

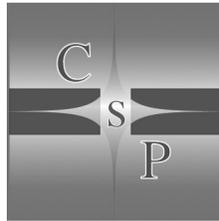
# Soul Loss and the Shamanic Story



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By

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It has been suggested that the only purpose of life is to know and experience God and that, in the words of the kabbalists, God is the soul of the soul. If this is the case, it can be said that when the soul goes AWOL life loses its meaning. Soul Loss is thus the most debilitating of all illnesses and the most worthy of our consideration.

“[T]he Soul is the noblest part of man, and was given to us by God that we should nobly use it. There is no thing more precious than a human Soul, nor any earthly thing that can be weighed with it. It is worth all the gold that is in the world, and is more precious than the rubies of the kings”  
(from *The Fisherman and his Soul* by Oscar Wilde).

Stories from various cultures and periods of time can be identified which deal with a concept of soul loss that is essentially shamanic. By means of textual analysis it can be shown they all share certain attributes in common, the identification of which forms the conclusion of the work. In shamanism, soul loss is the term used to describe the way parts of the psyche become detached when we are faced with traumatic situations. In shamanic terms, these split-off parts can be found in non-ordinary reality and are only accessible to those familiar with its topography. Case studies are presented to show how the way soul loss is dealt with by indigenous shamans differs from the way it is treated by neo-shamanic practitioners. Stories have traditionally been classified as epics, myths, sagas, legends, folk tales, fairy tales, parables and fables. However, the definitions of the terms have a tendency to overlap, making it difficult to classify and categorize material. For this reason, a case can be made for the introduction of a new genre, termed the shamanic story—a story that has either been based on or inspired by a shamanic journey (a numinous experience in non-ordinary reality) or one that contains a number of the elements typical of such a journey. Other characteristics include the way in which the stories all tend to contain embedded texts (often the account of the shamanic journey itself), how the number of actors is clearly limited as one would expect in subjective accounts of what can be regarded as inner journeys, and how the stories tend to be used for healing purposes. Within this new genre it is proposed that there exists a sub-genre, shamanic stories that deal specifically with soul-loss, and examples are presented and analysed to support this hypothesis.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis that will be proposed in this study is that stories from various cultures and periods of time can be identified which deal with a concept of soul loss or soul theft that is essentially shamanic, and that by means of textual analysis it can be shown that these stories all share certain attributes in common. The identification of what these attributes are will form the conclusion of the work.

As a starting point, what the shamanic concepts of the soul and soul loss are will be explored and how these differ from the way in which they are perceived in other religious traditions.

In her paper “Shamanistic Philosophy: Soul—A Changing Concept in Tyva”, Johansen makes the point that the European concept of soul is not particularly helpful when it comes to examining the belief systems found in other cultures. Therefore, avoiding the use of the word “soul”, she describes how the Tyvans, also known as Tuvans, originally understood human beings to be

entities in which nature, manifest mainly in the breath *tyn*, and reason, *saghysh* were bound together inseparably. Besides this they called the positively evaluated abilities of a person and the special vital power of children *qut*. After death, a person who lived forth in the imagination of people, turned into a spirit of the deceased, called *sünäzin* (Johansen, 2003, p.45)

Johansen then asks the following question: “Can research on original shamanism exist without using the falsifying neo-Platonic concept of soul as crutches for understanding the real philosophy of the shamans?” (Johansen, 2003, p.46). And her answer is that it will probably “do even better without” (Johansen, 2003, p.46). However, *Soul Loss and the Shamanic Story* does not purport to consist of research exclusively on original shamanism but on both indigenous shamanism and neo-

shamanism, and to write such a work without making use of the word “soul” would clearly be impossible.

Johansen then remarks that “it might be a severe blow for the new religious movements, which teach their communities shamanic soul-flights, to discover that originally shamans never believed in souls” (Johansen, 2003, p.46). It should be pointed out, however, that first of all the movements she refers to (presumably organisations such as the Foundation for Shamanic Studies or Scandinavian Centre for Shamanic Studies) do not regard themselves as religious, and secondly there would be absolutely no point in them initially explaining what happens to their students in terms that are alien to them. Consequently, although one can sympathize with the main point of her argument, issue is taken with the way in which she presents it.

As the way in which soul loss is dealt with by indigenous shamans is not necessarily the way in which such cases are dealt with by neo-shamanic practitioners, what these differences are and why they exist will then be considered. It has been suggested, for example, even by Harner himself, that one of the attractions of the neo-shamanic approach is that it offers a “quick fix”. The shaman journeys in order to bring back the patient’s missing soul parts and it is all over in a flash. “Another factor that helps to account for the popularity of neo-shamanism is that it is possible to achieve in just a few hours experiences that might otherwise take years ..., which makes it ideally suited to the contemporary life of busy people” (see Harner, 1990, p. xii). However, indigenous shamans in fact do provide something similar in that the “cure” is often achieved relatively quickly, though the accompanying ritual would not necessarily be the same as one performed by a neo-shamanic practitioner, as we shall see.

