is the be-all and end-all of shamanism. And the only authority that “certifies” shamans is Mother Earth!

## Traditional thought - Shamanic philosophy

If you want to work with shamanic methods it is imperative to acquire certain insights into the philosophical foundation of the shamanic world view and activities. This is a philosophy that permeates the totality of life in indigenous cultures. Traditional peoples, however, hardly use the notion of *philosophy* and we are here not dealing with philosophy as a separate and detached branch of intellectual work, as philosophy can be defined in Western academic tradition.

Indigenous (or traditional) philosophy contains the patterns and ways of thinking that are present in all of life's activities. We find the essence of this philosophy in myths, ceremonies, rules and attitudes regarding human relations and all sorts of life-sustaining activities such as reindeer herding, corn growing, hunting and fishing. This is what traditional Navajos call *fundamental law*, i.e. the basic and informal regulations of all human relations.

Indigenous philosophy regulates the relations of human beings to the surrounding world in a non-dominant way and contains an attitude of balance between mind, heart and hands. Thinking is seen primarily not as a cerebral activity but as an activity that comprises the whole organism, including abstract thinking as well as emotional reactions and bodily sensations. Traditional thinking is rooted not only in the human body but also in the landscape.

The following points represent my attempt to sketch the essential features of a shamanic philosophy – the setting for all practical descriptions of shamanism that will follow later on in this book.

### 1

The world is one and everything is connected.

### 2

The world appears as diversity but beneath and beyond diversity there is unity.

**3**

In each separate phenomenon we find the whole. The whole is in all its parts.

**4**

The world consists of wholes and is a cyclic process of creation, where the wholes in their turn are founded on complementary opposites.

**5**

Complementarity is a basic element of everything, e.g. male/female, life/death, construction/destruction, “evil”/”good”.

**6**

The whole implies that the world is complete, perfect. The whole is always larger than the sum of its parts.

**7**

Complementarity is a prerequisite of all development. Opposites make the world move.

**8**

The world is basically good and sacred. All sites are sacred but some sites are more sacred than others.

**9**

That a site is sacred means that it holds a quality stemming from the beginning, the primordial creation; that is has a function and meaning to the existence of the whole and that it has a spiritual essence.

**10**

The spiritual essence of each site and each phenomenon in the landscape could also be called its *inner form* and has been known under other names such as *rådare* and *ancestral spirits*. This essence is immortal and indestructible; it has consciousness and is possible to communicate with.

**11**

The energy that flows through the whole world and gives life, thought, speech and the ability to move and act to all living beings is usually called the holy wind or *önd/anda*.

**12**

The four cardinal directions as well as zenith and nadir contain several sacred

dimensions, inner forms, colours, vibrations and qualities that are filled with sacred power and knowledge.

**13**

All time is one and the same and sacred, but some times are more sacred than others and their sacredness can be intensified in ceremonies.

**14**

Time is alive and cyclic, circular. It has no beginning or end. What has already happened is present in the now, which also contains what is to come.

**15**

Circular time is always the same, nevertheless always different and renewed.

**16**

In each moment we can make contact with the first moments of creation, with Dreamtime, which takes place simultaneously and constantly and contains the beginnings of the world as well as the now.

**17**

Each moment is a gate into infinity. In each moment we have the possibility to move into Dreamtime and touch upon the sacred.

**18**

The innate state of the world is beauty – a beauty characterized by diversity and balance in diversity. Diversity is the essence of the cosmos.

**19**

All beings exist in a common and all-embracing web, *Urd's* web, where everyone and everything reciprocally affects one another. Everything is alive and this energy of life is in everything and everywhere.

**20**

Everything is shaped of the same elements as everything else in the cosmos.

**21**

Everything has life, everything has the might to talk, to breathe, to learn and guide.

**22**

Everything has a cause and often several causes and is connected to everything else. Furthermore everything has essentially the same cause.

**23**

It is the same power that is behind the existence and movement of everything. It is the same power that is behind the movements of the clouds and behind my own thoughts, movements and activities.

**24**

In the multitude of beings no one is superior to anyone else. The human being is neither superior nor inferior to other beings.

**25**

All beings have souls and these souls are parts of the primordial force of life, the holy wind, *önd/anda*.

**26**

In order to play a positive role in the diversity of existence, the human being must act with humbleness towards everything that lives and grows. This is about tuning into harmony and balance with the animals and the plants and with everything that is and grows. It is a process that takes its time and can't be sped up.

**27**

To walk in beauty is to live in alliance with nature. The beauty is in the dynamic relation between things, between human beings and things and between human beings and all other beings. Beauty is realized when the forces of the world are in balance.

**28**

The world demands our participation. All species have mutual tasks and duties and when all beings mind their own businesses there will be balance in the world.

**29**

Indigenous peoples have a spiritual relation to land and water. The sacredness of the landscape is an emotional experience of unity with the place. The landscape is a central part of the individual's self-image and the landscape comprises also other forms of life, both visible and invisible.

**30**

The landscape is a social, ethical, physical and mythical space that is jointly created by the human beings and all other beings in a reciprocally and constantly ongoing interplay.

**31**

Human beings live in an ocean of relations with plants, animals, stones, trees, mountains, rivers, lakes, weather systems and other natural processes, visible as well as invisible.

**32**

The myths are maps helping human beings to navigate the oceans of relations.

**33**

The myths show how to live in the world. They point at potential problems, at what is possible to change and at what is not possible to change, and they leave it to the creative processes of human beings to solve the problems.

**34**

The landscape can be seen as a huge library where geological, physical, chemical, historical, ethical and mythical knowledge is stored. This knowledge is part of the common world heritage.

**35**

By taking part in the holy wind that is everywhere and runs through everything human beings can have access to all knowledge that is to be found in nature, manifest as well as hidden.

**36**

The knowledge is already complete. Everything there is to know about the world is already known by the world and is contained in nature itself since the world is organized in accordance with this knowledge. Human beings can take part of this knowledge but they can't expand it since it is already complete.

**37**

The landscape also contains emotionally charged personal histories, stories and visions and it is possible to take part of their contents.

**38**

The landscape expresses itself in ceremonies, songs, stories, dances and symbols and within them we find knowledge that is necessary for establishing the right relation to the place and its non-human beings.

**39**

The ceremonies, songs, stories, dances and symbols contain manuals to the



landscape and show ways that humans can use in order to take part of the knowledge and power of the landscape.

**40**

Ceremonies, songs and dances belong to specific places. To perform them is a way to remember and renew the relations to the landscape.

**41**

Through ceremonies human beings can stay attuned to the rhythms of the spiritual world. The ceremony is an exchange of energy and responsibility between different life forms and between humans and nature.

**42**

Through ceremonies human beings enter into communication with different natural processes and fulfil their commitments in order to preserve harmony, balance and diversity. In the ceremony human beings enter a sacred time, Dreamtime, and a sacred space where we can interact with the spiritual essence of all other beings and with the spiritual world.

**43**

The ceremony is a way to create beauty in one's own thinking and within oneself, which is a prerequisite of bringing this beauty into the world through words and deeds, thereby contributing to the creative process of the world.

**44**

Nature is the prime source of knowledge. Every place and every moment is loaded with knowledge and power and all power and knowledge comes from Mother Earth.

**45**

In every place and at every given moment we have potential access to the power and knowledge that is needed to attain insight and freedom.

**46**

Learning and insights are depending on the experiences in specific places, where specific life processes can be observed and where specific knowledge is stored that can be accessible to those who open their minds.

**47**

Coming to knowledge is an active dialogue with nature where you enter into nature, getting to know it and all its processes from within.

**48**

It is not a matter of searching for power and knowledge, or of finding it but of making yourself accessible to it.

**49**

By making yourself accessible you will be open to power and information that is otherwise hidden.

**50**

By being accessible to knowledge and power you will be a participator and co-creator in a cosmic base of information.

**51**

Human beings can gain knowledge and learn from *all* nature by silently listening and paying attention.

**52**

Everything in nature has something to teach human beings. Everything has a message. Through creative participation human beings can open up their bodies, souls and minds to the world and receive knowledge directly from and by nature.

**53**

Wisdom is insight into what's hidden *and* into the world. The shaman who is aiming at harmony and balance seeks insights both in the ordinary *and* in the non-ordinary reality.

**54**

Wisdom implies recognizing and understanding the forces that constitute both the non-ordinary and the ordinary reality.

**55**

The shaman is someone who knows; someone who knows how and someone who sees, but he or she is not the only one who does.

**56**

The prerequisite of gaining insight is right attitude.

**57**

The shaman seeks a mental method as simple as possible to gain insight; a simple on-off button in his/her own mind.

**58**

To gain insight you have to be a soft human being whose self-importance and ego doesn't block the path to knowledge and power.

**59**

The shaman reads nature. The shaman grasps the forest, grasps the moose and participates in the competence of other species.

**60**

The shaman knows that the animals and the plants are professional survivors that have accumulated knowledge during several million years; knowledge that is accessible to other species in a reciprocal exchange.

**61**

Knowledge is relationship and relationship brings responsibility and obligations.

**62**

When the shaman is looking for answers he/she knows that the answers will come sooner or later. The shaman is like a satellite dish; prepared to constantly and everywhere receive knowledge and power from all sorts of directions and traditions.

**63**

It is power and knowledge *in itself* that is essential to the shaman – not the different forms that power and knowledge chooses to reveal itself in. Therefore the shaman is primarily interested in working with and experiencing the energy *directly* instead of via symbols.

**64**

In *ordinary* reality the shaman meets his/her teachers in everyday life and in nature. It's all about realizing who one's teachers are, what they can teach and then making oneself accessible to that knowledge.

**65**

In *non-ordinary* reality the shaman meets his/her teachers through traditional mind-altering methods such as ceremonies, vision quests, walkabouts, drumming, *yoiking*, dancing, fasting, and sleep deprivation.

**66**

In order to be accessible to power and knowledge you have to bite off the threads of fate.

**67**

Biting off the threads of fate means to liberate yourself from ways of thinking, from power structures and hierarchical conceptions that those around you, the society and the state have forced upon you and that you have internalized during adolescence.

**68**

As an individual human being you can liberate yourself and attain a state of freedom that goes beyond the limitations that you yourself or others have put on you regarding your role and place in the world.

**69**

The shaman takes part in ordinary life as everybody else but is not dependent on it or chained to it. He/she lives fully but is also prepared to leave this life at any moment.

**70**

The shaman uses aloneness and death as advisors since they are important sources of wisdom and power.

**71**

While one is alone in all decisive phases of life the shaman is not afraid of this insight but transforms the fear of the vast emptiness of the cosmos into a positive driving force towards wisdom.

**72**

The shaman realizes that there is no inherent purpose in or all-embracing plan for the cosmos. You simply have to relate to the world as it is. The shaman touches the world with restraint but with quality and *makes* life meaningful through his/her striving for knowledge and power.

**73**

The shaman's striving for freedom is a striving for perfection in inner and outer sense, i.e. individual and social perfection.

**74**

Perfection is to the shaman not a state but a continuous and dynamic striving for liberation, in outer and inner sense, at an individual and a social level. It is *the striving in itself* that is essential.

**75**

The striving for freedom liberates the creative powers of the individual and of society. In this striving the potential of liberation in shamanism will be of a *real* significance to each and every one.

**76**

The shaman wants to come to terms with the world. It is not a question of fleeing the world or dominating the world but of coming to an *understanding with the world* through a conciliatory and humble attitude.

**77**

The shaman's attitude of understanding does not mean that he/she is accepting injustice, oppression and exploitation. That would amount to fleeing the world. The shaman is a *creative co-actor* in the world aiming at harmony and balance of the whole – on a global and cosmic level.

**78**

Everything is connected, everywhere and always, and the subject influences the observed object. Energy and matter are flowing phenomena and mental energy can influence matter. The power of thought might influence political and social processes.

**79**

The shaman is however humble and realizes that he or she cannot influence everything. We can wish, we can pray but we can't always *decide*.

**80**

The shaman's wisdom implies knowing what causes things, what he/she might influence, what he or she can't influence and where and when it is advisable to intervene. Of course it is not always wise to intervene since the consequences of an intervention are very hard to anticipate and even could be negative somewhere else in the great web of *Urd*.

**81**

Sometimes wisdom implies that you admit that you don't know the cause of things and possibly might never be able to tell. Sometimes you should simply let things be. Wisdom will tell you when. Sometimes not-doing is better than doing.

**82**

The method that the shaman employs in order to attain his/her goals, to as far as possible rule one's fate and to creatively influence relations can be summarized

in the notion of *unbending intent*. It is an act of concentrated effort of will carried out in an altered state of consciousness.

### **83**

Magical effect on the world is possible only if the shaman has established inner harmony and is in balance with the great cosmic movement. Magic is acausal; there is no simple relation of cause and effect in magic. It occurs only in *synchronistic* situations.

### **84**

When you have achieved balance with the world, with all that is and all that isn't, then it might be possible to intervene in and exert an influence on the world. This includes balancing yourself also in relation to what is negative, destructive and chaotic.

### **85**

The shaman tries to be free in relation to different categories in the ordinary reality such as nation, class, religion, party, associations, subcultures etc. True, the shaman like all other humans participate in a number of different everyday situations but does not *primarily* define himself/herself as part of them. That would be to make oneself unfree and incapable of going beyond those categories.

### **86**

The shaman is creative and innovative and has a dynamic relation also to his/her own tradition. Even if the shamanic methods that have been developed during thousands of years are functional, the shaman is neither restricted nor bound by them.

### **87**

The shaman is primarily not interested in the different methods or even in the mental states you can attain with their help. He/she is interested in the power that is manifested in this state; not in the forms into which the power chooses to manifest itself.

### **88**

The shaman can move beyond the methods and is then no longer working with the different material and spiritual manifestations of power (power animals, spirits, *rådare* etc) but *directly* with *power itself*.

**89**

The traditional methods of the shaman is one way of attaining this state, but the methods can also be an obstacle to attaining this state.

**90**

The shaman realizes that all beings just like himself/herself at heart understand their existence as a privilege and a blessing and that they seek to live to the full. All beings have the right to live and to make their own decisions.

**91**

The shaman strives for liberation, i.e. living to the full and fully developing his/her potential. He or she strives for perfection and aims at walking in beauty in order to make both his/her own existence and the existence of the world beautiful.

**92**

In order to attain this perfection the shaman must let go of his/her own self-importance since the ego could be a hindrance to the shaman's striving for beauty.

**93**

The mythical stories and philosophies of indigenous peoples present alternative ways of viewing and understanding life. They present a map of reality that is qualitatively different from the Western scientifically and economically defined map. These different concepts of reality express complementary aspects of existence and can exist side by side.

