

SHAMANISM

A COMPLETE DEEP DIVE

*Siberian Origins, South American Plant Traditions, Korean Muism, and the
Universal Shamanic Map*

*The word 'shaman' comes from the Tungus šaman of Siberia —
the one who sees in the dark, who crosses between worlds,
who retrieves what has been lost from the soul.*

The Shipibo curandero sings the icaros that hold the healing.

*The Korean mudang dances in full possession of the spirits
so that the community can speak to what it cannot ordinarily see.*

The oldest technology of consciousness on earth.

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Introduction

Shamanism is the oldest technology of consciousness available to the human species — predating all the world's organized religions, predating writing, predating civilization in any formal sense, present in the archaeological record from at least 40,000 years ago. Every tradition in the Haligricity library, including the most sophisticated philosophical systems of India, China, and Greece, has roots that ultimately reach back to the shamanic layer of human sacred experience: the recognition that the visible world is embedded in a larger invisible world, that specific human beings can be trained to navigate that larger world and retrieve information and power from it, and that this navigation is the primary technology for healing, guidance, and community wellbeing.

This guide covers three specific shamanic traditions in depth — chosen because they represent three distinct regional expressions of the universal shamanic pattern, and because each offers specific gifts directly relevant to Haligric practice: Siberian shamanism (the etymological and probably historical source of the word 'shaman,' and the most completely documented original form), South American shamanism (home to the world's most sophisticated plant-medicine healing traditions and to the Amazonian curanderismo that has produced the specific healing songs called icaros), and Korean Muism (one of the world's oldest continuous shamanic traditions, practiced primarily by female shamans called mudang, whose relationship with the spirit world is among the most pragmatic and most direct in any tradition).

Critically, this guide approaches the shamanic traditions with the same Haligric lens applied to every other tradition: factual, respectful, and honest about the distinction between what is documented and what is claimed, between what is genuinely accessible to outside practitioners and what is appropriately restricted to those trained within the specific tradition. The plant medicine traditions in particular require careful treatment — their genuine power and their genuine risks are both real, and neither can be safely ignored.

What Shamanism Is

The Core Defining Features

The word 'shaman' comes from the Tungus (Evenki) word šaman — referring to the specific type of ritual specialist found among the indigenous peoples of Siberia who enters specific states of altered consciousness (trance) to interact with spirits on behalf of the community. The Russian anthropologist Mircea Eliade's 1951 study *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* established the comparative framework through which the commonalities across diverse indigenous traditions came to be understood as expressions of a single fundamental pattern.

THE CORE DEFINING FEATURES OF SHAMANISM

1. THE SHAMAN SPECIALIZES IN NON-ORDINARY STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS: Deliberately entered, not passive or accidental — the shaman trains to navigate altered states of consciousness with specific intentionality. 2. THE SHAMAN INTERACTS WITH SPIRITS: The non-ordinary reality the shaman navigates is populated by specific beings — ancestral spirits, nature spirits, helping spirits, illness spirits — with whom the shaman develops working relationships. 3. THE SHAMAN ACTS ON BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY: Shamanism is fundamentally a community service — the shaman's navigation of non-ordinary reality is for the purpose of healing, divination, and guidance for specific community members and the community as a whole. 4. THE SHAMAN MEDIATES BETWEEN WORLDS: The shaman occupies the boundary between ordinary and non-ordinary reality — capable of moving between them in ways that ordinary community members cannot. 5. HEALING IS CENTRAL: The primary function of shamanic practice in virtually every tradition is healing — physical illness, psychological distress, community disruption, and the specific condition of soul loss. 6. SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES: The shamanic journey (deliberate trance travel to non-ordinary reality), soul retrieval (the recovery of lost soul-parts), power animal retrieval, extraction (removing intrusive spiritual elements), and psychopomp work (guiding the dead) are found across diverse traditions with remarkable consistency. 7. THE SHAMAN IS CALLED, NOT CHOSEN: Shamans across traditions are not volunteers — they are called by the spirits through specific experiences (often including serious illness, near-death, crisis) that leave them no choice but to accept the vocation or suffer the consequences.

Part Two

The Three Worlds

The Universal Shamanic Cosmological Map

Across the extraordinary diversity of shamanic traditions — from Siberia to the Amazon, from Korea to the Amazon, from West Africa to the Arctic — a consistent cosmological structure appears: the universe is organized into three worlds (though the specific number varies — some traditions have two, some have five or seven, but the three-world structure is the most common), connected by a central axis, and navigable by the trained practitioner.

THE THREE WORLDS

THE UPPER WORLD: The realm above — typically reached by ascending through or above the sky (up a tree, up a rainbow, through a smoke hole, into the clouds and beyond). The upper world is generally associated with: higher spiritual beings (deities, angels, cosmic forces), ancestors who have ascended to higher spiritual states, teachers and guides of a more celestial character, future knowledge and broad cosmic perspective. The upper world tends to have a quality of luminosity and expansiveness.

THE MIDDLE WORLD: The world of ordinary everyday reality — but understood as also containing its non-ordinary dimension. The spirits of nature inhabit the middle world: the spirits of specific trees, specific rivers, specific stones, specific places, specific animals in the wild. The middle world is also where the wandering dead may be found — those who have died but not fully transitioned to another state. Shamanic work in the middle world includes: connecting with nature spirits, tracking lost objects or people, working with the recently dead.

THE LOWER WORLD: The realm below — typically reached by descending through an opening in the earth (a tree root, a cave, a lake, a hole in the ground). Despite the name, the lower world is not the equivalent of hell in the Abrahamic sense. It is generally understood as: the realm of earth spirits and nature powers, the home of power animals and totemic helpers, the source of grounded earthly wisdom. The lower world has a quality of density, richness, and primal power. Most shamanic healing work (particularly soul retrieval and power animal retrieval) is done in the lower world.

THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN WORLDS: The three worlds are separated by membranes or boundaries that ordinary consciousness cannot cross. The shaman's primary skill is the trained capacity to cross these boundaries consciously and with intentionality — to enter the other worlds, to find what is needed, and to return with it to the ordinary world.

The World Tree / Axis Mundi

The Connection Between Worlds

The World Tree (in Siberian traditions, the Cosmic Tree — in Norse mythology, Yggdrasil; in Mesoamerican traditions, the Ceiba; in various traditions, the Mountain, the Pole, the Cosmic Pillar) is the axis mundi — the central axis that connects the three worlds, the specific point where movement between worlds is most accessible, and the structure along which the shaman climbs upward to the upper world or descends to the lower.

The World Tree's Appearances

The World Tree appears in virtually every shamanic tradition in the world: the Siberian shaman climbs the World Tree in trance; the Tungus shaman's drum is made from the wood of the World Tree; the Norse god Odin hung on Yggdrasil (the World Tree) for nine days to receive the runes; the Mayan Ceiba tree connects the underworld through its roots, the earth world in its trunk, and the heavens in its branches; the Hindu Mount Meru and the Buddhist cosmic mountain serve the same cosmological function; the Kabbalistic Tree of Life maps the same structure onto the human soul; even the Christian cross has been interpreted as an axis mundi symbol.

CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY

The World Tree — the axis mundi, the central axis connecting the three worlds along which the shaman travels — is the shamanic tradition's cosmological equivalent of what every tradition in the Haligricity library expresses through its own specific vocabulary. The Sufi poteau mitan is the axis mundi of the Vodou ceremony. The Hindu shikhara tower points to heaven above the garbhagriha. The Stonehenge solstice alignment is the axis mundi of the Druidic sacred landscape. The Kabbalistic Tree of Life is the axis mundi of Jewish mystical cosmology. Every tradition that maps the structure of existence identifies a vertical axis connecting the divine above with the earth below — and places the practitioner's work at the intersection of that axis with the horizontal plane of ordinary reality. The shaman is the practitioner who most explicitly and most literally navigates that axis.

The Shamanic Journey Mechanics and Method

The shamanic journey — the deliberate entry into an altered state of consciousness to navigate non-ordinary reality — is the fundamental shamanic technology. It is not a vision or a hallucination in the passive sense; it is a directed navigation of non-ordinary reality with specific intention, specific destination, and specific purpose. The shaman travels with intention and returns with specific information or power that can be applied to the ordinary world.

THE SHAMANIC JOURNEY — COMPLETE MECHANICS

THE INTENTION: Before beginning the journey, the shaman sets a specific clear intention — 'I am going to the lower world to find [this person's] power animal' or 'I am going to the upper world to ask my teacher about [this situation].' The journey is purposeful, not exploratory. **THE VEHICLE:** The most universal shamanic induction method is rhythmic sound — typically the drum, though rattles, singing, and other sound instruments also serve. The specific drumming rhythm most used in core shamanic practice (developed by Michael Harner and the Foundation for Shamanic Studies from comparative research) is approximately 200 beats per minute — a theta-wave-inducing rhythm that facilitates the specific state of consciousness in which journeying occurs. **THE ENTRY POINT:** The shaman enters the journey through a specific imagined entry point — a particular hole in the ground, a cave, a tree root, or a lake for lower world journeys; a rainbow, a tall tree, or a mountain peak for upper world journeys. The entry point is typically one the shaman has used before — familiarity deepens the path. **THE JOURNEY ITSELF:** In the altered state, the shaman experiences non-ordinary reality with the same sensory vividness as ordinary reality — seeing, hearing, feeling, and sometimes smelling and tasting. The spirits encountered are not passive images; they communicate, they resist, they have their own agendas and their own knowledge. **THE RETURN:** When the work is complete, the shaman returns to the entry point and ascends/ascends back to the ordinary world. The specific drumming pattern shifts (often to a callback rhythm — rapid double-beat drumming) to signal the return. **THE INTEGRATION:** What the shaman brings back — information, power, soul fragments, power animals — is applied to the specific healing or guidance need that motivated the journey. The integration of the journey's results into the ordinary world is as important as the journey itself.

Soul Retrieval

The Central Healing Technology

Soul retrieval is the most distinctively shamanic of all healing practices — the specific shamanic technology for recovering parts of the soul that have been lost through trauma, shock, or chronic distress. It is based on a specific understanding of trauma's mechanism that differs fundamentally from psychological or biomedical models: in the shamanic view, when a human being experiences overwhelming trauma, a part of the soul leaves the body — a protective dissociation that is understood as a spiritual reality rather than merely a psychological metaphor.

Soul Loss: The Diagnosis

Soul loss is understood as the underlying cause of a wide range of conditions: chronic depression, addictions, difficulty being fully present in one's life, a persistent sense of emptiness or incompleteness, physical illness that does not respond to ordinary treatment, and the specific quality of numbness and disconnection that follows severe trauma. The shamanic view is not that these conditions have psychological causes to be treated — it is that the soul has literally left and needs to be literally retrieved.

THE SOUL RETRIEVAL PROCESS

THE DIAGNOSIS: The shaman determines through their own journey or through observation that soul loss is the presenting issue — that a part of this person's soul is not in the body where it belongs. THE JOURNEY TO FIND THE LOST SOUL PART: The shaman journeys to the non-ordinary reality where the lost soul part is located — this may be in the past (stuck at the point of the original trauma), in the lower world, or in another location accessible only through non-ordinary consciousness. THE NEGOTIATION: The soul part may not want to come back — it left because the ordinary reality was unsafe. The shaman must communicate to the soul part that it is now safe to return, that the person is ready to receive it and to make the changes necessary to support it. THE RETURN: The shaman brings the soul part back and blows it into the person (through the crown of the head or the chest) — literally breathing the returned soul part back into the body. THE FOLLOW-UP: Soul retrieval without integration work is incomplete — the person needs to do the inner work necessary to welcome and sustain the returned soul part. This may involve therapy, changes in behavior, ritual practices, or other forms of support. THE HALIGRIC LIVING ALTAR CONNECTION: The Haligric concept of the Living Altar — an altar oriented toward the living versions of the self and loved ones across simultaneous time, connected to shamanic soul retrieval — is the most direct application of this shamanic technology in the Haligricity framework. The Living Altar creates the material conditions in the ordinary world for the reception and sustaining of retrieved soul parts.

