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**Response on:**

**DREAM WORLDS OF SHAMANISM AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM**

**by Angela Sumegi**

**Chapter1: Shamanism and Dreams**

Shamanism is one of the belief systems existing in the world since ancient times. It is a practice that has always been questioned for whether it is a phenomenon of possession of spiritual mediumship or rather a religious element for ancient Siberian and other related cultures.

“Dream Worlds of Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism” is a remarkable work of Angela Sumegi, a Canadian Professor of Humanities and Religion, which presents her expert academic research of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and the interface between Buddhism and Shamanism.[[1]](#footnote-1)

“Shamanism and Dreams”, the very first chapter of Sumegi’s book, is a beautiful depiction of the dream-worlds of Shamanism, in the context of Tibetan literature and culture. The text starts with familiarizing the readers to the traditional Shamanic philosophies and spiritual practices, gradually building up connections to the main topic, the Shamanic view of Dreams.

Shamanism, in its core, refers to the set of native religious elements of certain regions, as well as to a cross-culture mystic belief system. The author supports Peter Furst’s description of Shamanism as an “ecological belief system”[[2]](#footnote-2) according to which, Shamanism expresses a philosophy of life that holds all beings to be qualitatively equivalent. In Shamanic world-view, all phenomena of nature are considered to be animate, interconnected and imbued with spirit forces that can interact with human beings in positive or negative ways.

Mankind does not hold a place of natural authority in the Shamanic world, and hence, participates in the complex interactions of the universe in the same way as all the other beings. All beings have a role to play and they must be allowed to play their part. The concept of permission and harmony between humans and other beings appears in many cultures as an important aspect of Shamanic activity. The ideology of animistic nature of all beings and the struggle for equilibrium among them is the principal essence of Shamanic ritual and dream-work.

According to Shamanic beliefs, the cosmos consists of various dimensions of existence, other than the physical human world. These dimensions can be accessed unintentionally by ordinary humans, but Shamanic activities involve the intentional access to these realms with the assistance of spirit forces[[3]](#footnote-3). A Shaman performs these activities (or rituals) in response to community demands for the protection or restoration of life force, property, and of personal, social, economic, and environmental well-being.

Shamanic power and activity have a close connection with sleep and dream, which link a Shaman to the realm of spirits and death. For Shamans, dreams work as a journey to the other states of existence and a mode of communication with the spiritual beings. Dreams, in Shamanic practices, are a way of creating and manipulating reality, revealing knowledge, and rewarding power. To emphasize the role of dreams in Shamanic belief, Sumegi says,

“Dreaming, in its widest sense, is the very foundation of Shamanic activity.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

It is a common feature of dreams that the dreamer experiences mysterious transformations. The Shaman dreamer learns to use the power of this ordinary aspect of dream, and seeks ways to extend that quality into the waking reality of the group, where it can become the basis for the extraordinary transformation called healing.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In many cultures, the beginning of a Shaman’s ability to heal lies within the Shaman’s own experiences of sickness and the initiatory dream[[6]](#footnote-6), the dream or vision in which he encounters the spirits who are responsible for his condition and who will become his allies in Shamanic healing rituals. The dream itself is the manifestation of the new Shaman’s power to see the spirits and navigate the invisible world.

Since shamanic power is allied with the ability to communicate with the spirits through chanting, singing, or speaking the language of the spirits, initiatory dreams are frequently known to play a part in the lives of traditional singers and musicians, who by virtue of their skill possess Shaman-like qualities.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Shamanic systems distinguish between the world of dream and spirits and the world of waking consciousness. The answer to the question of how the dreamworld of the Shaman interacts with the waking world is not found in the categories of dreaming and waking, but in their nature as transitional states. Waking reality and dream reality are recognizably distinct, yet they influence one another. Dependent on the characteristics of his world, the Shaman is able to fulfill his role and manipulate the diverse realities of his universe for himself and his audience.

The Shamanic belief system is really deep in spiritual practices. The connection of humans and the other beings of the universe, as expressed in Shamanism, is just mesmerizing. Our current world, continuously losing its precious natural treasures and getting ruined by materialistic mankind, desperately requires human-beings to learn from Shamanic practices of respecting and cherishing the natural environment and other creations of God.

The Shamanic dream rituals and spiritual practices, on the other hand, might seem dramatic and unconvincing or based on completely fabricated lies to the non-believers, but this is where lies the beauty of the belief and the purity and innocence of the believers.

For someone who has little to no knowledge of Shamanism or dream philosophy and wants to learn it in depth, without having to read a lot of boring academic texts, ‘Shamanism and Dreams’ is a really good option. The text is so rich in knowledge yet so engaging and easy to understand. Angela Sumegi has done an amazing job of conveying her extensive research work in such an interesting way. From the very basic beliefs and philosophical concepts to presenting the deep spiritual practices of Shamans, she has used very simple language, the traditional terminologies are also explained within the text. As a person who gets easily overwhelmed with the difficult language and loads of information in academic texts, Sumegi’s writing was like a rare pleasant experience to me, which enhanced my curiosity and interest in the topic.

**References**

* Sumegi, Angela, 2008: ‘Shamanism and Dreams’, in *Dream Worlds of Shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press) pp.11-34.
* <https://carleton.ca/chum/people/angela-sumegi-3/> (21.09.2019)

1. (Carleton University Website: Angela Sumegi, Accessed: 21.09.2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Sumegi, 2008: p.12) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (Sumegi, 2008: p.12) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. (Sumegi, 2008: p.24) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (Sumegi, 2008: p.30) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. (Sumegi, 2008: p.28) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. (Sumegi, 2008: p.29) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)