**94**

The philosophies and thinking of indigenous peoples also present paths of knowledge and ways of acting different from Western thinking.

**95**

The knowledge of indigenous peoples forms a complete whole embracing all dimensions of life. It is about all sorts of things from cultivation, hunting and fishing to understanding of the spiritual world. Primordial philosophy is another sort of map of the cosmos than we are used to in the Western civilization. In certain respects it corresponds better with the essence of the cosmos than the Western map does.

**96**

Traditional knowledge is closely connected to the landscape. Therefore this

knowledge does not disappear even if the human beings who carry this knowledge disappear. In spite of 500 years of colonization, war, genocide and all but extinction, the indigenous thinking is still alive in the Americas. In our own landscape much of the traditional knowledge of our ancestors can still be found.

**97**

Knowledge belongs to the landscape and is constantly present and possible to take in for those with the *right attitude*. When time and place is right knowledge can come back through ceremonies and dreams and individuals can share in the knowledge through presence in the landscape and by being accessible. Knowledge does not belong to any particular group of human beings or any particular culture. It belongs to Mother Earth and it is part of the landscape.

**98**

The essence of the philosophy of indigenous peoples is present in the interplay between them and the landscape and in their relations to the spiritual dimension. The heart of the philosophy can be found in myths, ceremonies, rules and attitudes regarding their livelihood, e.g. reindeer herding, corn growing, hunting and fishing.

**99**

Traditional spirituality is intrinsically practical. Its concrete aim is to achieve harmony and balance. It is about a *technology of spirit*.

**100**

The right to land and water also implies the right to religious freedom. Protecting the landscape is also a defense of individual integrity. The task of the human being is to live in the right way *with* the landscape.

**101**

The linguistic concepts, the filters of consciousness that determine how human beings understand reality, are made up in a very complex way where landscape, economic system, social upbringing and conventions as well as everyday attitudes are important constituents.

**102**

There is a close connection between landscape and language. The language is part of the landscape. Traditional thinking stresses the sacredness of words –



they originate from the holy beings of Dreamtime – and the effects of words. What is spoken also comes about. When we speak we co-create reality.

### **103**

The indigenous languages are, in quite another sense than the Western languages, in harmony and balance with the landscape. They are a part of and an expression of the dynamic dance of the landscape. Therefore they are not possible to use for large-scale manipulation and exploitation of nature.

### **104**

The traditional emphasis on prayer as a central element of ceremonies is founded on the attitude that everything is in a state of becoming and changing. Prayer is simply good words spoken with an open heart and a clear mind with a desire to take part in the creative processes.

### **105**

We Western human beings can liberate our thinking by consciously *rejecting* what we have learnt and by *reorganizing* our way of perceiving the world. This is about abandoning and transcending Western thinking and inwardly establishing *liberated zones* as a stage in our striving for liberation. In this way we can contribute to a transformation of the world.

### **106**

The greatest challenge to indigenous peoples is how to live in the modern society and translate their culture into modern circumstances and surrounding. The greatest challenge of modern society is how to open up and learn from fundamental elements of traditional thinking.

### **107**

It is important both to the indigenous peoples and all mankind to preserve traditional cultures. They promote dignity of the indigenous peoples, diversity of thinking and diversity of technologies. Diversity is the essence of beauty.

### **108**

Traditional thinking regulates the relations of human beings to the environment in a non-dominant way. It is about the relations between humans, between humans and animals, between humans and plants, between humans and the landscape and between humans and the spiritual world.

### **109**

Traditional thinking contains an attitude of balance between mind, heart and

hands. Thinking is not exclusively an activity of the brain but a total activity that comprises abstract thinking as well as emotional reactions, spiritual experiences and bodily sensations. Traditional thinking is not only rooted in the landscape but also in the human organism, in the body.

### **110**

Primordial philosophy represents a knowledge that is attained through interaction between body, soul and thought and all aspects of nature, in both an ordinary and altered state of consciousness.

### **111**

Ritual and ceremony are two ancient techniques to attain this interaction and knowledge.

### **112**

Traditional thinking represents a collective dimension of the notion of *walking in beauty*. This means to live with dignity and with respect for all other beings. One example is the arctic way of having one's meals; in an environment characterized by scarcity no one leaves the table completely full or still hungry.

### **113**

In traditional thinking collectivism is a basic dimension. The individual is defined through her relations in a larger context – family, clan, tribe, landscape. The individual is defined through her part of the greater whole and can't be detached from the whole.

### **114**

Respect is another basic dimension of traditional thinking; respect for all that is unusual and different; tolerance towards all that is deviant. The existence *is* diversity and difference.

### **115**

One of the paradoxes of the modern world is that indigenous peoples can live in a modern way and at the same time keep their way of thinking and traditional attitudes. This is expressed in statements such as: *We have always been here, we are here and we will always be here.*

### **116**

When indigenous peoples have managed to dynamically adapt to changed external circumstances they have displayed great improvisatory skills.

**117**

The shaman's medicine implies reestablishing harmony and balance that have been disturbed – within the individual, between the individual and the community, between the individual and the landscape and between the individual and the spiritual world, the invisible.

**118**

As a supplier of premises the shaman also anticipates what is *in the making*; that which will manifest itself in *what will be*. The shaman represents a sort of provisional utopia for his/her society. Shamanism contains an implicit “political” dimension and in my version this dimension is explicit.

**119**

The task of the shaman could perhaps be described as discovering the lost technology of the spirit and give it a form and a language that is adapted to our modern world thereby pointing to ways to transcend the framework of industrial civilization.

**120**

When human beings act in order to establish and/or preserve harmony and balance in the world and enter into creative relations with other species and a spiritual dimension they consciously abolish a deep-going alienation that has plagued human societies for a long time. This is to fulfil the cosmic “obligations” of mankind.

**121**

That important elements of the alienation of human beings can be abolished doesn't mean that all contradictions and all suffering are abolished but it is the beginning of a creative process where mankind exercises just enough force to renew and regenerate the relations to other human beings, to animals and plants and to a spiritual dimension. This is a way of preserving peace, prosperity and harmony.

**122**

The world is today dominated by the globalized capitalist system of production and consumption which is characterized by wage labour and the production of commodities. This system has dragged also the indigenous peoples into its sphere and the majority of human beings are forced to earn their living by selling the only thing that they own, namely their labour. The majority of human

beings in the modern world are wage labourers, i.e. proletarians according to the original definition by Karl Marx.

### **123**

The only overall “meaning” of globalized capitalism is producing value through the production of constantly new commodities, material and immaterial. It is the urge of capital to constantly increase its value that is the driving force of the system.

### **124**

The capitalist system creates prosperity as well as poverty, democracy as well as dictatorship, but it doesn't create meaning. Above all it depletes the resources of the earth, upsets the balances of Mother Earth and constitutes a threat to survival in the long term for mankind and other species.

### **125**

Capitalism is founded on exploitation of the labour of human beings, on exploitation of other species and the resources of the landscape in a way that brings it in fundamental opposition to harmony and balance. If capitalism can't be abolished it must at least be curbed and regulated to make it possible for mankind to walk in beauty.

### **126**

The counteracting forces that capitalism gives rise to, such as class struggles, have in many cases been able to improve the conditions of the working class. The class struggle has reformed and streamlined capitalism but in no way abolished its fundamental character and its violence towards Mother Earth and other species that is incorporated into the system and is a prerequisite to the system.

### **127**

Capitalism also gives rise to utterly reactionary and destructive opposing forces, which are hostile to life and use terror as a working method. Those forces bring even more unbalance and disharmony into the world, further increasing suffering and alienation.

### **128**

Capitalism causes alienation on quite another scale than previous social systems by reducing human beings to labour force, animals and plants to objects of exploitation and nature to supplier of raw materials and waste deposit.

**129**

To abolish alienation in a shamanic sense implies abolishing not only the alienation in relation to the process of production and to one's own activity in production as well as to the commodity, the result of the production, but also abolishing the *inner* cleavage, the alienation in relation to nature and all of its visible and invisible inhabitants. This inner cleavage might have originated as early as during the Neolithic revolution when the majority of mankind took decisive steps into a new system of production, from gathering and hunting to farming and cattle breeding.

**130**

There are no simple answers to why these steps were taken. Life as gatherers and hunters gave the human beings an equal and meaningful existence with a pleasing material standard. It might have been substantial and sudden climate changes in connection with or after the latest glaciation that made more and more people change to a stationary way of living with farming and cattle breeding as a base.

**131**

This transition benefited some individuals and groups and already 10 000 years ago we can get an inkling of the patterns that have shaped today's world with a far gone division of labour, economic exploitation, political and religious institutions of power, gender discrimination, wars, epidemics, destruction of environment and resources.

**132**

After several million years of evolution human beings are biologically and psychologically adapted to a "Paleolithic" way of life; a life in relatively small groups in an intensive interplay with everything else in nature, including its spiritual dimension. This includes a diet that is optimally adapted to the human organism – with no cereals, very little, if any, dairy products and, definitely, no refined sugar. The modern Western society seems to be an evolutionary blind alley.

**133**

In the Paleolithic epoch, which covers more than 90 percent of mankind's existence on earth, human beings were able to develop their physical, mental and spiritual potential in full. We know that the brain capacity of human beings was fully developed already 200 000 years ago. This means that the human

beings living at that time had at least the same capacity for thinking as we have (plus a lot of intuitive and organic thinking that we seem to have lost). In the light of this the transition to farming society was hardly necessary, desirable or worth aiming at. The big question is not why it took so long before human beings started farming but why they did it at all.

### **134**

In the globalized capitalist system of production and consumption human beings don't get any outlet for their physical, mental and spiritual potential. Instead life in the modern system imposes a number of restrictions and inhibitions on their creativity.

### **135**

Those restrictions and inhibitions have to a high degree been internalized by modern human beings, who in this way have turned into their own oppressors. They are their own inner prolonged arm of the state, the church and big business. The consequence can be anxiety and other mental and bodily ailments. Modern man is hardly walking in beauty but rather in chaos and confusion.

### **136**

Human beings are also plagued by a more deep-going alienation, an existential cleavage that humans experience in their cosmic separateness. Traditional cultures have treated this existential anxiety with different ceremonies in order to bring humans into contact and interplay with Place and with Dreamtime.

### **137**

Alienation can be abolished through *activity* in the landscape that will create balance between mind, heart, hands and landscape. This is all about tuning oneself into balance and harmony with *all* dimensions of the landscape.

### **138**

One way of attaining this balance is to establish relations *directly* with the wild animals and plants in order to partake of the wisdom and experience of these professional survivors – wisdom and experience that are based on millions of years of evolutionary development and adaptation.

### **139**

In order to establish balance with nature and its spiritual dimensions you need to be *present* in nature, you need to interplay with nature, you need to live and think *with* nature and *be with* the processes of nature. To walk in beauty implies

that you actually walk *in the landscape*. Activities in the landscape such as gathering, fishing, hunting, cultivating potatoes, picking berries, chopping wood etc. can be a prerequisite to balance between mind, heart and hands, which in turn is a prerequisite to walking in beauty.

**140**

If we *in deed* abolish alienation we can also abolish our *spiritual* alienation. Then the spiritual dimension is no longer something that is separate from our world. Spirit is the world and the world is spirit. Our activities in the world will then be spiritual. The spiritual universe will manifest itself in this world and the religions can wither away.

**141**

The liberation of mankind is something much bigger than the liberation of *mankind*.

**142**

To achieve the full liberation of mankind a series of the fundamental categories of the capitalist system (=social relations) such as wage labour, commodity, property, capital, state and nation must be abolished.

**143**

All these categories involve a certain form of slavery. Those who are set to wage labour are not free. Those who produce or buy commodities are not free. Those who own property are fettered to and subordinate to the property. The more property human beings acquire the more they will be dominated by it and the more alienated they will be.

**144**

To abolish wage labour doesn't mean that *work in itself* is abolished but that work is liberated from its social straitjacket and is transformed into free activity that is carried out together with and in interplay with other humans for our own and common good.

**145**

To abolish commodity and property doesn't mean that things are abolished but that they are liberated from their straitjackets as *commodity* and *property*. Liberation doesn't mean that only human beings liberate themselves from their fetters but that also things are liberated from *their* fetters. Then they will cease

being commodities and property, instead becoming *utility goods* or *free things* that exist in themselves and for themselves and not for human beings.

**146**

To abolish the state, and as a consequence also the nation, is a process that can't come about by causing a new oppression, another state or an "anti-state" but only by abandoning the state as an organizational form, replacing it with a free association between humanity and all other species.

**147**

In *Manifesto of the Communist Party* Karl Marx describes communism as "an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." In shamanic thought this thesis is applied also to other species and natural processes.

**148**

In the free association of the shaman the liberation of all species is a prerequisite to the free development of mankind. In order to implement the liberation of mankind it must also include the liberation of the animals, the plants, the landscape, the mountains, the minerals, the rivers, the lakes, the oceans, the weather systems and the whole earth as a living organism. A natural democracy will be developed guaranteeing the rights of all species, natural processes and Mother Earth.

**149**

But liberation must go even further and also involve a *spiritual* liberation. To belong to a religion is a form of slavery. A human being who is walking in beauty has no need of a religion. There is not and cannot be any central spiritual authority. Life in itself is sacred and living and acting in the world will in itself be a spiritual activity. In that way we can say that a human being who is walking in beauty is *living* her "religion".

**150**

Liberation in this profound sense also implies liberation for the spiritual world. God is liberated and cease existing as "God". "God" becomes instead what in traditional thought is called *all my relations*, i.e. all my relations to everything else in the surrounding world. All these relations are present in the landscape and are part of the landscape which thereby recovers its divine essence.



### **151**

The human being will then be able to reach such a high level of knowledge that she becomes one with the sacred processes of creation and abolishes the boundary between humans and “the divine”, between humans and the holy beings. In this process the shaman is a guide and companion, the one who can help others to take the step into Dreamtime.

### **152**

Such liberation implies that mankind enters a “Paleolithic” state. This doesn’t mean that mankind goes back or backwards. Instead mankind transcends the evolutionary rather short era of the agricultural and industrial civilizations and becomes reconciled with nature and the fundamental energies of the great cosmic spiral dance.

### **153**

Certainly the human beings in such communities will need a great number of technical facilities and also centralized and common production of vital utility goods. But all this, including the production of waste, will be an integral part of the great cycles of nature. To lay down precise outlines for such a future cannot be done today or by us. The result would just be a reflection of our own limited way of thinking and of the phenomena of our modern world since this is the world we know.

### **154**

But from this reasoning I nevertheless venture to summarize a dignified shamanic way of action in five short rules:

- Think in beauty.
- Come to terms with the world.
- Become a creative participant and co-actor in the world.
- Put things right.
- Walk in beauty.