The Shamanic Calling Illness, Crisis, and Election

Across all shamanic traditions, the shaman does not choose their vocation — they are chosen by the spirits through specific experiences that are typically characterized by crisis, illness, or some form of breakdown. This 'shamanic illness' (or shamanic crisis) is the initiatory ordeal through which the spirits claim the person who will serve as their conduit — and refusing the calling is understood as guaranteeing the continuation or worsening of the crisis.

FORMS OF THE SHAMANIC CALLING

INITIATORY ILLNESS: The most common form — a specific, often serious illness that defies ordinary medical explanation or treatment, which only resolves when the person accepts the shamanic vocation. In Siberian traditions, this illness is understood as the spirits dismembering the candidate (in non-ordinary reality) and reconstituting them as a shaman. In Korean Muism, the specific illness associated with the mudang calling is called sinbyeong — a specific complex of symptoms (seizures, visions, hearing voices, unusual behavior) that is recognized by experienced mudang as the spirits' call. **NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE:** A serious accident, surgery, or illness that brings the person to the boundary between life and death — and in which they have specific experiences of non-ordinary reality (encounter with spirits, travel through the other worlds) that they bring back as evidence of the shamanic capacity. **ANCESTRAL ELECTION:** Being born into a shamanic lineage — some traditions hold that shamanic ability runs in families, and that specific children are elected by the ancestral shamans before birth. **LIGHTNING STRIKE:** In some traditions (Siberian, Native American), surviving a lightning strike is one of the most powerful possible signs of shamanic election — the direct contact with the sky's sacred power is understood as the spirits' most dramatic form of calling. **THE SIGNIFICANCE:** The shamanic calling is not a choice — it is a recognition. This distinguishes the shaman from the ordinary practitioner of any tradition: the shaman did not select their path through reasoning or preference. They were identified by the non-ordinary reality as someone capable of serving as a bridge between worlds, and the specific ordeals of the calling are the training and initiation that the spirits provide.

SIBERIAN SHAMANISM

The Original Tradition

Siberia — the vast territory extending from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean across the northern half of the Asian continent — is the homeland of the shamanic tradition in its most fully documented and most archeologically ancient form. The indigenous peoples of Siberia (the Evenki/Tungus, Yakut, Buryat, Mongolian, Nenets, Khanty, Mansi, and dozens of other distinct groups) maintained shamanic traditions of extraordinary sophistication that were documented in detail by Russian and European scholars from the 17th century onward.

Why Siberian Shamanism Is Primary

Several factors make Siberian shamanism the most important starting point for understanding the global shamanic pattern: the word 'shaman' itself comes from the Siberian Evenki/Tungus tradition; Siberia is likely the cultural origin point from which the Paleo-Indian migrations brought shamanic practices to the Americas approximately 15,000-20,000 years ago; and the Siberian tradition has been documented more comprehensively and over a longer period than most other shamanic traditions.

THE CORE FEATURES OF SIBERIAN SHAMANISM

THE SHAMAN'S SOCIAL ROLE: In traditional Siberian societies, the shaman was a specific category of specialist distinct from ordinary religious practitioners, healers, and community leaders. The shaman served specific functions: healing the sick (particularly soul retrieval and the removal of illness-causing spirits), divination (obtaining information from the spirits about hunting, weather, community decisions), conducting the dead to the other world (psychopomp work), and mediating between the human community and the spirit world that governs nature and fate. **THE SPIRIT WORLD STRUCTURE:** Siberian shamanism maps a specific three-world cosmology (Upper World, Middle World, Lower World) connected by the World Tree or Cosmic Axis. The Upper World is the realm of the High God (Tengri — sky deity) and the celestial spirits; the Lower World is the realm of the ruler of the dead and of the earth spirits; the Middle World is where humans live alongside the spirits of nature. **THE SHAMAN'S HELPING SPIRITS:** The Siberian shaman works with specific spirit helpers — typically one or more primary 'mother spirits' (the shaman's primary spiritual protectors), various animal spirits, and the spirits of deceased shamans. These helpers are the shaman's extended spiritual community, without which the shamanic work is impossible. **THE ECSTATIC JOURNEY VS POSSESSION:** Siberian shamanism primarily involves ecstatic journey — the shaman's spirit leaves the body to travel to other realms while the body remains accessible. This differs from the possession model (where spirits enter the shaman's body) that is more common in African diasporic traditions. Both forms occur in Siberia, but the ecstatic journey model is the defining characteristic.

Tungus and Evenki Shamanism

The Source Tradition

The Evenki (formerly called Tungus by Russian settlers) are the indigenous people across the vast territory from the Yenisei River to the Pacific Ocean — among the most mobile and most adaptable of all Siberian peoples, following the reindeer herds across thousands of kilometers of taiga and tundra. Their šaman is the etymological source of the English word 'shaman,' and their shamanic tradition is among the most fully documented in the ethnographic record.

The Evenki World Tree and Cosmic Geography

The Evenki cosmic geography involves a river that flows through all three worlds — the Upper World, the Middle World, and the Lower World — with the shaman traveling along this river to reach specific destinations. This river-based navigation of the cosmos is one of the most distinctive features of the Evenki tradition: the cosmos is not a static structure to be climbed but a flowing process to be navigated, with the shaman as the skilled boatperson who knows the currents.

