

What is the status of spirits?

A transpersonal-shamanic view

Before our upcoming Soul Retrieval workshop [October30-Nov 2, 2008] I want to briefly discuss the nature of helping spirits. I hope this will help prepare us and save a little time. I welcome your questions here, for shamanic clients, and in Face Book Hollow Bone Circle for apprentices, and/or at the workshop.

What are spirit guides and power animals ?

From a phenomenological perspective they are simply “numina” --imaginally experienced as helping presences or consciousnesses, created by or emanated from and aligned with the Divine Center -- being Its messengers, attendants, helpers, mediators and guardians. These consciousnesses are more profound, or are higher and deeper than ordinary human consciousness, and from them we may gain a greater and more objective perspective. Hence they are sometimes called ‘transpersonal’ forces or realities. They are part of the vision of ultimate reality, of the Divine Spirit in virtually any culture.

The phenomenology of helping spirits is cross-cultural and trans-historical. The word angel, in Greek means messenger, and the first mythological images come out of ancient Sumeria, which ultimately has influenced Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Egyptians had their own versions, Toth is the scribe messenger of the gods, and Eros and Dike are examples of the Greek *daimons* (=inspiring sprits). Hinduism has its various helpers and messengers, and does Buddhism with its bodhisattvas and buddhas, dakini and so on. In shamanism these transpersonal phenomena are often referred to as helpers, power animals, spirit guides, guardians, naguals, and so on. They each have differing functions in helping, guiding, inspiring, healing, or guiding humanity.

The ultimate experience of the divine is formlessness that is seething with creative energy. This formless dimension of the Divine is also called the causal realm, as it is the cause of all arising forms or worlds or creations. Because it is formless there is no image for it, and names fail. “The Tao that can be named is not true Tao” (Lao Tzu). Yet we must use words to point to it. In the subtle realm of the divine spirit (transpersonal realms) individual consciousnesses, our spirit guides manifest and are findable through altered states (visionary states of consciousness). You can think of this as the Divine manifest in some form.

It is a reductionistic move to consider them projection of archetypes and complexes, and C.G.Jung, the pioneer of modern depth psychology, was aware of this limitation, yet his terms do give some ontic status to what has gone by the name of angels, spirits, inspiring daimons and such. You are free to interpret them however you wish and you will have some success in working with them, but you will find shamanic methods more effective if you enter the shamanic system and view them on their own terms, thus spending the scientific-cultural paradigm while working shamanically. That mind will do what it will, but in the shamanic state of consciousness, the helpers, Guardians, and guides are facts. Keep in mind that there is nothing, phenomenologically speaking, in experience that indicates they are projections of archetypes—that is simply a theory which cannot be tested in experience. Experience presents facts, what they are ontologically is a matter of interpretation. But from within a spiritual world view, such as shamanism, they are simply considered spirits and helpers, and as realities, powerful numinous facts. They are not theoretical but can be confirmed in visionary experience, same as with Buddhist bodhisattvas which can be confirmed in contemplative experience.

From ancient Sumeria through Judaism, Christianity and Islam there is a hierarchy of angelic beings, some serving functions close to the Divine Source, and some helping humanity and every creature on earth and elsewhere in the Cosmos. In Buddhism these are known as “Buddhalands”, and more recently as part of the

Buddhaverse. In transpersonal psychology, the states of consciousness lying beyond ordinary rational ego-consciousness are psychic, low subtle, high subtle, and causal (formless Divinity).

In shamanism the mapping of these dimensions comes in terms of the visionary cosmology of shamanic visionary states, organized into a three storied universe with Underworld, Middle World, and Upper World. Each of these worlds is a realm of consciousness, and some dimensions of the collective unconscious are tapped, and some dimensions of transcendent spirit are accessible as well. According to Eliade and Harner, shamanism lies at the historic root of all the contemplative yogas of India and Tibet, and is reflected throughout the mythologies and iconographies of all the world's great religions...somewhat degraded but noticeable in Christianity as Hell, Our World, and Heaven. Mythologies are portals into shamanic, mystical, or transpersonal realms of experience. Don Miguel Ruiz, author of the Four Agreements, used mythology as a direct portal to his own enlightenment, as directed by his curanderismo and Toltec teachers.

Don Alverto Taxo has shared similar information.

Tapping into the visionary planes and presences extends our consciousness with more insight, intuition and objectivity...and this is the real test of their factual nature. If they help wisdom increase, help you in healing work and in your own growth, you are tapping into transpersonal or spiritual reality---call it what you wish. Faith in this reality does enhance the results and outcome. When you see your clients transforming and growing rapidly you will know your shamanic work is potent and effective. In all this, we still need our rational consciousness and have a foot firmly planted in this physical reality, while the other foot is located in the transpersonal or non-ordinary reality.

Brief Bibliography for this discussion

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