## Sacred sites, sacred times

The earth is sacred as everything else in the cosmos. But at certain sites the sacredness is concentrated, manifesting itself in unusually shaped trees and stones, in mountains, waterfalls and lakes. The shape of sacred sites, however, need not be deviant from the surroundings. They can on the surface appear quite “normal” at the same time as they contain quite special energies. Shamans can find such places through developing their intuition and learning to *see, feel and hear the power*.

Many sacred sites are mythically and traditionally connected to certain spiritual beings. They have been regarded as the abode of the guardian spirit of a special area or as the abode of the spirits of deceased ancestors or of especially powerful deceased shamans. There are thousands of testimonies of sites like this in all shamanic traditions, not least in the Saami and Nordic traditions.

A great many sacred sites have been amplified by human beings. This has been accomplished by erecting stones, building stone circles or labyrinths, carving runes or leaving sacrificial gifts on the sites. These actions are characterized by reciprocity. The human beings who take part in this reshaping of a site or perform ceremonies on a sacred site will receive energy through these actions. Simultaneously they will give energy to the beings that are already present at the site. This is a reciprocal give-and-take and a joint process of development. We also find examples of sacred sites that have lost their charge when humans stop performing ceremonies there.

During four decades I have explored and performed ceremonies at a large number of sacred sites in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Estonia, England, Ireland and USA. These places display energies of amazingly different qualities.

The three great mounds at the very famous site of *Gamla Uppsala* have between them quite different powers, which can be connected to their old popular names: the mounds of *Frej*, *Oden* and *Tor*. Those who enter this area in a humble way can experience all sorts of energies, from a strong “earthly”, female and soaring energy to a more “heavenly”, male energy aiming downwards. This is a site where you easily can enter an altered state of consciousness.

Other ceremonial sites can be dominated by female, balancing energies, like *Uppsa kulle* in *Södermanland*, which was renamed to *Frigga's breast* by members of the shamanic network Yggdrasil in the 1980's. At other sites you might meet beastly, ecstatic and almost destructive powers that can be so strong that sensitive persons may find it hard even to stand upright.

A common view in shamanic traditions is that there is a kind of hierarchy among sacred sites. If we start at the “bottom” of the scale we find places of power that are close to one's home or village and that are used by individuals or families. At those sites one can draw inspiration for the daily life. Next in place we find places of power that are common to a clan or a village and where people meet at special times, e.g. in order to perform joint and more powerful ceremonies connected to the cycles of the sun and moon, to planting and harvesting and to marriages or name-giving ceremonies for children.

Next level is represented by regional places of power where large groups of people have met once or twice a year, e.g. in connection with the summer and winter solstices. Such regional sacred sites can of course also be used by individuals who are seeking knowledge through vision quests or other individual practices.

At the top of the list of sacred places we find the mega-sites that have been used by people in a very large area. Examples of such places are *Grand Canyon* in Arizona, *Stonehenge* in England, *Newgrange* in Ireland, *Goseck* in Germany and *Ålleberg* in Sweden. *Seite* is a Saami term for a sacred site or a formation of stones or even individual stones and maybe we could call those mega-sites *stor-seitar* (stor = great) or *mega-seitar*. A few examples of *stor-seitar* in Sweden are the isle of *Blå Jungfrun* with its stone labyrinth in Kalmarsund, the mountains of *Omberg* by the lake Vättern and *Stenshuvud* by the Baltic in Skåne, *Rösaring* with its 500 meters long ceremonial way in Upplands-Bro and *Runsa* ancient castle in Upplands Väsby.

Often strong mythical stories are connected to those *mega-seitar*. One example is the enormously high esteem that the *Hopis* and other pueblo peoples hold towards Grand Canyon, which in their creation myths is the site where they entered this world. Another example is the story about the goddess *Álla* and her twelve sleeping blue knights in the mountain *Álleberg*. It is still told that those knights will wake up and defend the country when it is faced by a great danger.

How do shamans use the sacred sites? They have two main aims: to acquire knowledge and to perform ceremonies in order to contribute to harmony and balance. The knowledge can be acquired in several ways. Partly it is about staying at the site for a certain time and in a state of quiet listening and observing, taking part in the wisdom that is owned by *the place in itself*. Partly it is about receiving knowledge from the beings that have their abode there, taking part in the spiritual essence of the place. There are special ceremonies that the shaman can perform with the explicit aim of making contact with certain spiritual beings. This contact can be attained when the shaman sacrifices something, drums, dances or sings a power song and then pays careful attention to what happens.

Sacred sites are sites that to the shaman represent a transition to a spiritual dimension. Shamans talk about the crack between the worlds or gates (or vortexes) into Dreamtime. Through those cracks/gates, knowledge trickles out for those who have the right attitude and are prepared to receive it. And through those cracks the world can also in auspicious circumstances be influenced. This means that sacred sites are excellent places for performing ceremonies. The ceremonies can deal with all sorts of situations: to bring rain to the plants in just the right quantity and at the right time; to make the hunting game thrive and multiply; to make sicknesses heal. The ceremonies can be performed individually, together with a patient, together with other shamans or with average community members.

The healers in the Swedish peasant society often performed their healing work on sacred sites, such as springs, strangely grown trees, boulders or waterfalls.

There is an intricate and complex relationship between sacred sites and sacred times. Even if the landscape as a whole is sacred the sacredness is intensified precisely at the sacred sites. And even if all time is sacred the sacredness is intensified at certain moments. There are special days, or phases, that have a heightened essence. This is often connected to the position of the sun or the

moon, e.g. the summer and winter solstices, and the spring and autumn equinoxes. They are junctures when the crack between the worlds is considered to be wider than usual and thus favourable to spiritual activities.

Human beings can heighten the sacredness of time just as they can heighten the sacredness of a place. This is exactly what happens in a ceremony where we step out of the ordinary worldly time (which according to Western thought is linear) and into a circular and living time, Dreamtime. Everyday life is suspended. If we perform the ceremony at a sacred site the effect will be increased. And if we furthermore perform the ceremony at a sacred time, such as the winter solstice, then we have created a maximally favourable situation for acquiring knowledge and influencing the world and the web of *Urd*.

Many sacred sites that haven't been used for ceremonies for a long time have fallen into oblivion and are in a state of decline. The sites may also have been polluted and desecrated in different ways. Such sites are first of all in need of a tidying up in the proper sense of the word, but in order to fulfil their original purposes they also need ceremonies that can supply them with balancing energies. In order to find out what a disharmonious site needs in order to be restored to harmony and balance it might be proper to make a soul journey trying to contact the guardian spirit of the place and ask for information. The prerequisite of attaining this knowledge and then also implementing it is that you are in harmony and balance. It might thus be necessary to prepare yourself with a harmonizing ceremony before you take action.

How will knowledge come to you? Through paying attention to and listening to the place with your inner seeing and listening. Traditional Navajos talk about the little wind as a messenger from the holy beings, whispering information into your ear from behind. What happens when we communicate with the invisible at a sacred site is that we talk with other life forms – besides the spiritual world also members of the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom and the animal kingdom. It is the little wind that brings the messages between the human beings and the other dimensions. To express myself in a more Western way I could say that we have altered our state of consciousness so that new and maybe unexpected synapses and quantum leaps can occur in our brains. A traditional shaman would say that he/she has talked to the spirits of the place with the help of the whole of his/her organism, including its invisible dimensions.

Certainly the spiritual powers that the shaman works with are present everywhere but the shamanic work is easier to do at sacred sites. In my Swedish book *Heligt landskap* (= Sacred Landscape) more than 100 such sites in Sweden are described. “New” sacred sites can be discovered by those who walk about in nature with all senses open. A good way is also to visit places that have a special status in the local tradition or have names that point to old ceremonial usage. Listen, feel and pay attention: is the power still there or is there something that you can do to help restoring it?

Even if you make soul journeys in your living room or in a sound proof basement you do need a sacred site where you can talk with The Great Mystery; where you sacrifice the only thing that you can sacrifice, namely your own energy; where you perform ceremonies for the sun, the earth and everything that grows and, finally but not least, a site where you can cultivate yourself.

## Utiseta – vision quest

In shamanic traditions a long sojourn in nature is considered to be one of the best ways to receive visionary experiences and knowledge directly from Mother Earth. Among Native Americans this practice is called vision quest or crying for visions. *Utiseta*, sitting out, is the Nordic equivalence.

*Utiseta* was considered to be especially fruitful if it was performed at a sacred site known to have been used for this purpose since ancient times. The basic rule for *utiseta* is to set out for a fairly unspoiled and secluded place, e.g. on a mountain or an old ceremonial site and then stay out for between one and four nights. The thought is: the longer time, the more powerful visions. Native American vision quests can last for up to four days and nights. The initiate at first has to go through different cleansing ceremonies, such as a ritual bath, sweat lodge, fasting and praying. The initiate is then accompanied to the visionary site by a shaman or some other spiritual teacher or wise person. After that: four days and nights in solitude. Sometimes the initiate might even be placed in a hole in the ground. Sooner or later visions will come in the form of strong dreams or waking visions where the initiate may be given instructions regarding which way in life he/she ought to choose. The initiate can also be given a new name during a vision quest and he/she may meet his/her guardian spirits and spiritual teachers.

The Nordic *utiseta* usually lasted for one night. This shorter time doesn't necessarily mean that the initiate will receive fewer or weaker visions. It is important not to eat or drink anything or use drugs during the *utiseta*. You don't step out into the night in order to sleep, but it doesn't matter if you fall asleep, because you may receive strong visions and messages in your dreams.

An especially powerful variant of the vision quest is *grottsittning* (*grotta* = cave) when you spend a whole night sitting or lying inside a cave. This is best done in

a cave that doesn't let in any daylight at all. Inside such a cave you quickly lose the sense of both time and space. You might totally lose the feeling of being inside a cave and get the impression that you in reality can see infinitely far out into space. During this sort of vision quest you are allowed to bring something to eat since it is considered to be very important to replenish your physical energy in order to have strength enough for the strong spiritual experiences. It is also advisable to have some companion to come for you at a time agreed upon.

*Utiseta* is an intuitive way of taking part in nature's wisdom, receiving insights into the invisible, and in its healing and balancing power. The person sitting out will be accessible to the wisdom of the whole landscape, including all living and spiritual beings that belong to the landscape. The person sitting out is embedded in the intelligence field of the landscape and can be awarded what is called the kiss of knowledge.

*Utiseta* can be done in order to meet your guardian spirit, to find out your purpose in life, to obtain self-knowledge, to get guidance in crucial life situations or to express your respect for and gratitude to Mother Earth and everything that is alive. In traditional healing *utiseta* can be used as a means to set in motion a process of self-healing.

The preparations for the *utiseta* are very important. I have already stressed the importance of right attitude in shamanism and that applies in particular to vision quests. Right attitude can promote great insights. Wrong attitude gives zero insight and could even be destructive. During a vision quest it is of utmost importance to have an open and receptive mind free from restraining influences by intellectual definitions and analyses. This is however not to say that you shouldn't analyze your vision quest intellectually afterwards. On the contrary! If the vision quest deals with some special problem it is beneficial if you have meditated on it in advance and maybe also talked about it with some other people.

Before you begin the *utiseta*, a very good idea is fasting for a day and engaging in some sort of physical exertion, taking a cleansing bath (preferably in a sauna), drumming, dancing or singing runes, *galdrar* (= a Nordic kind of incantation) or other songs of power. Cold weather can block your mind so bring warm clothing to avoid that. During cold periods – in winter but possibly also in spring and autumn – it is good to bring a sleeping bag to nestle down in. A severe winter cold will bring special problems. To be freezing through one or more nights is



not a good prerequisite for visions. Those indigenous peoples who perform vision quests naked in a chilly climate have been hardened since early childhood in a way that would feel unfamiliar to us Westerners. Too thick layers of clothing can on the other hand become a restraining barrier during a vision quest. If there is snow and maybe moonlight you can without problems move around a bit and in that way reduce both the risk of getting frostbitten and the need for thick clothing. It is also possible to bring skis to an *utiset*. However it is important not to move around over too large an area but now and then gently stop to take in the surroundings before you move into the new “room”.

With that we touch upon the old tradition that is known under terms as *årsgång* (= annual walkabout) and *landskapsgång* (= walkabout in the landscape). The notion of *walkabout* comes originally from Australian aborigines. It is simply a meditative way of walking to places of power at certain sacred times. *Årsgång* was often performed during Christmas night when the walker in silence and in darkness walked to the churchyard or to seven churchyards before he/she went home again. *Årsgång* was also practiced at Midsummer to springs or crossroads that have always been considered to be saturated with magical powers. The important thing with *årsgång* is the open mind and the repetition. In the popular tradition it was said that you had to practice the *årsgång* for seven or nine consecutive years in order to attain the sought after knowledge and power.

*Landskapsgång* can be practiced at any time during the year and actually anywhere in the landscape since all places are sacred. The important thing is an attitude of openness and humbleness when you slowly walk through the landscape in a movement that tends to become circular or cyclical. A *landskapsgång* is not the same thing as a walk from point A to point B and it is not a Sunday stroll. Generally the walker returns to the starting point but if the walkabout is properly done he/she is nevertheless not the same human being as when he/she went off. He/she has grown in wisdom and power.

In the more stationary vision quest there are some further important things to think about. First of all you must find a place that *feels right*. Just follow your intuition in order to find the right place. Sometimes a certain site may just “feel wrong” and it might even give you negative physical sensations. In that case you simply have to leave. There might be powers at the site that want to be left alone and you have to respect that.

When you have found a place that feels good you have to ask for permission to do your vision quest there. You can put the question to the guardian spirit of the site or other beings who might reside there. Or, if you don't want to use such notions just ask the place itself if you can do your vision quest there. Give thanks to the place by leaving a gift or a small sacrifice.

It is advisable to open the *utisetá* by greeting the cardinal directions with words, rattle, bullroarer or the like. Explain why you are there and ask for help and power from the spiritual world. You can also invoke and dance your power animals and then you just have to wait. The most important thing is an attitude of passive, silent listening and observation, both inwards and outwards, without any foregone judging definitions. This is about letting nature; both the inner and the outer, come to you, in its own way and let yourself become merged in the greater.

*The more I wait, the more I see.*

*The more I expect, the less I see.*

*And when the trees start dancing, let them continue.*

Continuity is important as far as vision quests are concerned. Right after an *utisetá* it can be difficult to put your finger on something special that you have experienced or learnt. Insights may come later, in ordinary dreams or as an aha-reaction in the ordinary waking state. Or they may come much later during new vision quests. In vision quest number five you maybe remember something from vision quest number one that in this new light will result in a sudden leap in consciousness. I have had such strong experiences myself and I have also experienced how wisdom is accumulated in a very subtle way with each new *utisetá*. Suddenly, after a long series of vision quests, you may just *know* in a strange way that embraces your whole organism that you *know*.