EVENKI SHAMANIC SPIRITS — THE ONGONS

ONGONS (Spirit Images): The physical representations of helping spirits — small figures, typically made of leather, wood, or metal, that serve as the dwelling places of specific spirits. The Evenki shaman's collection of ongons represents their community of spirit helpers. THE SHAMAN'S SOUL DIVISION: Evenki tradition holds that the shaman has multiple souls — unlike ordinary humans who have a single soul, the shaman's soul is divided into components that can travel independently, some remaining in the body while others journey. This multi-soul model allows the shaman to be simultaneously present in the ordinary world and active in non-ordinary reality. THE HARGI (THE SHAMAN'S SHADOW SOUL): The specific soul component that journeys during shamanic trance — traveling through the three worlds while the shaman's body remains in the community. The hargi is the 'traveler' aspect of the shaman's being. HEREDITARY TRANSMISSION: Among the Evenki, shamanic ability is understood as inherited — passed through specific lineages. The spirits who worked with a deceased shaman may transfer to a descendant, choosing their new vessel from among the lineage's members.

The Siberian Shaman's Costume

A Cosmos Worn

The Siberian shaman's ceremonial costume is one of the most symbolically complete sacred garments in the world — a wearable map of the shaman's cosmic geography, a material expression of their relationships with helping spirits, and a practical instrument of shamanic work. Every element of the costume carries specific symbolic meaning; the costume as a whole constitutes the shaman's alternate body — the body they wear when moving between worlds.

THE SHAMAN'S COSTUME — ELEMENT BY ELEMENT

THE IRON SKELETON: Many Siberian shamanic costumes are sewn with iron rings or iron plates representing the shaman's inner skeleton — the immortal iron bones that the spirits gave the shaman during the initiatory dismemberment. The iron skeleton is the shaman's indestructible spirit-form, the form that persists through death and dissolution. **BIRD FEATURES:** Feathers, wings, and bird imagery are common throughout — the bird being the primary symbol of upper-world travel. The shaman's costume enables flight through its bird symbolism. **ANIMAL REPRESENTATIONS:** Images and physical elements (claws, teeth, fur) of the shaman's primary spirit helpers — particularly the bear (earth power, healing), the eagle (upper world access, far-seeing), and various other animals specific to the shaman's helping spirit community. **MIRRORS (TOLI):** Polished metal disks attached to the back of the costume — serving as armor against harmful spiritual forces (reflecting them away) and as instruments of divination (surfaces in which the spirit world can be seen). **BELLS AND JINGLES:** Metal bells and jingles that sound with every movement of the costumed shaman — the sound scaring away harmful spirits and calling helping spirits to the shaman's aid. **THE HEADPIECE:** A complex headdress with antlers (representing the shaman's ability to travel to the upper world) or feathers, sometimes with a face covering — the headpiece marks the shaman's transformation from ordinary human to spirit-mediator.

The Drum

The Shaman's Horse

The drum is called the shaman's horse in many Siberian traditions — the vehicle that carries the shaman on their journey between worlds. It is simultaneously the most important practical tool of shamanic work, the shaman's most sacred object, and a living being in its own right — made from the wood of the World Tree and the skin of a specific animal, containing the spirit of those materials and capable of communication with the shaman.

THE DRUM'S CONSTRUCTION, CONSECRATION, AND FUNCTION

THE MATERIALS: The frame of the shaman's drum is traditionally made from a single piece of wood — ideally from the World Tree (the specific tree designated in the tradition as the cosmic axis), or from a tree that has been struck by lightning (a tree chosen by the sky spirits). The drumhead is made from the skin of a specific animal — deer, reindeer, elk — chosen through divination as the drum's spirit. **THE CONSTRUCTION CEREMONY:** Making a shaman's drum is itself a sacred ceremony — the wood and hide are gathered with specific prayers, the drum is constructed with specific ritual, and the completed drum undergoes a consecration ceremony in which the drum is 'awakened' — its spirit is called into it and the drum is introduced to the shaman's community of helping spirits. **THE DRUM AS LIVING BEING:** Once consecrated, the drum is understood as a living spiritual being — not an instrument but a partner. The shaman feeds the drum (with offerings), speaks to it, and maintains a specific relationship with it. If the drum is damaged or destroyed, the shaman may become ill. **THE DRUMMING PATTERN:** The Siberian shamanic drumbeat is typically in the range of 4-7 beats per second — a frequency that research (Michael Harner and others) has shown to facilitate the specific theta-wave states of consciousness in which shamanic journeying occurs. The drum is beaten throughout the journey, maintaining the specific state of consciousness that makes navigation of non-ordinary reality possible. **THE DRUM IN HEALING CEREMONIES:** During healing work, the drum is beaten around the patient's body — the sound both driving away illness-causing spirits and calling the patient's soul back if soul loss is the diagnosis. The drumming is not background music; it is active sacred technology.

SOUTH AMERICAN SHAMANISM

The Plant Teachers

South American shamanism — particularly the traditions of the Amazon Basin, the Andes, and the Amazon's tributaries — represents the world's most sophisticated and most fully developed tradition of plant-medicine-based healing and consciousness exploration. These traditions have developed over thousands of years a specific technology: the use of specific plant medicines (understood as teachers and allies, not as drugs or recreational substances) as the primary vehicle for accessing non-ordinary reality, receiving healing, and navigating the spirit world.

The Plant Teacher Model

The foundational distinction between South American shamanic plant traditions and all other approaches to psychoactive plants (including Western pharmacological and recreational approaches) is this: in the Amazonian tradition, the plants are not drugs that produce effects — they are teachers who have specific knowledge to transmit to the practitioner who approaches them correctly. The ayahuasca vine, the huachuma cactus, the peyote plant, the psilocybin mushroom — these are understood as intelligent beings who have been working with human consciousness for as long as human beings have lived in relationship with them.

