

# The Way of the Shaman

## A Guide to Power and Healing

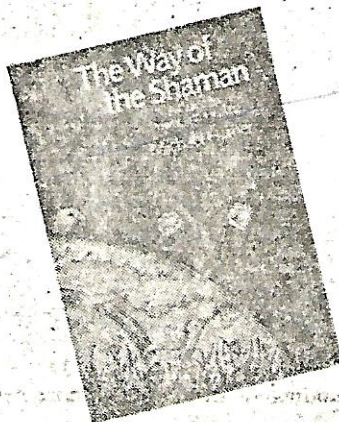
By Michael Harner, Ph.D. (Harper & Row, \$9.95)

### Reviewed by Prem Das

Many people today are seeking a vision of humanity at one with nature rather than opposed, and to accomplish this re-imagining a new paradigm or model of reality is required: we need a paradigm that is inclusive rather than exclusive, experiential instead of intellectual—one that embodies the relationship between all levels of consciousness, all belief systems, and which values with love and respect the place that each mineral, plant, animal, and human being has in the sacred "Medicine Wheel" of life. Shamanism—the age-old practice of "witch-doctors" or "medicine men"—offers such a paradigm: what Dr. Michael Harner terms "shamanic states of consciousness," or SCC (synonymous with Castaneda's "non-ordinary reality" or Eliade's "ecstasy"), have been employed for millennia throughout the world to provide this "new" way of experiencing ourselves and the world around us.

An anthropologist by training, Dr. Harner has taken a bold step forward in this book. Not only does he lucidly describe his own extraordinary adventures with shamans in South America, he also presents practical exercises and methods that the reader can employ to acquire shamanic experience [see sidebar]. As an effort to convey genuine shamanic experience through the print medium, the book must be recognized as an experiment, for shamanism has always been taught by master to apprentice, in a very direct and personal manner. Unfortunately, today few shamans are available as teachers, and the number of people interested in undergoing an apprenticeship greatly outnumber the shamans able to introduce

them to this ancient and extraordinary path. For this reason alone, the experiment is warranted, for if it turns out to be successful, or even partially so, we will be rewarded with individuals who can open latent perceptual modalities and help to heal the wound that divides people from one another and from the environment.



Shamanism presents a paradigm that is truly holistic: the shaman is a healer concerned with the well-being of the individual, family, community, and environment. Shamans, according to Dr. Harner, attain power through an understanding of primary life force energies, revealed on their "journeys" into the underworld (the human unconscious) and up into the sky realm (superconscious). It is from this highly integrated inner vision that healing power emanates.

"The shaman is forever trying to articulate his personal revelatory experiences as though they were pieces of a great cosmic jigsaw puzzle," writes Dr. Harner. "Many years of shamanic experience are usually necessary to arrive at a high degree of knowledge of the cosmic puzzle, and even a master shaman does not expect ever to complete the puzzle in a mortal lifetime."

In *The Way of the Shaman* the novice is encouraged to try exercises such as sending one's awareness down into caves or springs to reach the underworld, or up into rainbows to circle the boundaries of the earth. The value of these visionary journeys (or of encounters with mythical gods and goddesses, dancing with one's animal spirit, etc.) lies in their ability to harmonize and integrate inner aspects of the self, the forces and powers of one's own psyche. The shamanic path itself is a healing process.

"In shamanism," Dr. Harner concludes, "there is ultimately no distinction between helping others and helping yourself. By helping others shamanically, one becomes more powerful, self-fulfilled, and joyous."

*The Way of the Shaman* stands as an open invitation for those who want to pass through the magical portway and enter shamanic realms of consciousness.

### Rock Seeing A Shamanic Technique

Even in broad daylight, one can learn to see shamanically the nonordinary aspects of natural phenomena. For example, the following is a method of *rock-seeing*, a technique I learned from a Lakota Sioux medicine man. First decide upon a problem for which you wish an answer. Then simply walk through a wild area until a two-fisted-size stone on the ground seems to attract your attention. Pick it up and carry it to a spot where you can comfortably sit down with it.

Place the stone on the ground in front of you, and pose the question to