If you write down your experiences after a vision quest and contemplate them deeply, you can continue to extract knowledge and power from the night out in solitude and silence in a more systematic way and for a fairly long time.

## Drums and seidr

The drum is one of the most employed and most effective means that shamans have used in order to move into non-ordinary reality. Through the drum, the shamans access knowledge that may be indispensable for healing sickness and weakness, tracking game, influencing weather and wind, solving all kinds of problems, and re-establishing and preserving balance and harmony.

In several shamanic cultures the drum is called the shaman's horse. It is on the drum that the shaman rides into the other worlds. In most cases the drum is a round or oval frame drum, resembling a large tambourine. It has thus only one drumhead and you hold the drum in straps or a wooden cross on its inside. The drumhead is made of hide from animals that play a central role in the shaman's culture, such as reindeer, moose, buffalo, and seal.

The Saami drums were as a rule decorated with a large number of signs representing different spiritual beings and natural forces. The drum figures have been an expression of the cosmology of the individual shaman, and the design of the drums displays big individual and regional differences. In addition to being the trance-inducing instrument of the shaman, the drum and its symbols have been used in all sorts of divination. Then the Saami shaman put a pointer on the drumhead and carefully noticed how the pointer moved over the different symbols during the drumming. These movements were decoded by the shaman into concrete instructions for solving problems facing the community in ordinary reality.

Many of the Saami drums were bowl drums made of a hollowed out tree trunk (preferably birch or pine) with the hide stretched and fastened on its top. The frame drum is made by wetting, warming and bending a thin plank into an oval or a circle and then stretching and fastening the hide on top of it. On the inside of the frame or on the back of the drum shamans often attach their power

objects, e.g. bird feathers or other animal parts, brass rings, small mirrors, little bells and the like. The drumhead with its pictures has been the more public side of the drum and was by many viewed as the prime side of the drum. However, to the shaman the “back” of the drum was often more important since it was there that he/she had the real power objects.

Both hide and wood for the drum is usually taken from special animals and trees and undergo ritual treatment in order to bring the necessary power to the drum. This goes also for the drum stick that is made of wood or bone and wrapped with hide or cloth at one end. Nowadays you can buy beautifully handcrafted drums made by people interested in shamanism and you can also attend courses in drum building and build your own drum. The drums built during such courses are often beautiful and work quite well in ceremonies and as means of soul journeying. It is obviously important to many shaman initiates to put their own personal imprint on their drums and the process of building a drum can also bring a lot of other important knowledge of shamanism.

I started out in the early 1980’s with an Irish-inspired but Swedish-built *bodhran* which I used for many years. Bodhrans can be purchased in many ordinary and well-assorted music shops. If you plan to use the drum outdoors it might be a good idea to buy a drum with a plastic drumhead, which will produce a very good sound even in humid weather. To some people a plastic drumhead feels too artificial but even this drumhead comes from Mother Earth. It has been made of plants that were very much alive millions of years ago. And I know people who have used quite ordinary plastic buckets in shamanic ceremonies. It all depends on your own attitude...

If you use a drumhead of animal hide outdoors, it is recommended to keep a small camp fire going in order to dry and tighten the drumhead in damp weather. However, the drumhead will always run the risk of cracking if it gets too hot too fast. If you have bought your drum in a shop or from a drum maker it is essential to inaugurate the drum in an appropriate ceremony before you start using it.

The drum is essential in most dances and in *seidr* and also in some ceremonies and magical singing. Furthermore it is a good aid in soul journeying into non-ordinary reality even if it is only one of several methods that shamans can use for that purpose. Many shamans dived the world into three main layers; underworld, middle world and upper world. But as I have already stressed this is not all about three different worlds but about three dimensions or “levels” in the

one and coherent world that we live in. The shaman can move fairly unhindered between these dimensions depending on which tasks he/she faces. The task of a shamanic journey can be to meet one's own guardian spirits or power animals and get answers from them to a range of different questions and problems, e.g. how to help a fellow human being who is sick or in some other kind of trouble. In non-ordinary reality we can also find helping spirits who can assist the shaman in various ways in healing ceremonies or other undertakings. This is also the abode of various spiritual teachers who may guide the shaman along his/her path of knowledge. The shaman can as well search out "deeper" dimensions in order to bring back a sick person's runaway soul, which may have lost its way and ended up in the realm of death.

Some of the dimensions of non-ordinary reality, those that are usually referred to as the underworld, are connected to water, moisture, forests, earth and vegetation. Other dimensions that are referred to as the upper worlds are often experienced as much more mountainous and vast, bright, airy and sometimes almost ethereal. The beings that the shaman may meet in these dimensions are generally not practical troubleshooters but beings who share a more existential wisdom. Here you can also meet holy beings from different religions, not least divine and enlightened beings from the pre-Christian Nordic mythical world.

I want to emphasize that the paths that shamans choose to journey along – whether they go "downwards" or "upwards" or "horizontally" – only are methods, aids for temporary dissolving the boundaries of the ego and making themselves susceptible to knowledge that would otherwise be hidden.

A soul journey into non-ordinary reality, into Dreamtime, can be done in the following way: to be able to succeed in journeying you need a drum, a companion who can drum for you or a recorded drumming session on a cassette tape, cd or sound-file. Make the journey indoors in a dark or semi dark room. You shouldn't eat anything during the preceding hours. Lie down on your back on the floor. Close your eyes, breathe deeply a few times and relax. Visualize an opening or a way down into the earth, e.g. a crevice below a rock, a cave, a spring, a well, a staircase to a cellar or a way down into the tube. It is beneficial if you have seen this way down in ordinary reality. When you have visualized the way down it is time to start the drumming. The pace should be even and steady. 180 beats per minute can be appropriate but the individual differences are big so let your intuition decide. A live drum is preferable since it will produce a lot of overtones that might be important to the journey.

When the drumming begins it is time to start the journey by visualizing how you direct your steps through the chosen way down and further on into the unseen. Many people experience passing through a tunnel or a darkness before they enter some sort of landscape that can be familiar as well as unfamiliar. Once there you carry out your task, e.g. asking for a guardian spirit, and then you return along the same path that you arrived. You decide when to go back. On recorded drumming sessions the moment to return is marked by a short pause and a change of the drumming pace. The journey back usually goes very fast and when you are back it is time to open your eyes and sit up. The normal duration of a soul journey is somewhere between 15 and 30 minutes, but when you journey alone you simply return when you have accomplished your task. A skilled shaman often needs no more than 5-10 minutes to achieve what he/she has attempted. Practice makes perfect.

The first time you try a soul journey you may not come further than the tunnel or the darkness, then everything turns black. Or you may be confronted by a chaotic flow of visions that are extremely fragmentary and messy. You may believe that you are fancying everything or that you are just creating the visions that you *want* to see. As you little by little develop your visualization abilities the visions and the experiences will become clearer and more genuine. In the dimensions of non-ordinary reality you can see, hear, feel, taste and smell things, but it is important to establish that it is another kind of experiences and knowledge than in ordinary reality. If you during the journey are confronted by obstacles such as rock faces, closed doors and the like you can just glide by or through. The natural laws of ordinary reality don't apply to non-ordinary reality.

Quite a few people do have problems visualizing a way down and the deadlock that might follow from that can make this method into a hindrance instead of an aid. Nowadays I use two alternative methods that I think work better:

- 1) The person making the soul journey doesn't have to focus on or visualize any way down at all. It is sufficient to just let the drum do the work and take the passive traveler wherever it wants. I have found out that there is a sort of readiness in Dreamtime for receiving and guiding those who choose this simple method to journey – if their attitude is humble enough. The traveler simply glides into non-ordinary reality with the help of the singing of the drum.
- 2) The person who will do the drumming or lead the journey can start with an oral instruction. This is very close to what C.G. Jung termed *active imagination*.

I usually employ an image of the world tree *Yggdrasil* as an aid, guiding the travelers along the trunk to the beings that according to Nordic tradition reside in the world tree and represent different nuances of wisdom. The journey can be directed either to the top where an eagle sits with a hawk between its eyes, or to the roots where the giant *Mimer* is guarding the spring of wisdom and the three *norns Urd, Verdandi* and *Skuld* are weaving the cosmic web. The traveler can use the squirrel *Ratatosk* as an assistant. *Ratatosk* is a mythical description of the shaman and his/her ability to journey between the worlds with ease. With the help of *Ratatosk* the soul traveler can run swiftly between the roots and the crown of the world tree. When I orally have guided the travelers to the top or the roots of *Yggdrasil* I start drumming and let the drum act as a catalyst for the wisdom that the beings in the world tree are ready to convey to the travelers.

The drum can yield very strong physical sensations. If you have difficulties seeing images during a soul journey let the drumbeats fill your mind and your organism and just let the “physical sensations” come out. This can open the way to an inner flow of images. Some people seem however to be unable to visualize at all. I have met people who couldn’t see any images at all during drumming sessions but instead learnt how to journey with the help of their hearing. They could “hear” non-ordinary reality. One good shamanic advice to all is to listen to the silence between the drumbeats. There a lot of interesting things can happen.

There are no dangers in connection with journeys of this simple kind. The trance that is induced by the drumming or the active imagination is relatively light and no one can “get stuck” or “disappear” in non-ordinary reality. If you get into a traumatic and undesirable situation you can use a patent method to break off the experience: open your eyes, sit up and you are back in ordinary reality in a jiffy. Dangers may appear if the shaman is involved in more advanced work, such as healing sickness or visiting the realm of death in order to bring back a straying soul. Such interventions require quite a lot of experience.

Within new shamanism you may be warned about meetings with spiders and reptiles and the usual recommendation is to avoid contact and just try to pass by such beings. I do not share that opinion. Within Nordic tradition spiders, snakes and frogs have always been associated with great wisdom and power that is quite possible to take part of. To me it is a favour to meet such beings, in non-ordinary reality as well as in ordinary reality.

A guardian spirit/power animal can be found on a soul journey, and you can do that on your own. If you meet an animal or some other being which shows itself to you in a very distinct way it may be your guardian spirit. In the Nordic tradition such a being is called a *fylgia*. Welcome it and ask if it wants to dance with you. If the answer is yes you can be pretty sure that you have found your power animal, or rather that the power animal has found you. Don't forget to dance your animal when you are back in ordinary reality. Power animals want to become body and move around in this world. You may also meet your *fylgia* in a dream or through a special kind of dance that I will describe further on.

With increasing experiences of soul journeying it will become possible for anyone who wishes to do one's own drumming and even use other means than the drum. One can use rattles or two small stones that one beats or rubs against each other; on condition that the rhythm is monotonous and steady. It is also possible to journey without any material aids at all by using methods of active visualization or imagination. This variant works best if one uses the tracks in Dreamtime that has been beaten by our ancestors, e.g. the conception of the world tree or other images from the songs of *The Poetic Edda* telling about the creation of the world, its essence and its demise/renewal.

The journeys into the dimensions that traditionally have been called the upper worlds or heavens don't differ from other soul journeys in any decisive way. Some shamans like Michael Harner think that the drum should beat a bit faster, approximately 240 beats per minute, but I would like to stress that each one has to find his/her own way and own pace. The way "upwards" may go via a trail of smoke, a whirlwind, a tree, the rainbow, the Milky Way or with the help of a bird – in fact anything that may take you upwards. Shamanic traditions assign divine beings such as shaman teachers, *rådare*, enlightened persons and "gods" to these dimensions, i.e. beings that are considered to be both able and willing to give more existential advice.

Since I nowadays view the world as one and indivisible I no longer try to direct the journeys "downwards" or "upwards" but focus instead simply on expanding consciousness in order to just glide or float into Dreamtime that, to be sure, is present everywhere and always. Another way of describing this process is to say that I let Dreamtime come into my consciousness. The boundaries between "me", the world and Dreamtime may then be abolished in a state that is beyond linguistics and is filled by serene ecstasy, wisdom and power.



A special and very powerful variant of the soul journey is the *seidr*, which is a Nordic tradition with Saami influences and according to Nordic myth is associated with “the utmost power”. An example of a *seidr* séance is related in the story of *Erik Röde* (Erik the Red who was the father of Leif Eriksson who traveled to the east coast of North America 500 years before Columbus). The main character in the *seidr* story is an old female shaman, who is called *Torborg Lillvölva*. (*Völva* is the old word for female healers formed from the word *völr* which in turn is a term for the magical staff that were used by shamans.) *Torborg* is described as the last of her kind (around the year 1000 AD), the youngest of nine sisters, all of whom were shamans. She wandered about between the farmsteads in the Nordic settlements in Greenland. *Torborg* had been called to this farmstead because of the prevailing bad crops and was treated with great respect. Maybe she could tell the people how long this would last and when things would turn for the better?

The outfit of the *völva* is described in some detail. She wore a blue coat, a magical staff decorated with brass, gloves of catskin, a hood that on the inside was lined with catskin and a medicine bag with various objects of power. *Torborg* was seated on a special stool, a *sejdhjälle*, and she was assisted by the women of the farmstead who formed a circle around the shaman and then sang the required song, *vardlokkur* (a song guiding the soul, *vard*, of the shaman) that sent *Torborg* into an ecstatic trance. After the séance she explained that the prevailing bad times soon would be over and then she went on foretelling coming events for the individuals on the farmstead.

The hood was used by *Torborg* as a means to shut off impressions from ordinary reality and make the journey into the other worlds easier. No drum was used – the main aids for the journey were the magical singing, *vardlokkur*, and the magical staff, *völr*. Another name for this staff is *gandstav* and staffs of this kind have been found in several iron-age female graves in Scandinavia. This is proof of how highly valued the magical staffs were by their owners and their contemporaries. The staff worked partly as a means for the journey into non-ordinary reality (the *völva* rode on the staff), partly as a way for the *völva* to keep her foothold in ordinary reality and via the staff direct the magical power that was conjured up in the *seidr*.

To perform a *seidr* you need to be at least five persons. The one who will make the journey, the shaman, sits or lies on a stool, chair or platform. Just like *Torborg* he/she might use a hood in order to shut off ordinary reality. The

assistants place themselves in the four cardinal directions and each of them can also have a drum. As they drum they also sing the special power song that the shaman has chosen. The drumming and singing will send him/her into a very special and very ecstatic trance. The session goes on until the shaman gives a signal that he/she is back again.