THE PLANT TEACHERS AND THEIR DOMAINS

AYAHUASCA (*Banisteriopsis caapi* + *Psychotria viridis*): The 'vine of souls' — a brew combining the ayahuasca vine (which contains MAO inhibitors) and the chacruna leaf (which contains DMT). The combination produces a 4-8 hour visionary state of extraordinary depth and intensity. Used primarily for healing — physical, psychological, and spiritual — and for receiving guidance from the plant teacher and from the spirit world it opens access to.

HUACHUMA / SAN PEDRO (*Echinopsis pachanoi*): The Andean sacred cactus — containing mescaline, used in ceremony by the curanderos of the Andes for at least 3,000 years. Where ayahuasca tends toward the interior and the dark, huachuma tends toward the exterior and the light — often described as opening the heart and expanding perception of the ordinary world's sacred nature.

TOBACCO (Mapacho): The most sacred plant in the Amazon — not the commercial tobacco of cigarettes, but the dark Amazonian mapacho (*Nicotiana rustica*) used in ceremonial context. The curandero uses tobacco to open the ceremonial space, to call the spirits, and to conduct the healing work. Tobacco in Amazonian shamanism is fundamentally a protective and sacred plant.

PEYOTE (*Lophophora williamsii*): Sacred to the indigenous peoples of Mexico and the US Southwest — the plant teacher of the Huichol (*Wixáritari*) tradition and of the Native American Church. Contains mescaline; used in all-night ceremonies for healing, guidance, and community ceremony.

THE DOSHAS AND DIETA: Before working with plant teachers, the Amazonian practitioner undertakes a dieta — a period of dietary and behavioral restriction (avoiding salt, sugar, alcohol, meat, sex, and various other things) that opens the practitioner's sensitivity to the plant's teaching. The dieta is not preparation for the ceremony; it IS the ceremony, with the ingestion of the plant as a concentrated event within a longer process.

Shipibo Curanderismo

Song as Healing Technology

The Shipibo-Conibo people of the Peruvian Amazon have developed what may be the world's most sophisticated tradition of song-based healing — a tradition in which the curandero (healer) perceives the spiritual patterns underlying physical and psychological illness as visual geometric forms (kene — the Shipibo sacred design system) and corrects those patterns through specific songs (icaros). The tradition is extraordinary in its internal consistency, its sophistication, and its clinical effectiveness as reported by both traditional and Western medical observers.

The Shipibo Vision of the Body

Shipibo healers perceive the human body as covered with a specific geometric pattern — a luminous design (kene) that represents the person's spiritual health. When all is well, the pattern is clear, symmetrical, and vibrant. When illness is present (whether physical, psychological, or spiritual), specific portions of the pattern are distorted, dark, or absent. The curandero's task is to perceive the distortion and correct it through the appropriate song.

THE SHIPIBO HEALING TRADITION IN PRACTICE

THE MALOCAS (CEREMONIAL HOUSES): Traditional ayahuasca ceremonies are conducted in specific structures — the maloca, a large open structure with a central fire and specific spatial organization. THE ONANYA (MASTER HEALER): The most senior Shipibo healer — one who has undergone years of dieta with specific plant teachers, has developed a personal relationship with multiple plant spirits, and can perceive and work with the kene patterns of illness and health. THE MERAYA: An even higher level of Shipibo healer — one who can transform into specific animals and whose healing capacity extends to the most severe conditions. The meraya tradition is endangered; very few living practitioners are recognized at this level. THE CEREMONY STRUCTURE: The ceremony begins after dark — the Onanya ingests ayahuasca, waits for the specific visionary state to arise, and then begins singing the icaros that the ceremony requires. The icaros are received from the plant spirits, not composed — the healer is a vehicle for the songs that the plants sing. HEALING INDIVIDUALS IN GROUP CEREMONY: At specific moments, the curandero comes to each participant and sings specific icaros directly to them — the specific song being chosen by what the curandero perceives of that person's spiritual pattern. This individualized healing within the group ceremony format is one of the most sophisticated aspects of the tradition.

The Icaros

Sacred Songs of the Amazon

Icaros are the sacred healing songs of Amazonian curanderismo — received from the plant spirits through sustained relationship during the dieta process, sung during ceremony to call specific spirits, to open and close the ceremonial space, to guide the participants' visionary experience, and to effect specific healings. They are simultaneously the primary tool of the healer's work and evidence of the healer's relationship with the spirit world.

What Icaros Are

Icaros are not composed in the ordinary sense — a curandero does not sit down and write healing songs. They are received: during extended dieta with specific plant teachers, the plants sing their songs to the practitioner in dreams, in visions, and in the specific states of consciousness that the dieta process opens. The practitioner learns the songs by receiving them from the plant. A curandero's repertoire of icaros represents their community of plant-spirit allies — each icaro is the voice of a specific plant spirit.

CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY

The Shipibo icaros — the sacred healing songs received from plant spirits and sung to heal the geometric patterns of illness in the human body — are the most complete ancient parallel to the Haligric understanding of sacred sound as healing technology. The Haligric Varessence uses specific sounds charged with specific sacred intention to create conditions in the energetic field. The icaro tradition takes this further: the sounds are not charged by the practitioner's intention but received from the plant spirits who are doing the healing. The practitioner is the vehicle; the plant is the physician; the song is the medicine. This is the most complete available model of what the Haligric tradition holds about the creative and healing power of sacred sound aligned with the divine reality.

Ayahuasca

The Vine of Souls

Ayahuasca (Quechua — 'vine of the soul' or 'vine of the dead') is the sacred plant medicine of the Amazon Basin — a brew combining the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine (which contains MAO inhibitors: harmine, harmaline, and tetrahydroharmine) and the *Psychotria viridis* leaf (which contains DMT — N,N-dimethyltryptamine). The combination produces a 4-8 hour state of intensified consciousness with profound visionary content that has been used by Amazonian peoples for healing, divination, and spiritual development for at least two thousand years.