In her paper “South Siberian and Central Asian Hero Tales and Shamanistic Rituals”, the Leipzig researcher Erika Taube suggests that

Folk-tales, being expressions of early stages of the development of human society, reflect reality: material culture, social relations, customs, [and] religious beliefs. When folk-tales were being formed and appeared as vivid forms of spiritual and artistic expression in correspondence with the general social development, those elements, which nowadays are usually regarded as phantastic creations of human mind, were strictly believed phenomena, i.e. they were accepted as facts. Therefore, it is not at all a new idea that such tales sometimes reflect shamanistic beliefs and

conceptions (Taube, 1984, p. 344).

If they were forms of “artistic expression”, however, then they could well have been regarded as such by those they were told to and we actually have no way of knowing whether they were “accepted as facts” or not. On the other hand, what we can show is that they do reflect shamanistic beliefs and conceptions and this will soon become apparent once we start to analyze them.

Sir James Frazer made a similar claim in his abridged version of *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1922: “folk-tales are a faithful reflection of the world as it appeared to the primitive mind; and that we may be sure that any idea which commonly occurs in them, however absurd it may seem to us, must once have been an ordinary article of belief” (Frazer, 1993, p.668). In reality, however, there is no way we can be certain that any idea that appears in such tales must once have been an ordinary article of belief as, not being able to get inside other people’s minds, we cannot possibly know what was actually the case.

Stories have traditionally been classified as epics, myths, sagas, legends, folk tales, fairy tales, parables and fables. However, the definitions of the terms have a tendency to overlap (see Berman, 2006, p.150-152) making it difficult to classify and categorize material.

Consider, for example, Eliade’s definition of myth. For Eliade the characteristics of myth, as experienced by archaic societies, are that it constitutes the absolutely true and sacred History of the acts of the Supernaturals, which is always related to a “creation”, which leads to a knowledge, experienced ritually, of the origin of things and thus the ability to control them, and which is “lived” in the sense that one is profoundly affected by the power of the events it recreates (see Eliade, 1964, pp.18-19). However, many stories are “lived” in the sense that one is profoundly affected by the events they recreate without them necessarily being myths. Moreover, a number of the stories that will be presented in this study could be regarded as having the above characteristics but would still not necessarily be classified as myths.

Another problem encountered is that a number of the definitions of what a myth is are so general in nature that they tend to be of little value. For example, the suggestion that a myth is “a story about something significant [that] ... can take place in the past ... or in the present, or in the future” (Segal, 2004, p.5) really does not help us at all as this could be

applied to more or less every type of tale. For this reason a case was argued in Berman (2006) for the introduction of a new genre, termed the shamanic story. This can be defined as a story that has either been based on or inspired by a shamanic journey, or one that contains a number of the elements typical of such a journey. Like other genres, it has “its own style, goals, entelechy, rhetoric, developmental pattern, and characteristic roles” (Turner, 1985, p.187), and like other genres it can be seen to differ to a certain extent from culture to culture. It should perhaps be noted at this point, however, that there are both etic and emic ways of regarding narrative (see Turner, 1982, p.65) and the term “shamanic story” clearly presents an outside view.

Characteristics typical of the genre include the way in which the stories all tend to contain embedded texts (often the account of the shamanic journey itself), how the number of actors is clearly limited as one would expect in subjective accounts of what can be regarded as inner journeys, and how the stories tend to be used for healing purposes.

In his Foreword to *Tales of the Sacred and the Supernatural*, Eliade admits to repeatedly taking up “the themes of *sortie du temps*, or temporal dislocation, and of the alteration or the transmutation of space” (Eliade, 1981, p.10), and these are themes that appear over and over again in shamanic stories too<sup>1</sup>.

Additionally, given that through the use of narrative shamans are able to provide their patients “with a language, by means of which unexpressed, and otherwise inexpressible, psychic states can be expressed” (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p.198), it follows that another feature of shamanic stories is they too have the potential to provide a medium through which psychic states that might otherwise be difficult to put into words can be expressed.

Finally they are all examples of what Jürgen Kremer defines as “tales of power”—conscious verbal constructions based on numinous experiences

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the criticism now levelled against Eliade’s work, which will be considered in Chapter 11, without him the current interest in shamanism would probably never have materialized. So instead of dismissing Eliade out of hand as someone who merely popularised various ethnographic reports written by others, by casting a critical eye over what he has to say and by being selective, it is felt there is still a lot of value to be found in his writing and thus justification for referring to it.

in non-ordinary reality, “which guide individuals and help them to integrate the spiritual, mythical, or archetypal aspects of their internal and external experience in unique, meaningful, and fulfilling ways” (Kremer, 1988, p.192).