*Seidr* is not a recreational practice; it must have a serious and distinct aim such as healing a sickness, finding solutions to severe problems or trying to affect some course of events in the world. The overpowering force of the *vardlokkur* and the drums more or less hurls the shaman into Dreamtime. The power of the *seidr* ecstasy is well-nigh painful to carry. The task of the assistants is to help directing this ecstatic power into the cosmic web for the intended purpose.

Soul journeying in a group is not necessarily more powerful than individual journeying in solitude. What's important is that the journey has a real and creative purpose. That usually makes the journeying more powerful and palpable. A group that is closely knit and has a joint purpose can reinforce the experiences, as well as a divided group can weaken and obstruct the experiences. If a well-coordinated group journeys with a joint purpose the experiences might be extremely deep and powerful.

The only way to learn how to journey in non-ordinary reality is to start practicing. Soon enough Dreamtime will show the resources of the other dimensions and soon enough the traveler will be given tasks to tackle.

## Magic sounds

The drum is like a heart in the shaman's work. Its pulses resonate with the different rhythms of nature and the drumbeats are often called the heartbeats of Mother Earth. There is a dimension of both giving and receiving in the drum. The drumbeats transmit power and knowledge from nature to the shaman but also give nourishment and rhythm to the earth and all her inhabitants. The drum represents a primal sound. The muffled vibrations create a connection back in time to basic processes of creation – mountains that are being born, volcanoes that are remodeling the landscape, and continents that loosen themselves from each other in a dynamic dance.

Other shamanic tools that are based on the sounds and processes of nature are bullroarers, rattles and instruments like flutes and didgeridoos. What is common to them is their ability to be a mediating link between nature and humans. With the help of these sounds, human beings can converse with Mother Earth and her invisible dimensions. The sounds also bring back knowledge and power from the spiritual dimensions to human beings; we could say that they work as a sort of antennas or tentacles into non-ordinary reality.

These things can also be expressed by the voice of human beings. With the help of his/her voice the shaman can vibrate in harmony with the landscape getting access to nature's knowledge and simultaneously giving back from his/her own power. The Saami *yoik* is a typical example of such primal singing. It has no beginning and no end but moves in a cyclical process that draws its dramaturgy from nature.

The shaman's power songs very much resemble Saami *yoiks*. They can be more or less without words or contain a taciturn but cogent text, where the words as such are considered to have power. They can describe the shaman's *fylgia*/power animal or contain road directions for the journey into Dreamtime.

Shamans usually have one or several power songs and there are many ways to get hold of one. As in most shamanic work it is all about attitude. If you have the right attitude the power songs will come. A common way to receive the power song is during an *utisetá*, a vision quest, where you may catch a fragment of a song from something that you hear in nature or with your inner hearing. It might be from a bird that sings at dawn or from a fox that barks in the night. You can work over the fragment back home in your everyday life or in dreams and eventually a whole power song will develop. But sometimes you can receive a *complete* song during an *utisetá*; suddenly it is just there. Soul journeying with drumming can also be a good way to receive a personal power song. In this sense a live drum is superior to a recorded drum since the overtones are of great help when listening for a song.

There is also a special shamanic ceremony that is called *sångsökning*, song seeking or spirit dance. It is performed when you are looking for a strictly personal power song that can be used for the rest of your life – as protection and support in important shamanic work during healing sessions and all kinds of ceremonies. You shouldn't share such a personal power song with others; it is strictly personal and regulates your and *only* your relations to nature and the spiritual world.

A structured song seeking is best performed in a group and can be done in the following way: Those who seek a song sit down in a circle along the walls of a semi-dark room while one or several drummers walk around the inside of the circle beating their drums in a hard and steady rhythm. The drummers continue walking and drumming while the “seekers” remain seated with an open and receiving attitude just letting the drumbeats fill their minds and bodies. Sooner or later someone catches a song or a fragment of a song. This individual gets up, the drummers stop drumming and walk up to the “seeker” who starts singing what he/she has heard. The “seeker” might be given a rattle to accompany the song. The drummers try to take part in the song and start drumming again – at the same pace as the rattle. Now, usually, the “seeker” starts dancing as well, closely followed by the drummers. The “seekers” sitting in the circle remain seated but can help with rattles and by taking part in the song. Such *sångsökning* can be a very ecstatic experience for all participants.

Those who receive their power song in such a ceremony are not especially conscious of what goes on in the room. They are rudimentarily conscious of the boundaries of the room and the presence of the others, but what happens and

how the song sounds isn't something that is under the control of the conscious will. It is as if an invisible power lifts the singer round the room and makes the vocal cords vibrate in strange tones and themes. It is as if non-ordinary reality sings directly through the singer.

In Nordic tradition there is a more structured form of power song that is called *galder*. The word stems from the verb *gala*. In Swedish we say that the cuckoo and the rooster *gal*. We don't know how the ancient *galdrar* were sung but we can image how they might have sounded from a description by the Roman commander Julianus Apostata. Around the year 360 AD he wrote about the songs of the Teutons as: "wild songs, performed in a way that mostly resembled the cries from such birds that call in a harsh way".

The structure of the *galder* songs resembles magic spells and healing incantations. They can be utilized to send mental energy in the right direction, e.g. to get good luck in hunting or to heal a sick person. But a *galder* can also be sung in order to seek general support from non-ordinary reality, like this one:

*Hören ljusalver, hören fylgior,  
Hören himlafar.  
Höga väsen, hämta till mig,  
Luftens ljusalveliv  
Och styrka från solens strålar.*

An approximate translation into English might go like this:

*Listen Light Elves, listen Fylgior,  
Listen Father Sky.  
Eminent Beings, bring to me  
The life of the Light Elves  
And strength from the rays of the Sun.*

Many indigenous cultures sing their old myths. This applies especially to the creation stories from Dreamtime when the mythical ancestors wandered about moulding the landscapes. Among the Navajos the medicine people are known as singers, *hataali*. They are extremely important people since they are the ones who keep the stories and the wisdom of the stories in their memories. During traditional ceremonies that can last several nights among the Navajo, the *hataalis* tell the creation stories by singing. Such ceremonies also contain a lot of other ingredients as well: dancing, sand painting, body painting, wearing of

masks and eating sacred meals. You could call this process a ceremonial drama where the totality is more than the sum of the ingredients. Probably the relating of the Nordic myths during dark winter nights was also performed as a drama. That is why I prefer to call the poems of *The Poetic Edda* songs.

The landscape and all of its spiritual aspects have their own songs that may be accessible during an *utisetä*/vision quest, a *landskapsgång*/walkabout or a ceremony. Then one's whole organism co-vibrates with the landscape. The song becomes body and human sound and one participates in the song of the landscape. This is a very uplifting feeling, a gentle ecstasy, letting this song flow from one's throat, but it is very seldom that this kind of song stays in one's memory. But then this is not the purpose; this song belongs to the landscape and one has just temporarily been connected to it and invited to participate in this choir of visible and invisible beings.

Those who are interested in using primordial sounds in their shamanic work should definitely examine the potentials of rune magic. The runes represent a very deep-going and extensive knowledge and power, but here I will just discuss them briefly. Those who want to go deeper into the essence of rune magic I refer to my book *Rune Magic and Shamanism* that is available in English, German and Estonian. Here I will just give a few concise descriptions of how runes can be combined with other shamanic methods into a very powerful practice. It is possible to practice shamanism without using runes or rune magic, but the runes will add another dimension to the shamanic work that would be foolish to renounce. To enter into the world of the runes however requires quite a lot of work and you shouldn't take the step until you really feel ready and the runes themselves insist on attention – something that is rather common among those who practice shamanic methods according to Nordic tradition.

The original runic system, the *uthark*, contains 24 runes that are summarized in Appendix 1 at the end of this book. The runes constitute a map of the cosmos, a story about the cosmic creation and a systematic overview of the basic forces of the cosmos. You can of course ponder on why there are precisely 24 signs, but probably the magical use of runes has developed during a period of trial-and-error where the rune magicians have felt their way and eventually found out that precisely this system contains the greatest magical potential. The *uthark* is founded on the sacred numbers three and four and holds very complex and advanced relations of numerical magic. The runes are archetypes, i.e. a sort of ordering principle in the collective unconscious; they are built into the creation

itself and they have after all existed since the world was born out of the Emptiness that in Nordic mythology is called *Ginnungagap*, the huge abyss. Human beings haven't created the runes, they have discovered them.

Since the runes constitute a map we shouldn't mistake them for the energies and the potential that they symbolize. The runes represent the primordial sounds that proceed from the beginning of creation, "early in primordial times", when the first being, the two-gendered giant *Ymer* was born in *Ginnungagap*. The name *Ymer* means the roaring one or the bellowing one and he/she represents the very first sound that also was the very first thing that was created. The first human rune magicians may have caught the sounds of the runes from nature's own vibrations; wind, thunder, rain, hail and the like. When one sings the runes in a meditative way one can feel how these primordial vibrations generate feelings of relatedness and harmony with the surrounding natural world and at the same time open gates into Dreamtime. What the magicians did with the runes was trying to steer and direct their power for magical purposes, e.g. by carving them on wood or bone, into stone or into the earth. That wood and bone were the most common materials is easy to understand when we see the present design of the runic signs. They have been carved with knives and that can explain the absence of rounded shapes. However the most important thing with the runes is their sounds and therefore most of the rune magic is a combination of rune singing and mental visualization.

When the younger runic system with 16 runes was developed towards the Viking age, much of the magical dimensions of the runes had been lost. By this time they were mainly used in a worldly way as an alphabet and a calculating aid. It was this type of runes that were used for commemorative inscriptions on rune stones and for calendar staffs.

In Nordic myths we can find important stories about the origin of the runes that can be of great help to students of shamanism. In the *Song of Sigrdrifa* the head of the wise giant *Mimer* (= memory) tells:

*On a shield they should be cut,  
the one which stands before the shining god,  
on the ears of Arvaker and the hoof of Allsvinn,  
on that wheel which turns under Hrungne's chariot,  
on Sleipner's teeth and on the sledges' strap-bands;  
on the bear's paw and on Brage's tongue,*

*on the wolf's claw, and the eagle's beak,  
on bloody wings and on the arch of the bridge,  
on hands which deliver and on the trail of a helpful man,  
on glass and on gold, and on the amulets of men,  
in wine and on wort and on the seat of honour,  
on the point of Gunger and the breast of Grane,  
on the nail of the norn, and the beak of the owl.*

*All were shaved off, those which were carved on,  
and scattered with the sacred mead  
and sent on wandering ways;  
they are among the Aesir, they are among the elves,  
some are with the wise Vanir,  
some with humankind.*

This enumeration mentions 24 places where the runes have been carved. The shining god is the sun; *Arvaker* and *Allsvinn* are the two horses that pulled the sun over the sky; *Hrungne* is a giant but this wording could also point to *Tor*, the god of thunder, who killed *Hrungne*; *Sleipner* is the shamanic horse of Oden; *Brage* is the god of poetry; the hands which deliver belong to the midwife; *Gungner* is Oden's spear; *Grane* is the horse of the hero *Sigurd* who is the one that *Sigrdrifa* is telling all this.

The power of the runes is everywhere, in a kind of homeopathic dilution, and what the runic signs and sounds do is to concentrate this diluted power and wisdom into a manageable number of magically charged signs.

*Oden* the master shaman gained insight into the essence of the runes through a shamanic initiation on *Yggdrasil*, the world tree, where he was confronted by death and was reborn as a more powerful being. It is told that he peered downwards and took up the runes, which implies that he received the knowledge directly from Mother Earth. It is also told that he took the runes screaming, i.e. he partook of *Ymer's* primordial scream. *Oden's* initiation is a description of a classic shamanic initiation, an initiation that I am sure that also rune magicians have passed through.

The runes are symbols of the forces that have created and ordered the cosmos and that continue to create and develop the universe in an ongoing dance. Therefore they should be regarded as open and dynamic processes. "Those are book-runes, those are helping-runes, and all the ale-runes, and valuable runes of



power, for those who can, without confusing them, without destroying them, possess them for good”, as *Sigrdrifa* tells *Sigurd*. It is important to stick to the original meanings and sounds of the runes, i.e. their essence, at the same time as we realize that they are constantly developing and changing as everything else in the great cosmic cycles. Those who want to be in balance and harmony with the creation should simply sing all 24 runes. To do this on a sacred site in nature can be a marvellous experience.

Regarding the meaning of the runes the basic shamanic attitude is that each person separately has to find the essence of every rune and in practice try out how to use them, or rather how to cooperate with them. The shaman can gain insight into the meaning and use of the runes through soul journeys into non-ordinary reality where he/she in a systematic way can examine each rune from the inside. Another good method is to contemplate each individual rune at the same time as one sings it, e.g. on a sacred site. The contemplation can also be combined with sketching or carving the rune.

Many rune magicians sooner or later want to have a magic pouch with a set of runes carved on thin slices of wood or bone that can easily be pulled out and used for magic or divination. The best thing is to make your own runes and inaugurate them in a ceremony where you invite powers from the whole of cosmos into them.

It is important to show humility and respect to the runes as well as to all other basic sounds and songs of Mother Earth and not use them in a thoughtless way. The same ethical principles should be applied as with all other shamanic methods. The knowledge and power that the runes bestow must be handled with responsibility and with a sound judgement. What is sent out will come back. Every rune has light as well as dark aspects. No rune is thoroughly “good” or “bad”. The runic system transcends the antagonism of black-white, evil-good.

The shaman aims at integrating the runes inwardly so that they will be constantly present as an inner potential. Then the shaman is no longer dependent on external rituals or ceremony. The runes are just as the other shamanic methods “only” aids and I will further on come back to the question of how the shaman on a certain level can work without such aids.

## Shamanic dance

The cosmic processes can be viewed as a sort of creative dance and through dancing the shaman can partake of this knowledge that would otherwise be hidden. By dancing the shaman can transcend his/her ego and move into other dimensions. Primarily the shaman utilizes sound (drums, runes, songs) in order to make his/her organism vibrate harmoniously with the natural processes, but dance also plays a central role in shamanic cultures – often in combination with drumming and singing. It is just another way of resonating with the cosmic processes.

Shamanic dances are not dances that you do for fun but in order to transcend the limitations of the ego and enter into a visionary dimension. The shamanic dance has a cleansing function, where the dancer acts out and works upon bodily and spiritual tensions and blockages. But the dance is cleansing also in a deeper and more existential way. The power that may come to the dancer can fill his/her inner being with light, providing clear-sightedness and insight.

Dance is a way of expressing reverence and gratitude to the universe, since the only thing that we can sacrifice is our own energy. Dance is a way of attaining balance with nature and a way of receiving visions that can give guidance for solving all sorts of problems.

In this chapter I will describe two different types of shamanic dance: power animal dance and ecstasy dance.