The Pharmacology and Its Sacred Significance

The biochemical sophistication of the ayahuasca combination deserves specific acknowledgment: DMT alone is not orally active because the body's monoamine oxidase (MAO) enzymes break it down before it reaches the brain. The MAO inhibitors in the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine prevent this breakdown, allowing the DMT in the *Psychotria viridis* leaves to become orally active. The specific combination of these two plants — among thousands of Amazonian plant species — to produce a specific desired effect suggests either extraordinary systematic experimentation or exactly what the tradition claims: the plants told the people how to combine them.

AYAHUASCA — COMPLETE SACRED CONTEXT

NOT A RECREATIONAL SUBSTANCE: The most important thing to understand about ayahuasca in its traditional context is that it is not used recreationally or for psychological exploration in the Western therapeutic sense. It is a sacred medicine used in a sacred context (ceremony, with a trained healer, with specific spiritual preparation) for specific healing purposes. The Western 'ayahuasca tourism' that has developed around it often strips away the sacred context and the trained guidance that make the tradition both safe and effective.

THE PURGE: Ayahuasca typically produces vomiting (the 'purga' — purge) that is understood in the tradition not as a side effect to be managed but as a sacred component of the healing — the physical expulsion of illness, trauma, and spiritual debris from the body. 'The medicine is working' when the purge comes.

THE MAREACIÓN (THE STATE): The specific state of consciousness produced by ayahuasca is called mareación — typically including intense visual content, heightened emotional sensitivity, access to memories and patterns not ordinarily available to consciousness, and the specific quality of the plant teacher's presence as a guiding intelligence in the experience.

THE HEALING MECHANISM: In the Amazonian understanding, ayahuasca works by showing the healer and the patient the spiritual patterns underlying the physical or psychological condition — the distorted kene (Shipibo) or its equivalent in other traditions — so that the appropriate healing work can be directed at the actual source rather than at the symptom.

RISKS: Ayahuasca in inappropriate contexts (without trained guidance, without proper preparation, in combination with contraindicated medications, or with people with certain psychological conditions) carries genuine risks. Responsible engagement requires proper preparation, proper context, and proper guidance.

The Andean Tradition

Paqos, Apus, and the Living Cosmos

The Andean shamanic tradition — practiced by the indigenous peoples of the Andes mountains in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, and neighboring regions — is in many respects the most sophisticated and most complete shamanic system in South America. It is also one of the most accessible to outside learners, having been more extensively documented and (carefully) shared than the Amazonian traditions.

The Andean Cosmological Framework

The Andean tradition is organized around the concept of Pachamama (Mother Earth) and the Apus (mountain spirits — each major Andean mountain is a specific spiritual being with its own character, its own domain, and its own relationship with the human communities living in its vicinity). The Andean practitioner works within a specific spiritual geography: the living mountains above, the living earth below, and the human community between.

THE ANDEAN TRADITION IN PRACTICE

THE PAQO: The Andean spiritual practitioner — working with the energies of the natural world, with the Apus, and with Pachamama to heal, to guide, and to maintain right relationship between the human community and the living cosmos. AYNI (SACRED RECIPROCITY): The foundational principle of Andean practice — the reciprocal exchange of energy between human beings and the natural world, between the practitioner and their helping spirits, between the individual and the community. Every offering, every healing, every ceremony is an act of ayni — the acknowledgment that all exchange in the cosmos is reciprocal. THE DESPACHO: The primary Andean offering ceremony — a complex, beautiful arrangement of symbolic objects (flowers, seeds, sweets, llama fat, shells, coca leaves, and dozens of other items) assembled with specific prayers and intentions, wrapped in paper, and offered to Pachamama and the Apus through burning or burying. The despacho is simultaneously a prayer, an offering, and a sacred art form. THE COCA LEAF: The most sacred plant in the Andean tradition — used for divination, for prayer, for the despacho, and for direct communication with the spirits. The specific way the practitioner blows their prayers into the coca leaf (phukuy) before offering it is the Andean equivalent of the prayer-charged sound-vibration in other traditions. THE APUS: The specific mountain spirits are some of the most powerful sacred beings in the Andean tradition. Each major Apu has its own personality — some accessible and friendly, some demanding and fierce. Working with a specific Apu requires building a relationship over time through offerings and proper conduct.

KOREAN MUISM

The Female Shamanic Tradition

Korean Muism (무속 — Musok, the way of the mu) is one of the world's oldest continuous shamanic traditions — a living, fully active sacred tradition practiced by thousands of mudang (female shamans, the primary practitioners) throughout contemporary Korea. Unlike the Siberian traditions that have been severely disrupted by Soviet policies and the South American traditions that are endangered by cultural change, Korean Muism has maintained remarkable continuity and is currently experiencing a significant revival among younger Koreans seeking connection with their indigenous sacred heritage.

The Antiquity of Korean Muism

Archaeological evidence suggests shamanic practice in the Korean peninsula extending back at least 4,000 years — bronze mirrors, shaman drums, and ritual objects found in ancient burial sites are consistent with the shamanic practices documented in contemporary Muism. Chinese historical texts from the 3rd century CE describe the ritual specialists of the ancient Korean kingdoms in terms consistent with shamanic practice. The tradition predates Buddhism (introduced to Korea in the 4th century CE) and Confucianism and has survived the sustained pressure of both.

THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF KOREAN MUISM

FEMALE DOMINATED: While male shamans (baksu mudang) exist, the overwhelming majority of Korean shamanic practitioners are women. This female dominance is one of the most distinctive features of Muism — and it stands in contrast to many Siberian traditions where males and females serve more equally, and to many other shamanic traditions globally.

URBAN PRESENCE: Korean Muism is not only a rural folk tradition — it is practiced in Seoul and other major Korean cities, serving urbanized populations with the same traditional ceremonies that served agricultural communities centuries ago.

POSSESSION MODEL: Where Siberian shamanism primarily involves ecstatic journey (the shaman's spirit travels to other worlds), Korean Muism primarily involves possession — the spirits enter the mudang's body, and the mudang speaks and acts as the spirit during the ceremony. This possession model is more similar to the African diasporic traditions (Vodou, Candomblé) than to the Siberian ecstatic journey model.