Within the new genre of the shamanic story, it will be proposed that there exists a sub-genre, shamanic stories that deal specifically with soul-loss, and examples, both traditional and contemporary, will be presented and analysed to support this hypothesis. This will be followed by a consideration of what the tales have in common.

Sandra Ingerman is a popular writer on shamanism, a practitioner of soul retrieval and workshop leader, with a master's degree in counseling psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies. She is the former Educational Director of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies and a former member of the FSS Board of Trustees. However, apart from her popular titles on the neo-shamanic approach to dealing with soul loss and how soul retrievals are performed in such circles, the differences between this approach and the approaches used by indigenous peoples have, to the best of my knowledge, not been considered in any detail before, or the reasons for these differences. Neither has the way in which soul loss is dealt with in shamanic stories been previously considered, or a case been made for introducing a new sub-genre specifically for this type of tale.

One of the problems with the word “religion”, as Jonathan Z. Smith observes, is that it is not a native category but one “imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture ... a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore it is theirs to define” (Smith, 1998, p.269 & p.281). Even so, given how frequently the word is used in common parlance, to ignore it when attempting to define what shamanism is would not be particularly helpful either, especially in view of the associations the word carries, for the fact of the matter is that by referring to shamanism as a religion, it could well result in the whole subject being treated with a great deal more respect than it otherwise might be.

As Donald S. Lopez, Jr. points out, it would not be inaccurate to say the idea that a religion must have beliefs in order to be a religion, rather than other features, has clearly influenced the way in which Christians have told their own history. Moreover, with the dominance of Christian Europe in the nineteenth century, Christians have also described the “world religions” from the perspective of belief too (Lopez, 1998, p.21).

Indeed, “belief” has probably become the most common term used to describe religion despite the fact that the word does not even exist in some of the languages spoken by the peoples whose practices we describe in such terms. Consequently the conclusion has been reached that it is probably more helpful to describe what we refer to as religions in other terms.

For the purposes of this study, shamanism will be referred to as “a religion of ritual observance”, centred on the dramatization of the death and resurrection of the shaman (rather than the figure of the King as in Ancient Egypt, Babylon and Canaan) in whom the well-being of the client and of the whole community rests. As for what shamans do, each time they conduct a séance, like performers, they can be said to “specialize in putting themselves in disequilibrium and then displaying how they regain their balance, psychophysically, narratively and socially” (Schechner, 1988, p.xviii).

The phrase “a religion of ritual observance” has been used in particular to describe Shinto—“a religion not of theology but of ritual observance” (Driver, 1991, p.38). However, it would seem to me that much the same could be said of shamanism. The advantage of this description is it could not offend either New-Agers who might consider the term “religion” without any form of qualification to be an unacceptable word to describe what they practise, or members of the predominant religions who might consider, for various reasons, that shamanism should not be included among their number (see Berman, 2006, p.80).

It has been suggested that an essential characteristic of the religious man is that he “interprets his existence not only in terms of being responsible *for* fulfilling his life tasks, but also as being responsible *to* the taskmaster” (Frankl, 1986, pp.58-59). A shaman is responsible to the spirits who help him, so not only is it being proposed that shamanism is a religion but that the shaman is a religious man (or woman) too.

An argument that can be presented against regarding shamanism as a religion is that it takes so many different forms. Durkheim, however, can be quoted to counter this. A religion, as he points out, does not usually consist of a single cult but of “a system of cults that have a certain autonomy. Sometimes they are ranked hierarchically and subordinated to some dominant cult into which they are eventually absorbed; but sometimes they simply exist side by side in a kind of confederation”

(Durkheim, 2001, p.40). Indeed, this was the situation in Australia—the society Durkheim chose to focus on for his research.

In his paper “The Siberian shaman as Diviner” (2007) Juha Pentikäinen, Professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Helsinki, proposes that we should refer to the concept of shamanhood rather than shamanism because “Shamanhood (parallel to Russian *samanstvo*) is a kind of cultural mother tongue rather than a religion in the languages lacking the very concept of ‘religion’ in the western meaning of the word.” This however, disregards the fact that there are neo-shamans born into, and practising, in cultures where the concept of religion does come from the Latin *religio*. Another reason for making use of the term shamanhood, according to Pentikäinen, is that it is “synonymous with *samanstvo*, the Russian term preceding shamanism in older sources, [and] is closer to the self-perception of the shamans themselves, since they do not see shamanism as a ‘religion’ in the western sense of the word.” Once again, however, this fails to take into account those neo-shamans who do see what they practise as a “religion” in the western sense of the word, which is why, for the purposes of this study, the term shamanism has been preferred.