A power animal dance, or *fylgia* dance, can be done in solitude or together with other people with the aim of finding or supporting *fylgior*/guardian spirits. If you dance alone I recommend a rattle as accompaniment; if you do it together with others the drum is preferable. This dance can be done outdoors as well as indoors and it is important to have plenty of space. As with all other shamanic

dances it is done with half-closed eyes – the dancers must be able to orient themselves in ordinary reality as well.

First of all greet the cardinal directions and invoke the spiritual helpers that you may have. Then start rattling, drumming and dancing. Let your intuition direct the pace of the rattle/drum and let the dance rise or fall according to your feelings. If you don't have any guardian spirits just "set your senses to zero" and be open and sensitive to anything that shows up inwardly during the dance. Express the feelings that come up – with sounds as well as movements. Let the power take physical shape in your body. If you feel an urge to move around like any special animal just follow this urge. This may be your *fylgia* that might also appear as inner images of animals or other beings. Keep on dancing as long as it feels right.

If you know that you already have a *fylgia* this dance is an excellent tool for contacting and consulting it. You simply ask the question in your mind and then await the answers that may come forth in connection with the dance. An old shamanic rule is that the power animals *want* to be danced. They *seek* to take physical shape and for a while take part in the life of ordinary reality. To the shaman the dance is a way to root the knowledge in his/her body and not just in the mind. Remember that the shaman seeks to attain balance between mind, heart and body. Power animal dance is also a way of relating to animals in ordinary reality, taking part in their evolutionary knowledge. That is a way to become rooted in the landscape as a co-creative participant. This variant may be the most important *fylgia* dance that you can do.

If the dance is done together with other people the effects will be more deep-going when several drummers take part. The drummers stay put in the middle and the dancers move in a circle around them. Clockwise or counter-clockwise? On that point the learned disagree. Just do it according to you feelings and in the way you like it. If the participants are experienced, the drummers can also participate in the dancing. The important thing for them is to keep beating with a strong and monotonous pace. The drumming should not be done with backbeats or other rhythmical subtleties since this is not about music. For how long do you keep on dancing? Precisely as long as it feels right, i.e. until the majority of the dancers have received the answers they were looking for.

The ecstasy dance or the trance dance is mostly done in a group and with several drummers. Compared to the *fylgia* dance this dance can go on much longer,

sometimes for hours. The drummers start beating their drums at a fixed pace that they can speed up or slow down depending on their feelings and interplay. Backbeats and other variations are permitted. The sound of the drums will undulate as a kind of reflection of the natural processes. The same applies to the dancers; they start expressing their *fylgior*/power animals but gradually a lot of other energies will stream forth. The strangest sounds and movements may find expressions and that is the very idea of this dance. Dancers may move into a deep trance, fall down and receive visions, while others may receive visions when they are still dancing. If somebody falls down, the others just continue drumming and dancing. Besides visions, this kind of long dancing sessions may also bring forth power songs. And the participants can be filled with the inner light that is talked about in shamanic cultures. This is a very intense experience of light, power and complete unity with everything else in the cosmos. This experience is the same as the alchemists wanted to bring forth in their melting furnaces – the fusion of spirit and matter, of male and female, of heaven and earth in the cosmic embrace, *coniunctio*.

You can enter an ecstasy dance with a clear question in mind. Maybe you seek contact with ancestral spirits looking for knowledge of traditional ceremonies and practices and how to recreate them or invent new ones. The answers may come during the dance but the dance can also function as the prelude to a journey into non-ordinary reality. In that case you just lie down and let the drums and the other sounds of the dance become your means for a more “traditional” soul journey. If several persons do the dance in order to get answers to a joint question they may receive different fragments that afterwards can be put together into a whole. Afterwards it is thus important to jointly analyze and contemplate what has happened. And this is also true of individual *fylgia* dances. Afterwards, go over what happened, what you saw and experienced, which beings you met, if you received any special messages etc. Write down, analyze and re-write, preferably several times à la Castaneda.

Common to all shamanic dances is that they must be well prepared, both physically and spiritually. It is definitely unsuitable to have a meal prior to a dance. It is also important to be unbiased and do the dance with an open mind. And: be creative, follow your own feelings and create the dances that feel right.

Dancing is a very physical way of tuning into harmony and balance with Mother Earth and all her spiritual dimensions. Since we Westerners are very much in our heads, shamanic dancing is an extraordinary means of becoming rooted in

life, in our center and in the earth – but also of connecting to *Urd's* web letting the spiritual take physical shape. And when you dance , “beyond sense” to borrow an expression from the primordial *völva* in *The Poetic Edda*, you do take part and act as a co-creator in The Great Cosmic Dance, The Great Cycle, The Great Mystery. To be a co-creator in all dimensions of the world can have a deeply healing effect on the participants who will then have abolished their existential cleavage and created a liberated zone.

## Ceremonies

Within shamanic traditions it is considered that all species during evolution have received their original instructions – a kind of reciprocal tasks and obligations that must be performed so that the universe will continue dancing in beauty. The task of humankind is among other things to perform ceremonies in order to preserve or restore balance and harmony in the universe. *The Elders Circle*, which is an association of traditional spiritual leaders among Native Americans, has interpreted this task in today's world as: Save the Earth and preserve the ceremonies.

The main function of the ceremony is to preserve the balance between the different forces of Life's web or restore this balance if it has been disturbed. The shaman often plays a central role in these ceremonies, but they can also be led by other spiritual persons. The ceremonies are definitely not a one-man job for the shaman.

The ceremonies can be performed when necessary or at special times of the seasonal cycle. In the ceremony the participants concentrate power for a special purpose, e.g. in the form of a prayer that the rains will arrive at a suitable time and in sufficient quantity, or that the wolves will breed and establish a vigorous population in Sweden.

In this context it is considered beyond doubt that ceremonies really can intervene in ordinary reality and thus can be used in order to affect how the world will develop. This makes heavy demands on the participants. The power that is called forth must not be used for egotistical purposes. Power that is used for wrong purposes is considered to hit back against its instigator in the form of a sickness or other problems and calamities.

A ceremony can be effective only if a destructive “dark” power has been invited. Without a fusion of constructive and destructive powers the ceremony will lack dynamics and will then hardly lead up to any changes in ordinary reality. If however the ceremony is performed primarily in order to express gratitude or reverence for different natural forces and beings or in order to achieve balance for oneself with nature then there is of course no need to invite any destructive powers.

Even if I talk about destructive power, this kind of ceremony shall absolutely not be confused with black magic, where the purpose is dark, i.e. to hurt other beings or obtain advantages at other people’s expense. I am only interested in so called white magic, but also white magic requires – in order to be effective – the introduction of a dark power that will be fused with a light power in order to function as a “motor” of the magical ceremony.

One example of how to unite light and dark powers is to invite the *Ur* rune (the constructive primordial power) and the *Thurs* rune (the destructive primordial power) and marry them for the purpose of the ceremony. Such a marrying can be done mentally through singing and depicting the runes. This can be experienced remarkably physically by the participants and supply the ceremony with great power. What the ceremony fundamentally is about is to direct this dynamic power in order to bring about the intended change.

Without dynamics – no magic. Through training the magician can tune up his/her organism to a level where it is possible to tangibly feel the intervention in the cosmic web, *Urd’s* web. The myth about the *norms* expresses the view of the old *seidr* tradition that time and space is a continuous whole, where all living and dead beings, all visible and invisible entities are included. An intervention at one site in this all-embracing web influences the whole web and not only the closest surroundings. *Urd*, what has been, what has led up to the present, has made the web of life strong but there is yet scope for influences and changes and this is where human beings enter the scene with their conscious and unconscious actions. Every action that I carry out influences everything else. This is true also of all my thoughts and magical actions, my actions in the invisible. The shamanic map is a theoretical model of magic and we find this common denominator in all sorts of shamanism all over the world. The shamanic map is an ancient map of the world that at the same time feels very modern and has many points in common with modern quantum physics.

Ceremonies can be performed in a very simple way, which is something that the shaman nearly always prefers. You can simply sit by yourself praying, meditating and attracting power for a special purpose. This is best done outdoors and preferably at a sacred site. A group that plays well together can often nurture greater power than is possible in individually performed ceremonies. Many people are fascinated by fire and want to have a camp fire in the middle of a magical circle. That is okay but personally I prefer to work in darkness and silence.

Here follows a general outline of how a ceremony can be performed: First of all you have to “tune into” the landscape and its spiritual aspects. You simply ask for permission to perform the intended ceremony at the intended site. Greet the cardinal directions and invite desirable spiritual entities with a rattle, a bullroarer or a song. Then you have to invite power into the magical circle, to start “the motor” of the ceremony. Use your creative imagination! Utilize runes, power songs, drums, power animals or whatever that feels right in order to bring about an accumulation of power in your circle. When the power is concentrated it is a matter of directing it for the intended purpose. Visualize how power is sent into the cosmic web. Use words to express what you aim to achieve. You can call it prayer or conversation or whatever you like, but above all – and especially when there are several participants in the ceremony – it is very important to verbalize the magic.

Shamans in general have great confidence in the intrinsic tendency and striving for beauty in the cosmos. That is why the energy that is sent out for good purposes also will arrive at the right site, sooner or later. However, there are no simple connections between cause and effect of the sort that “if I perform the action A the effect B will result”. All magic is performed in an ocean of relations and we can never know how the cosmic web will receive and treat the power that is brought forth in a magical ceremony. It seems as if magical changes primarily can take place in so called synchronistic situations where events in Dreamtime and in ordinary reality work together. A ceremony performed at the right time and at the right place can obviously contribute to the emergence of synchronicities.

How can you know if, when and how ceremonies ought to be performed? You are the one who decides – after consulting Mother Earth. I suggest that you start doing ceremonies to express respect to the universe. This will give you a feeling for the phenomenon as such and how the conversation and interaction with the



landscape can take place. Ceremonies with the aim of achieving balance with the natural processes can be performed at the solstices or in relation to the phases of the moon.

Ceremonies with the aim of intervening magically in the world are performed when and if there is a need and if and when you are willing to shoulder the responsibility that is associated with such ceremonies. Visions of how and for what purpose ceremonies should be done can be acquired on vision quests and soul journeys. But remember: this is no play. And sometimes you shouldn't try to intervene at all in *Urd's* web. It might be that we can't find out the reason of a certain imbalance or bad conditions and then we probably can't find any reasonable way of action. Neither can we predict which effects a magical ceremony could have at other sites in *Urd's* web. An intervention at one place may bring about more harm than good at another place. If you are uncertain about the total good it might be wise not to intervene at all. Sometimes wisdom is about realizing one's own limitations and accept things as they are. Often processes simply have to develop according to their own inherent dynamics – even if they might be painful.

## Soul concepts

In shamanic contexts it is often talked a bit carelessly about the soul and soul journeys. The *soul* is a rather blunt concept and most shamanic cultures have a good deal more expressions for this phenomenon. In Nordic tradition I have found at least seven concepts that deal with the soul: *fylgia*, *hugr*, *hamr*, *hamingja*, *önd*, *vard* and *gand*. It is important to a student of shamanism to get acquainted with those concepts.

The *fylgia* is the spiritual companion of a human being, the entity that in shamanic contexts is mentioned as guardian spirit or power animal. The *fylgia* is invisible to most people but can be perceived by clairvoyant persons and in dreams or on soul journeys. The *fylgia* most often appears in animal shape but in Nordic tradition it was very common that it appeared in human shape.

Sometimes the *fylgia* belonged to a whole family, *ättarfylgjur*. There are stories about how the *fylgia* could come out of the mouth of a sleeping person and show itself as a fish, a bird, a mouse, a snake or an insect. When someone died it was considered that the *fylgia* left the body through the mouth. The task of the *fylgia* was to protect its human being against sickness and black magic and bring luck and success in life.

*Hugr* is the sum total of the conscious soul powers. Sometimes *hugr* was used as a designation for all functions of the soul, but it is primarily the ego, the mind, the thought that is intended by this notion. The *hugr* was considered to reside in the heart but it is also connected to the *hugauga*, i.e. the “third eye”. Through the *hugr* you could influence other people and beings even at a great distance.

*Hamr* represents the ability to materialize the soul, most often in animal shape. *Hamnskifte*, shapeshifting, has always been connected to magic and witchcraft. Even if the magician had successfully materialized the soul in animal shape

he/she could be recognized by the eyes. One such story tells how the giant *Geirröd* managed to recognize *Loke* by his eyes though *Loke* had shifted shape to a falcon. When the shaman was on a soul journey in his/her animal shape the body lay dormant, i.e. in a trance state. It is told about the master shaman *Oden* that he lay as asleep or dead while he was a bird or a mammal, a fish or a snake journeying in unknown worlds. There are also stories about magicians who were taking part in violent struggles in animal shape at the same time as their bodies lay sleeping at home. If the animal shape couldn't find the way back to its body or if it was stolen by someone its human owner could die or go insane. The notions of *hugstolinn*, *hamstolinn* and *modstulen* (= downhearted) have to do with this.

*Hamingja* has to do with *hamr* and expresses power, above all magical power and the assembled spiritual essence of a person. To have great *hamingja* was the prerequisite for the ability to shift shape. The *hamingja* could be intensified by shamanic methods such as vision quests, soul journeys and drumming. The deeper insight one achieves the mightier *hamingja* one will have. The magical ability follows the *hamingja* but is not the essence of it. The *hamingja* is neither "bad" nor "good", but there are clearly stated ethics and morals surrounding the concept. Those who send evil will get evil back and then the *hamingja* will decrease. Black magicians thus undermine their own ability and finally they will lose all of it.

*Önd* represents spirit, the soul of breath. *Önd* is connected to the *Ass* rune. In the myth it is *Oden* who gives *önd* (= breath) to the first human beings, *Ask* and *Embla*, who have been created out of two tree trunks. *Önd* is the innermost, divine essence, the primordial power, the primal spark in the human being. *Önd* permeates *Urd's* web and *önd* is the equivalent of the holy wind that traditional Navajos consider to be the constituent energy of the cosmos. Every living being has a small part, a spark, of this great wind. This little wind is the soul of breath of each individual, and it is through this wind that the holy beings and the spiritual aspect of all phenomena talks to the human beings.

The *vard* is the part of the mind that the shaman sends on the journey into non-ordinary reality. The magical song *vardlokkur* is sung by the assistants of the shaman in order to bring forth and maintain the trance and furthermore to guide the soul on its journey. During the soul journey the shaman has a split or double consciousness. He/she is present in both the ordinary and non-ordinary reality. Old stories, e.g. among the Saami, tell that shamans lay totally unconscious

during their journeying but I think that they exaggerate. It was only a part of the soul, the *vard*, that was sent away and the shaman was conscious of both time and space also when he/she journeyed in the other worlds.