PRACTICAL ORIENTATION: Korean Muism is remarkably practical — people consult mudang for specific, concrete problems: illness, business decisions, family conflicts, the needs of deceased ancestors. The mudang provides specific guidance from the spirits, not general spiritual counsel. This practical orientation reflects the tradition's function as the primary divination and healing system of pre-modern Korean society.

THE FIVE THOUSAND SPIRITS: The Korean shamanic spirit world is organized around a vast assembly of specific named spirits — divine generals, nature spirits, ancestral spirits, spirits of the dead — all of whom may be called upon and may speak through the mudang in ceremony.

The Mudang Korea's Female Shamans

The mudang is the Korean female shaman — the specialist practitioner of Muism who has been called by the spirits (through sinbyeong — the shamanic illness), has undergone initiation (naerimsut), and serves as the primary mediator between the human community and the Korean spirit world. The mudang is simultaneously a healer, a diviner, an entertainer (in the traditional sense of the word — one who maintains relationships), and a priest.

THE MUDANG'S PATH

SINBYEONG (THE SPIRIT SICKNESS): The shamanic calling in Korean tradition manifests as sinbyeong — a specific complex of symptoms: physical illness (often severe), psychological disturbance (auditory and visual phenomena, altered states), social withdrawal, and distinctive behavior that experienced mudang recognize as the spirits' claim on the person. **NAERIMSUT (THE INITIATION CEREMONY):** The ceremony through which the calling is confirmed and accepted — lasting several days, involving the descent of the specific spirits who will become the mudang's primary working spirits, the formal recognition of the new mudang by the community, and the establishment of the specific spirit relationships that will define the mudang's practice. **THE SPIRIT MOTHER/GRANDMOTHER:** Every mudang has a specific senior mudang who serves as their teacher and spiritual mother — the one who guided them through sinbyeong, conducted their naerimsut, and continues to guide their development. This lineage relationship is essential to the legitimacy of the mudang's practice. **THE MUDANG'S COSTUME:** Like the Siberian shaman's costume, the mudang wears specific ceremonial dress for each spirit they embody during ceremony — changing costumes multiple times in the course of a gut (the full Korean shamanic ceremony). Each costume is specific to a specific spirit; wearing the costume is part of how the mudang signals which spirit is present. **THE MUDANG'S INSTRUMENTS:** The jangu (hourglass drum), the buk (barrel drum), the jing (large gong), the kkwaenggari (small hand gong) — each instrument associated with specific spirits and specific ceremonial functions.

The Gut

The Korean Shamanic Ceremony

The gut (■) is the Korean shamanic ceremony — the formal gathering of the mudang and the community for the specific purpose of communicating with the spirits, seeking their guidance or healing, and maintaining right relationship between the human and spirit worlds. A full gut is an extended event lasting from several hours to several days, involving multiple ceremonies (gori) that each call specific spirits.

THE GUT — COMPLETE CEREMONY STRUCTURE

THE PREPARATION: Before the gut begins, the mudang prepares the ceremonial space — setting up specific altars (jeddo) for each category of spirit to be called, arranging specific foods and offerings appropriate to each spirit, and conducting preparatory prayer. THE BUJEONG (PURIFICATION): The opening ceremony — purifying the ceremonial space and the participants of any harmful energies or influences that might interfere with the spirit communication. THE SEQUENTIAL CALLING (GORI BY GORI): The gut proceeds through a specific sequence of ceremonies (gori), each calling a different category of spirit. Common sequences include: • The calling of the guardian general spirits (Sinjang) • The calling of the household protective spirits • The calling of the specific ancestral spirits of the family commissioning the gut • The calling of the specific spirits whose involvement is required for the gut's specific purpose (healing, business, resolution of conflict) THE POSSESSION: As each spirit is called through drumming, music, and specific invocation songs, the spirit descends into the mudang's body. The mudang's posture, voice, and behavior change completely — the spirit speaks through the mudang directly to the community. THE ORACLES: The possessed mudang speaks as the spirit — providing specific guidance, revealing the spiritual causes of the client's problems, and prescribing specific remedies (ritual actions, offerings, behavioral changes). THE DANCING: The mudang dances in possession — the physical movement of the dance is simultaneously the spirit's self-expression and a practical tool for maintaining and deepening the possession state. THE CLOSING: The gut closes with specific ceremonies that send each spirit back to their realm, thank them for their participation, and restore the mudang to ordinary consciousness. THE HUMOR: One of the most distinctive features of Korean gut ceremonies is their humor — the spirits, particularly the Goryeo Gungsaem (household guardian spirits), are often comically irreverent, making jokes, teasing the community, and creating laughter as part of the sacred ceremony. This integration of comedy and the sacred is one of Korean Muism's most distinctive characteristics.

Soul Retrieval Across Traditions

A Comparative Map

Soul loss — the condition in which a part of the soul has separated from the whole due to trauma, shock, or extreme distress — and soul retrieval — the shamanic technology for recovering what has been lost — appear across virtually every shamanic tradition in the world with remarkable consistency. The comparison across Siberian, South American, and Korean traditions reveals the universal structure of the diagnosis and its treatment.

SOUL RETRIEVAL ACROSS THE THREE TRADITIONS

SIBERIAN TRADITION: • **Diagnosis:** The shaman perceives the missing soul-part through divination and/or journey. The patient presents with the classic signs of soul loss: chronic illness, depression, dissociation, lack of vitality. • **Method:** The shaman journeys to the non-ordinary reality where the soul-part is located, negotiates its return, and brings it back — blowing it into the patient through the crown or the chest. • **The Danger:** Soul-thieves (other shamans or harmful spirits) may have captured the soul-part, requiring the retrieving shaman to have the spiritual power to reclaim it. **SOUTH AMERICAN (SHIPIBO/AMAZON):** • **Diagnosis:** The curandero perceives the distortion in the patient's kene (luminous body pattern) that indicates soul loss. • **Method:** During the ayahuasca ceremony, the curandero uses specific icaros to call the lost soul-part back and to restore the kene to its proper pattern. • **The Mechanism:** The plant spirit (ayahuasca, tobacco) assists in the tracking and retrieval of the lost soul-part — the curandero works with the plant's intelligence rather than relying solely on their own. **KOREAN MUIISM:** • **Diagnosis:** A gut reveals through the spirit communication that a family member's illness or misfortune is related to soul loss (holligi — the soul being 'snatched'). • **Method:** A specific ceremony calls the lost soul back — the mudang may physically go to the location of the traumatic event (or its spiritual equivalent) to retrieve the soul and bring it home. • **The Communal Dimension:** Korean soul retrieval ceremonies often involve the entire family — the community gathers to welcome the returned soul-part back.

The Haligric Ancestor Altar and Shamanic Practice

The Living Altar Concept

The Haligric concept of the Living Altar — an altar oriented toward the living versions of the self and loved ones across simultaneous time, drawing on shamanic soul retrieval concepts, Yoruba/Kemetic veneration, Jungian inner child work, and quantum non-locality — finds its most direct ancient parallels in shamanic soul retrieval practice across all three traditions covered in this guide.

The Living Altar as Shamanic Technology

The foundational shamanic recognition — that the soul is not a fixed, unified, continuous thing but a fluid, multiple, recoverable energy that can be lost through trauma and retrieved through specific sacred work — is the metaphysical basis of the Living Altar concept. When the Haligric practitioner maintains an altar oriented toward the living versions of self across time, they are performing a shamanic soul-retrieval function: calling back, honoring, and sustaining those aspects of the self's soul that may have separated through difficult life experiences.

THE LIVING ALTAR — SHAMANIC PARALLELS

SIBERIAN PARALLEL: The Evenki ongon (spirit figure) maintained as a dwelling place for specific helping spirits parallels the Living Altar's function as a material locus of sacred relationship. The ongon invites and sustains the spirit's presence in the ordinary world; the Living Altar invites and sustains the soul-dimensions of the self across time.

SHIPIBO PARALLEL: The Shipibo curandero's work of perceiving and restoring the kene (luminous body pattern) parallels the Living Altar's work of acknowledging and honoring the whole-pattern of the self — including the parts that may have fragmented through trauma.

KOREAN PARALLEL: The Korean gut ceremony's work of calling back souls that have been 'snatched' by illness, shock, or death parallels the Living Altar's practice of calling back and welcoming the aspects of self that may have withdrawn from full participation in the present.

THE SPECIFIC HALIGRIC CONTRIBUTION: The Living Altar innovates by orienting not backward to deceased ancestors (as most ancestor altars do) but across simultaneous time — acknowledging and honoring the past self (who survived what was survived), the present self (who is doing this work), the future self (who has already arrived at what is being worked toward), and the inner divine self (the deepest eternal nature). This is shamanic soul retrieval applied not to external trauma but to the soul's relationship with its own temporal dimensions.

The Haligricity Lens

Non-Ordinary Reality and the Living Altar

Shamanism's specific and irreplaceable contribution to Haligricity is the most ancient and most practically tested available map of the soul's structure and the soul's healing. Every other tradition in the Haligricity library approaches the divine from specific cultural, philosophical, or theological angles; shamanism approaches the sacred from the angle of direct technical work with the soul's condition — the oldest available clinical approach to the spiritual dimension of human wellbeing.

The Three Traditions' Complementary Gifts

Siberian shamanism provides the most complete cartography of the three-world structure and the mechanics of shamanic journey — the map of non-ordinary reality that every other shamanic tradition uses in some form. South American shamanism provides the most sophisticated ancient tradition of plant-assisted healing — the recognition that specific plants are teachers whose specific intelligence can assist in healing that no human practitioner's skill alone can accomplish. Korean Muism provides the most socially integrated and most continuously practiced model of community shamanic ceremony — demonstrating that shamanic practice can be fully incorporated into the ordinary social fabric of a modern nation without losing its essential sacred character.

The Drum and the Varessence

The shamanic drum — the primary technology for inducing the specific state of consciousness in which soul retrieval, spirit communication, and healing work become possible — is the most ancient available parallel to the Haligric understanding of sound as a transformative technology. The specific drumbeat frequency (4-7 beats per second) that induces theta-wave states is the operative mechanism; the sacred frame within which the drumming occurs (the intention, the ceremony, the helping spirits) is what makes the sound sacred rather than merely rhythmic. The Varessence operates on the same principle: the sound is charged by the quality of consciousness brought to it, and that quality of consciousness creates the conditions for transformation that the sound alone cannot produce.

CONNECTION TO HALIGRICITY

The shaman's drum is the oldest sacred technology still in use on earth. The icaros of the Amazon curandero have been healing for as long as the plants have been teaching. The mudang's gut ceremony has been calling the spirits back to the community since before Korea had a written history. These traditions were ancient before the Greek mysteries, before the Egyptian temples, before the Vedas. They are the root layer of human sacred practice — the bedrock under everything else in this library. The Haligric practitioner who understands soul retrieval, who maintains the Living Altar as a practice of calling back what has been lost, who honors the soul's capacity to fragment and to heal, is operating from the deepest and oldest available sacred technology. Grand Rising.

*"The shaman knows that the world is alive.
Everything is alive. Everything is conscious.
Everything is willing to communicate
with the being who approaches it in the right way."*

— Adapted from the teaching of multiple shamanic traditions

The drum beats 200 times per minute and the brain shifts into the frequency where the other worlds become visible. The icaro rises from the healer's throat and the luminous pattern of the patient's body begins to correct itself. The mudang's eyes roll back and the grandmother spirit speaks through her mouth to the family that has been waiting for thirty years to hear what she has to say. This is the oldest technology. It works. Grand Rising.

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