The *gand* is the part of the soul that the shaman uses to send magical power, when healing sickness or doing weather magic and the like. Originally *gand* was a term for the staff that the Nordic shamans used for journeying into Dreamtime. That the *gand* was very much connected to magic and magical power can be understood from a lot of notions in popular tradition, such as *gandpilar* (= *gand* arrows), *gandskott* (= *gand* shots) and *gandflugor* (= *gand* flies). The *gand* is then synonymous with magical power that can be sent as a kind of missile producing both healing and sickness.

Sometimes blood is considered to be an eighth concept of the soul. It might be so but primarily blood was seen as the carrier of the soul and the carrier of life. Therefore blood had a very strong magical charge and could be used in all kinds of magic, white as well as black magic.

## Magic tools

When a Bronze Age grave in Zealand was opened in 1888 the archeologists found a leather case that obviously had belonged to a shaman who lived 3 000 years ago. The case contained horse teeth, weasel bones, lynx claws, snake skeletons, pieces from rowan and aspen, small stones and bits of pyrite.

This is the kind of objects that shamans still today carry in their medicine bundles. These objects are considered to give its owner special powers or abilities and therefore they shouldn't be shown to others. They express the shaman's relation to diverse spiritual powers, to the power animals and the helping spirits, but also to animals and phenomena in ordinary reality and to particular sacred sites. Among these things we can find teeth, claws or the like from magically charged animals or stones from a sacred site. The objects may have come to the shaman in many different ways. Sometimes the shaman looks actively for power objects; sometimes he/she comes across objects "by chance". If it is the right time and place such objects should be incorporated into the medicine bundle. If you are unsure of the meaning of the object you can utilize the classical shamanic solution to get an answer: make a soul journey or ask the runes.

But do the power objects really have any power by themselves? Only for the person who has received them, and only because they express a deeper relation between the shaman and that which is represented by the object. Magic objects are tools that help the shaman to concentrate and direct his/her power. After some time the shaman may feel that an object in the medicine bundle has lost its special meaning and then it should be given back to nature with thanks for the time that has been.

Besides animal parts, medicine bundles can contain parts from plants, stones, pieces of metal and minerals. To a shaman, stones are not just stones and

flowers are not just flowers. They are integral parts of a spiritual context and they have magical significance beyond their significance in ordinary reality. The spirit helpers of the shaman can have plant shape and the interaction with them usually takes place in an altered state of consciousness. Stones and minerals on the other hand are often used by the shaman also in an ordinary state of consciousness. They represent the primordial foundation of existence, the rock, which is one of the shaman's foremost teachers and power givers.

During soul journeys shamans may receive many suggestions and advices about objects that should be included in the medicine bundle. My recommendation is that those advices should be followed even if one doesn't understand them for the time being. Sooner or later the right time and place will come and bring understanding.

One common magic object is worth a specific exposition. That is the quartz crystal. It is frequently used in many widely differing shamanic cultures and it has the remarkable characteristic that it doesn't change shape between the different worlds. All other power objects can change shape but the quartz crystal keeps its shape in all dimensions.

A crystal is a sort of solid light and several shamanic cultures view crystals as objects that have been thrown down from the heavens by holy beings. Sometimes the heavenly god is described as sitting on a throne of quartz crystal. The crystal is solid wisdom, solid power. In central Australia shaman initiates can be scratched with crystals till the skin is scraped off; crystals can be squeezed into the hair and under the nails. In visions the initiate will meet death and his/her reborn body will after that be filled with crystals.

Also in South America we find the custom of inserting crystals into the shaman initiate. Those crystals are considered to represent the helping spirits and the shaman can put small crystals into his/her rattle to have the spirits close at hand. The prospective shamans can also drink water that has been charged by crystals. This can give them the ability to see the spirits and fly like them.

The shaman can also *see* in quartz crystals, e.g. when diagnosing sicknesses and finding remedies. Crystals can also be tools with which the shaman brings healing energies. However, within shamanism there is no systematized list of what different minerals might be utilized for. A mineral system of that kind can be part of ceremonial magic, but has little to do with shamanism. Shamans try to use as few tools as possible and that is true for minerals as well. The shaman has

furthermore always a personal relationship to the objects that he/she utilizes. This means that a mineral that a certain shaman uses in a particular way might be used in quite another way by another shaman based on that shaman's personal knowledge and experience.

If you feel like including a quartz crystal in your work you can either try finding it yourself in nature, which might be difficult in our regions, or you can buy it in some mineral store. Then it is important to cleanse it, e.g. in water or smoke. You can also use an old shamanic method: namely placing the crystal on a sacred site in connection with the Summer solstice. Let it lie there for a week. Then it will have been cleansed and charged with power. This is a method that can also be utilized when you want to cleanse and charge your other objects. And remember: the crystal has only been lent to you! Be prepared to give it back to Mother Earth at any time.

The drum is of course one of the most powerful tools of the shaman and since I have already discussed it let's turn our attention to the rattle and the bullroarer. Rattles are used for calling helping spirits and ancestral spirits. You can find more or less suitable rattles in music stores, museums or ethno shops. Nowadays you can also buy authentic rattles from Native American artisans. A bought rattle must be incorporated into your own circle through an appropriate ceremony, preferably on a sacred site.

If you are handy it is rather easy to make your own rattle, e.g. of a dried calabash. Drill a hole in the calabash and fill it with dried peas, beans, grains of corn or barley, stones, small crystals and the like. Then you just have to plug up the hole, mount a handle and start using the rattle. You will have the best durability if you let the handle go through the whole calabash. You can then hang feathers, claws, teeth or similar items on the rattle and paint it in some desired colour. People giving courses in drum building often also teach how to make rattles, e.g. of animal hide. Such rattles can be beautiful as well as functional.

It is even easier to make a bullroarer – a very powerful shamanic tool that you can find all over the world. The bullroarer is a piece of wood between 10 and 30 cm long, 2-7 cm broad and maybe only 0,3-0,5 cm thick. It must be narrowing at both ends, reminding of a propeller. At one end you drill a hole and draw a chord 1-2 m long through the hole. Then take hold of the chord and start spinning it with your arm; the bullroarer will begin to rotate emitting a whining

or buzzing sound. The bullroarer that is commonly also called spirit catcher or spirit conjurer entails great power and already after a minute of buzzing you can notice tangible alterations of consciousness.

Among the magic tools of the shaman that I also want to mention is the costume, which in some shamanic cultures, especially in Siberia, is viewed as extremely important. The thought is that the special dress will help the shaman to alter his/her state of consciousness and to step into non-ordinary reality. In Siberia a shaman's costume can be covered with metal decorations weighing 10-15 kilos. Besides this the costume contains objects and symbols that are connected to the shaman's spirit helpers and will help him/her to fly.

Some decorations depict skeletons or internal organs symbolizing the initiation of the shaman. A confrontation with death has given the shaman a new body with new organs. The costume may show what kind of initiation he/she has passed.

In some places it is the shaman's cap or hood that is the most important garment. The cap must be made so it can be pulled down over the eyes. It is common to sew into the cap a hide from a flying squirrel or a cat, or from other animals that are associated with magical power and the ability to move into the other dimensions.

Most shamanic cultures have nothing corresponding to the sumptuous Siberian costumes. In many cases the shamans don't have any special dress at all; they maybe just dress up a little before a ceremony. In some places people have chosen the very opposite of the 15-kilos costume; Inuit and Australian shamans have often been stark naked when healing and leading ceremonies.

As with all magic tools you have to find your own way. Use whatever feels right as long as it feels right. And remember that the shaman is a spiritual innovator, a first-rate creator! Remember also that stones and other magically charged objects are living beings with both consciousness and soul. View them as wanderers that are dancing together with you for a while and be prepared to let them go when they want to travel on.



## Shamanic medicine

*Seidr 5.0* is primarily about using shamanic methods and attitudes in order to attain knowledge and power and to develop your full potential as a human being, but nevertheless I have to write something about shamanic medicine. Working with shamanic methods in the way I describe is in itself a healing process for the practitioner. Shamanism in itself is a healing process for mind, body and landscape but it is something quite different to start treating sick people or animals.

Curing sick community members was one of the basic tasks of traditional shamans, but it was definitely not the only task and maybe not the most important either. Those who today choose to seek knowledge along the paths of the shaman need not devote themselves to disease handling at all. This is associated with great responsibilities, deep commitments and sometimes also suffering. In all shamanic traditions we can hear stories of how reluctantly initiates took on this duty. For the most part they accepted only after receiving death threats from the spiritual world: if you don't accept becoming a healer you must die!

Healing sicknesses with shamanic methods implies knowledge of a very special kind. Besides good anatomical knowledge of the human body the healer also needs to have a well-developed feeling for psychology, a good amount of empathy and deep-going knowledge of the spiritual causes and cures of sicknesses. This is definitely not something that you can learn during a week-long course in shamanism. As I see it there are only two ways to learn this difficult art: 1) to be apprenticed to a skilled healer, 2) to be chosen by non-ordinary reality to become a healer and be prepared to pass through a more or less spontaneous and involuntary initiation. Both of them can be time-consuming and arduous.

Michael Harner and his Foundation for Shamanic Studies teach a few rather simple methods that can be utilized for healing sickness. The simplest one is about making a soul journey bringing back a power animal to another person. A more complicated one is to do a so called *soul retrieval*, which means that the shaman tries to bring back a person's lost soul or parts of the soul from the lower worlds. My view is, however, that shamanic medicine demands knowledge and power at quite another level than can be taught during a course in shamanism. It is true that a person might feel better if somebody fetches a power animal or parts of the soul, but the effect might have been just as good if he/she had had an open and fruitful conversation with another person or if they had gone for a joint walk in woods and fields.

My views on healing and healers are based partly on my own experience and especially on my many meetings with traditional healers among the Saami in northern Sweden and Norway. The healers that I have met have been very serious and humble people with impressive abilities to treat their patients in flexible ways and without self-importance.

Shamanic medicine defines two main causes of sickness:

- 1) Alien objects or energies have penetrated into the body and mind of the patient.
- 2) Vital energies or parts of the soul have left the patient.

The shaman can diagnose in many different ways. It can be done by *seeing* in a crystal or in water, by feeling with the hands over the body of the patient, by divination with runes or some other "foretelling" technique, or by making a soul journey into non-ordinary reality. When the diagnosis has been made and the shaman knows what has entered the body or left it and which spiritual aspects and relations that may be involved, it is a matter of finding a suitable healing method.

When something has to be removed from the body the shaman can suck it out and then spit or throw up the negative energy. The sickness can also be ordered to leave the body with the help of *yoik*, a power song, runes, spells, massage, heat, smacks, cupping, blood-letting or some more pure spiritual methods. The spiritual aspect of a sickness can be expelled from the patient during a soul journey where the shaman and his/her power animals fight down the sickness spirit and drive it off. If the cause of the sickness is that someone has sent black

magic, the shaman tries to find the guilty person and then sends the energy back or to some place in nature or the cosmos where it can't do any damage.

If the cause of the sickness is that the patient has lost vital parts of the soul, the shaman makes a soul journey trying to find what has been lost. This can be a journey fraught with dangers, especially if it is necessary to go way down into the realm of death to bring back a straying soul.

Sickness can also depend on a general disruption of balance and harmony, e.g. the balance between the sick person and other people, between the sick and nature, between the sick and the spiritual world or between the whole community and the environment. One reason can be violation of taboos in connection with hunting, fishing or cultivation, something that has also caused bad hunting luck or bad crops. In such cases the shaman makes a soul journey to find out the real cause. Healing can then be achieved when someone in the community confesses taboo violations or when the sick person and the group as a whole perform a certain ceremony in order to re-establish balance.

This brings us to something that is much more complicated than fetching a power animal to another person. Here, the shaman needs great expert knowledge of the balances that ought to be, why they have been disrupted and how balance and harmony can be re-established. Among the Navajo a traditional healing ceremony can last for up to nine nights. In reality *all* healing of sickness is about re-establishing harmony and balance and the healing process may take place gradually. It is a process that means that the sick person gets well when he/she has regained a balanced relation to his/her total environment (the landscape and the cosmos) and finds the right role and place in the great cosmic dance. When the human being begins walking in beauty again, he/she has recovered.

During the nearly 40 years that I have studied and been active within shamanism I have seen numerous proofs that shamanically inspired healing methods do work. I have seen how traditional healers in northern Sweden and Norway utilize the power of thought in order to cure patients who have come to see them or who are far away. I have also seen how people within the "new shamanic" movement have brought about improvements and changes by using methods such as *seidr* and rune magic. I have also witnessed occasions when such methods haven't worked at all. And, as I have underlined before, one doesn't know in advance if a healing ceremony will succeed or fail. "I cannot promise

recovery, I can just promise that I will try” as traditional healers usually say today.

The traditional art of healing is still a living tradition in many places and that is because it is functional. It lives on, while it works sufficiently often for a sufficient number of people. One of the reasons to its success is that it is practiced by people who have acquired their power through long training and maybe also suffering. This has made them into skilled and humble human beings that enjoy great trust and respect from their fellow beings.

## Beyond the methods

The shaman is seeking knowledge and power, harmony and balance. He/she might be described as a satellite dish, looking for power all over the world. The shaman's mind is like a vacuum cleaner in the cosmos, sucking in anything that can increase his/her knowledge. Curiosity is the motor in this search for wisdom that is intended to be integrated into life. The aim is to let wisdom permeate everyday life and colour all actions of the shaman, who wants to be a creative participant in the world.

The shaman is striving for simplicity and efficiency and is therefore interested in working with and experiencing the energy *directly*. It is the power *as such* that is essential – not its diverse shapes of appearance or interpretation. This is about finding an attitude, a state, where the shaman is accessible to power and knowledge. And it is about finding sites and activities in the landscape that facilitate all this.

In order to become accessible to power and knowledge, the shaman has to bite off the threads of fate, which means freeing him/herself from restrictive and oppressive ways of thinking, power structures and hierarchical ideas, freeing him/herself from and going beyond the Western way of thinking. In this way the shaman can establish a kind of “liberated zone” inwardly, fulfilling his/her human potential to the utmost within the external limits that are set by social, economic and historical factors. At the same time the shaman can strive for widening these outer limits, alone as well as together with other people.

The traditional methods of the shaman can work as good aids in reaching this state, but the methods can also function as obstacles. The shaman has to be creative and innovative and act dynamically also in relation to his/her own shamanic tradition. Even if the methods that have been developed and refined during thousands of years are functional, the shaman feels neither bound nor

restricted by them. He/she is primarily not interested in the methods or the states that can be achieved with their help but in the power that is manifested in this state and in the harmony and balance that this can promote.

Therefore the shaman wants to go *beyond* the methods and attain a state where he/she no longer works with the material and spiritual manifestations of energy (power animals, spirits, *rådare* and the like) but *directly* with the *energy in itself*.

As far as Saami shamanism is concerned it was confirmed already in the great work *Lapponia* (1673) by Johannes Schefferus that the most powerful *noaidies* didn't need any drums or other material aids to call their spirit helpers. Instead they were constantly accompanied by the spirits. They were shamans who walked on a path that went beyond the drum; a path that I call the drumless way. The drum is an excellent aid to the student of shamanism, especially to present-day Westerners. But once that you are skilled in soul journeying and maybe even have been able to bring about magical changes, you can go further along the way of the shaman and learn how to attain exactly the same state and power without a drum or other tools. It will then be sufficient with a concentrated *act of will* where the thought or intention in itself is sufficient.

It is quite possible to work shamanically and perform ceremonies without any tools at all. The sacred objects of shamanic traditions should be viewed only as aids for the shaman to concentrate and direct his/her power. When the shaman has attained a certain level of knowledge, he/she doesn't need the aids. When you have learnt how to ride a bike, just remove the support wheels!

When the shaman has reached this level he/she doesn't need any magical spells, power songs or runes either. The shaman doesn't have to carve or sing the runes or any songs at all since they have been incorporated inwardly. Then the shaman *is* the runes. The shaman *is* the power animals and power songs.

At this level the shaman will be in harmony and balance with the landscape and the whole cosmos and will be walking in beauty. Then power will simply come when it is needed and when it is the right time and place. It sounds easy and it *is* easy, even if the way there can be long, arduous and full of hardships. Those who walk this path must be prepared to invest both time and energy. At the same time it is a great adventure to walk this path, an adventure that gives meaning to the shaman's time on Earth.

## Shamanism and quantum physics

If you want to gain insight into the world and its essence, you have to acquaint yourself with the theories of quantum physics. Modern physics has turned several ingrained opinions upside down; it has deep-going philosophical dimensions and quite a number of points in common with the world view of traditional shamanism. We can of course not equate shamanism with quantum physics, but I am convinced that shamanism can be enriched and developed by taking in the advances of modern physics. To work shamanically today with the same thoughts and methods as shamans used a thousand or even a hundred years ago is hardly a creative contribution to the great cosmic process – rather it is a more or less pathetic gesture without any great significance.

The future is open, as the German quantum physicist Hans-Peter Dürr has emphasized, inter alia in his book *Geist, Kosmos und Physik* (2016). At the same time he accentuates the fact that it is not boundlessly open. There are natural laws and habits that set certain limits and for a scientist as Dürr it was important to underline the connections between quantum physics and classical physics – as a line of demarcation from the kind of woolly interpretations of quantum physics that can be found within the New Age movement. There, you can get the impression that quantum physics implies that you can mould reality anyway you like by your own will. Such vulgar conceptions of magic and quantum physics are presented either out of ignorance or as a modern con trick. Magic is, as I have already stressed, an immensely complex thing that is intimately connected to the phenomenon that Jung called *synchronicity*, which implies that it includes much more than the will of the magician. We live in an ocean of relations where many wills and minds are on the go and where the outcome of a magical ceremony never can be predicted.

Those who want to approach the thoughts of genuine quantum physics should do it via the real physicists and not via its amateurish interpreters. When Dürr says

that matter strictly speaking doesn't exist, he is definitely not denying the material aspect of reality. Nor does he agree with old Platonic thoughts about the spirit as the real thing and material reality as just a reflection of spirit. When we move down to and beyond the atom level with quantum physics, the laws of classical physics are dissolved, as is the ability of our language to express what is happening. There, at the "bottom" of everything, we can't find any matter but only – yes what shall we call it? A kind of wave perhaps, energy maybe, information possibly, or potentiality, or quantum field, or the psychophysical primordial ground or *Urd's* web. At this level we can, according to Dürr, only talk in parables and this leads undeniably our thoughts in the direction of the mythical stories about the creation and the essence of the world. Dürr himself approaches esoteric trends within the world's main religions, above all Buddhism and Hinduism, but also Christianity, in his efforts to describe the implications of quantum physics to our world view. There is nothing non-living; everything is connected to everything; the *thing* has disappeared and become *process*; there is something inherent in the cosmos that constantly seeks enlargement and expansion; in this dynamic process the creative contribution of every individual also assists in changing and extending the Whole; the quantum field is apt to learn and is the primordial ground on which everything takes place.

Those who enter deeply into Nordic shamanism can find exciting relations between the master shaman *Oden* and quantum physics and I have jokingly called him the godfather of quantum physics. *Oden* is an archetype who has always existed – not as a person or a god or a weather phenomenon but as an ordering principle in the collective unconscious (to use the Jungian concept). Just as the cosmos is in constant change and flux, so the archetypes too should be viewed as dynamic processes. That is true as well of the archetype that we usually call *Oden* but who also is known under more than 200 other names. It is there that we find the parallel to quantum physics. An elementary "thing" can be interpreted as a particle or as a wave motion depending on which method we use to "observe" it. As a matter of fact it is neither or possibly both (but not simultaneously) and at the same time maybe something quite else if we find out new ways of "observing" it. Depending on how *Oden* has been perceived, thus depending on the method of observation, this archetype has been interpreted in over 200 different ways. And just as elementary particles can be transformed from wave to particle to wave, *Oden* can be transformed to bird, snake or four-legged animal. He can also change gender which is evident from a small silver



figurine that was found in an excavation in *Lejre* in Denmark in 2009 and that depicts *Oden* wearing a female dress.

Just like elementary particles, *Oden* too has his anti-particle, his *Anti-Oden* or rather his *Shadow-Oden* in the shape of *Loke/Lodur*, who after all is even more of a shape-shifter and gender-shifter than *Oden*. Anti-matter is extremely short-lived on Earth and all *Loke's* shapes are also more or less short-lived transitional forms. And when we penetrate *Oden* and *Loke* to the core, peeling off all their exterior attributes and shapes, nothing remains in the end. Like Dürr we can state that there is no matter, no *Oden* or *Loke*. Everything is just an expectation in the quantum field, a potentiality in the implicate order or in the cosmic holomovement, a vibration in *Urd's* web, a dream in Dreamtime and a possibility waiting for birth in the *Unus Mundus* of the alchemists.

When we take matter apart, in the end nothing will remain that resembles matter – just form, symmetry and relation, Dürr writes. Matter is not made up of matter. What is primary is relation; matter is secondary. At the base of everything we find something that is more like spirit and which can possibly be described with linguistic concepts such as whole, open, alive and potential. Reality is an indivisible immaterial pattern of relations, a “field of expectation” for possible energetic and material manifestations in the future. In each and every moment the world is created anew when potentiality becomes reality.

Quantum physics have many points in common with shamanism, but can it also say something about how we should live on Earth and how life can be lived in harmony with the great cosmic order? That is at least the view of Lothar Schäfer in his book *Infinite Potential: What Quantum Physics Reveals About How We Should Live* (2013). Schäfer is deeply rooted in Western science as professor emeritus in physical chemistry at the University of Arkansas. He emphasizes that the basic ideas of quantum physics have ancient spiritual roots:

- A non-localized field of information is the foundation of everything that exists.
- Everything emerges out of an indivisible whole.
- Everything is connected in a pattern where every particle is in instant contact with every other particle of the universe.
- Waves are the source of the manifest world.

The new paradigm that Schäfer wants to develop doesn't imply a return to an archaic way of thinking; instead he proposes a dynamic and active integration of

primordial spiritual views with present-day rational views of the world and its character. Schäfer writes about the need for a world view that unites all aspects of reality – its physical order as well as its mental and spiritual orders. This relates very much to how the psychologist C.G. Jung and the quantum physicist Wolfgang Pauli jointly tried to create a new world view by bringing together quantum physics, deep psychology and alchemy.

If we want to live in harmony with the order of the universe, it is quite necessary to develop an understanding of how the universe is constituted and functions. “A life in agreement with cosmic order is an authentic life”, writes Schäfer. And he adds: the only life that is worth living.

I will try to summarize Schäfer’s interpretation of quantum physics since it is so close to the basic ideas of a shamanic world view, and it can also contribute to an expansion and modernization of shamanic ideas.

- The primordial basis of all existence is a field of *cosmic potentiality*. This field is a pattern of information, a non-empirical realm of reality, an indivisible whole, a domain of transmateral forms, images and elementary thoughts.
- There are two domains of reality – the visible, empirical world of material things and the invisible, non-empirical realm of potentiality. The visible world is an emanation of the invisible, transempirical and transmateral potentiality, which holds the forms and the patterns of everything that is.
- The basis of the visible world is an invisible, nonmaterial wholeness, a realm of hidden images and patterns. The basis of matter is nonmaterial. All things thus have transcendent roots.
- The metaphysical realm is primary and the physical is secondary. “The basis of the world is a field of information and a storehouse of information.” “Nothing comes out of nothing, but everything comes out of the cosmic potentiality.”
- The non-empirical or rather transempirical order underlying all of reality is immanent, contained in everything, and transcendent, i.e. not restricted to the visible world.
- The complex order of the biosphere is an actualization of a virtual order that already exists in the cosmic potentiality.
- The non-empirical reality is the common source of both external structures and internal principles. Our consciousness thus has its origin in

a cosmic consciousness, in the invisible wholeness. The universe *has* a consciousness, but *is* also consciousness – and our human consciousness is part of this cosmic consciousness. The cosmic spirit is thinking with us. Everything is connected in and through its non-empirical roots.

- We humans have an inner potential that is part of the cosmic potentiality. We live in an ocean of potentiality. Changes in the world take place through so called quantum leaps and these quantum leaps are directing evolution.
- Our human consciousness serves as an outlet for the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic spirit. Through our minds the cosmic consciousness can actualize its potentiality in the empirical world.
- The cosmic consciousness creates constantly increasingly complex ports through which it can enter the empirical world. This process points at the need of a transformation of human consciousness, a quantum leap that, according to Schäfer, signifies the appearance of a new human species. The universe is a message that wants to be spoken and it wants us to speak it, writes Schäfer.

We humans have a desire deep inside to live in agreement with the cosmic order, because we are one with this order. When Schäfer tries to transform his view of quantum physics into a vision for our life on Earth he writes as follows:

“The new structure of consciousness is the consciousness of a nondual world, the world of the quantum phenomena, in which seemingly incompatible opposites are integrated or reconciled. The integrative mind can accept cosmic order as a model of human order. It can combine spiritual views of the world with a rational understanding of cosmic order. It can find a way to base public order on cooperation and kindness, rather than competition and conflict. And we will be able to live to the fullest our individual potential in a holistic world in which all things and people are one.”

The hitherto existing laws of nature are fundamentally wrong, writes Hans-Peter Dürr. There is no matter, there is no atomic nucleus, there are no electrons but just waves and wave figures. Everything is in constant flux and it is this flux that is the “building block” of existence. Our “egos” that are embedded in this transformation are not localized in time and space but are infinitely extended.

All that is solid melts into air, as Karl Marx underlined. The “language” that according to me is best suited to capture the cosmic flux and help human beings

to move in harmony with the great cosmic dance is the *uthark*, the original runic system that is intrinsic in the cosmos itself and changes as the cosmos changes. The runes capture and express the complex and paradoxical cosmic potentiality field. They are expressions of the cosmic order at the same time as they take part in the ongoing creation of this order. This creativity is the essence of the shaman's work.

## Appendix: Cosmology of the Uthark

The 24 runes can be described as a map of the cosmos. They are a summary of the basic powers of the the cosmos. The system displays the greatest magical potential when you start with **ᚱ** the *Ur* rune and conclude with **ᚦ** the *Feh* rune, i.e. when the rune system is utilized as an *uthark*.

The runes represent primordial sounds and primordial images that the magicians at first picked up from nature's own vibrations; wind, thunder, rain, hail, snow, streams, waves, murmuring brooks, bellowing animals, humming insects, whispering trees, the sounds of growing and the like. When you sing the runes in a meditative way you can feel how you through these primordial vibrations get into touch with the great cosmic web, *Urd's web*, vibrating in harmony with it.

ᚱ **Ur**. Creative primordial power. Origin. Beginning. Dawn.

ᚦ **Thurs**. Destructive primordial power. Chaos. Dusk. Darkness. Wisdom.

ᚦ **Ass**. Önd/holy wind. Air. Thought. Inspiration. The Great Mystery. Wisdom.

ᚱ **Reid**. Lightning, thunder. Tor. Illumination. Movement. Order. The four directions.

ᚨ **Ken**. Fire. Heat. Spirit. Transformation.

ᚨ **Gifu**. Gift. Reciprocity. Ceremony. Harmony. Balance. The six directions.

ᚦ **Wynja**. Peace. Serenity. Joy. Wellbeing. Happiness. Existential vital power.

ᚱ **Hagal**. Hail. Crystal. Tremor. Purification. Clarity. The rainbow. The Milky Way.

ᚦ **Naud**. Necessity. Urd's web. The norms. Effort. Initiation. Rebirth.

┆ **Iss**. Ice. Frost. Snow. Stillness. Ego. Structure. Moulding power. Winter.

✧ **Jara**. Female sexuality/fertility. Pregnancy. The annual cycle. Harvest. Autumn.

┆ **Pertra**. Mother Earth. Rock. Minerals. Metals. Form. Body. The mineral kingdom.

┆ **Eoh**. The world tree. The spine. Wild plants. Plant teachers. Protection. The plant kingdom.

┆ **Algiz**. The wild animals. Power animals. Instincts. Protection. The animal kingdom.

⚡ **Sol**. The sun. Heat. Love. Care. Summer.

↑ **Tyr**. Father Sky. The spiritual warrior. Honesty. Self-sacrifice. Manliness.

♁ **Bjarka**. Mother Earth. Power of growth. Birth. Healing powers. Womanliness.

♁ **Eh**. The shaman and the shaman's horse. Ecstasy. Spirit journey. Insight. Death.

♁ **Madr**. Human beings. Self-knowledge. Awakening. Ancestral spirits.

┆ **Lagu**. Water. Rain. The moon. Night. Sleep. Intuition. Patience. Feelings.

◇ **Ing**. Male sexuality/fertility. Conception. Creative ability. Sowing. Spring.

⌘ **Odal**. Cultivation. Cultivated plants. Agriculture. Tradition. Family. Relatives.

⌘ **Dagaz**. Day. Light. Insight. Wakefulness. Transformation. The crack between the worlds.

┆ **Feh**. Fulfilment. Contentment. Domesticated animals. Wealth. Prosperity. Ending.

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