It has to be admitted that the view being expressed here, that shamanism is a religion, is neither a fashionable nor a widely accepted one, and most writers on the subject would argue against it. Take Johansen, for example: “Shamanism is not a religion—at least scholars of comparative religions and modern anthropology, with the exception only of some, mostly Russian, colleagues agree on that—but a phenomenon—namely the activities of shamans—that can be found in various religions” (Johansen, 1999, p.41). If, however, this was the case, what would be the religion of Aboriginal Australians (referred to in Chapter 4), for example, or the Nisqually (referred to in Chapter 7) for that matter? The fact of the matter is that no conclusive proof can be provided either way to resolve the question of whether shamanism is a religion or not, and as further discussion would be a digression from the main focus of this work, the time has now come to move on.

For the “outsider”, without direct experience, the material in shamanic stories can be “rich but ultimately poetic to the point of unknowability ... Various modes of interpretation are possible, each potentially rewarding [and] ... they can build on each other with an interpenetrating layering” (Balzer, 1996, p.310). For this reason a variety of approaches will be

employed to reach a fuller understanding of the texts in question. Another reason for using more than one approach is that each interpretation can only be partial, because it is the result of each reader's incomplete perception of reality. This should lead us to explore different interpretations and perspectives—whether expressed, implicit, or even left out of a given text.

The psychoanalytical approach, as exemplified by the work of Bettelheim and von Franz, will be taken into account, as well as the socio-historical perspective, and formalist approaches such as structuralism and narratology will be alluded to as well. In this way attention will be drawn to how the selected stories can be interpreted on a number of different levels to convey both their richness and depth. By making use of textual material from different cultures and times, the intention is to highlight the pervasive influence the concept of soul loss has had and to show how it has been dealt with by different cultures.

Joseph Campbell's paradigm for the myth in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* follows the tripartite ritual framework model explicated by Arnold van Gennep in 1909, later to be developed further by Victor Turner (1969). The three stages Campbell identifies consist of separation (the call to adventure or threshold crossing), initiation (the confrontation with an antagonist or divinity), and return (the return crossing and reincorporation into the community). And as all shamanic stories presented in Berman (2006) incorporate these stages, it is the paradigm that thus appears to be the most appropriate for the purposes of this study. It will be interesting to see whether it can also be applied to shamanic stories that specifically deal with soul-loss too.

There are those who would argue that there is no such thing as an immortal soul, David Hume for example. In "Of the Immortality of the Soul" (a suppressed essay published after his death, which was in 1776) he asserts that "The physical arguments from the analogy of nature are strong for the mortality of the soul ... Sleep, a very small effect on the body, is attended with a temporary extinction; at least a great confusion in the soul" (Hume, 1992, p.35). However, is this in fact what takes place in sleep? Rather than being a "temporary extinction", it can be argued that our ability to sleep actually ensures our continued existence. As for the "great confusion in the soul," which presumably refers to the dreams we have, they can actually be a means of removing confusion by helping us to resolve the issues that trouble or concern us.

To further support his case, Hume then goes on to claim that “Judging by the usual analogy of nature, no form can continue, when transferred to a condition of life very different from the original one, in which it was placed. Trees perish in the water; fishes in the air; animals in the earth” (Hume, 1992, p.36). However, it is debatable whether they do or not. It can be argued what actually happens is that they enter a different medium and take on a different form, as the soul well might do both before and after death, and this is thus no argument to prove the soul’s mortality. What takes place can in fact be interpreted as a form of shape-shifting. Hume attempts to add more weight to his argument by then posing the following question: “How to dispose of the infinite number of posthumous existences also ought to embarrass the religious theory” (Hume, 1992, p.36). However, this is interpreting the facts from a human perspective, a perspective from which it might not be possible to comprehend the total picture that only becomes clear upon stepping outside “ordinary reality”. What is being suggested here is that there is in fact no way of proving or disproving the existence and immortality of the soul. Moreover, it is not the purpose of this study to make such an attempt.

Incidentally, according to Hume’s empiricist view, external reality is nothing more than a product of sense perception, but this is certainly not how an indigenous shaman would describe what he / she experiences during a séance. Neither, for that matter, would many neo-shamanic practitioners.

## **The Significance of the Soul in other Religions**

The importance of the soul is referred to in the New Testament in Mark 8:37 when the question is asked “what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” And John Bunyan wrote a series of sermons on the subject as he was of the opinion that “nothing is a matter of that concern as is, and should be, the soul of each one of you” (Bunyan, 1845, p.1).

In his sermon Bunyan asks the following question: “Now consider what is best to be done. Will you take up the cross, come after Me, and so preserve your souls from perishing? Or will you shun the cross to save your lives, and so run the danger of eternal damnation?” (Bunyan, 1845, p.4) In other words, the way to prevent “soul-loss” is seen to be by following Christ.

In Mark 8:36, after speaking to his followers about their denying of themselves, their taking up their cross and following him, Jesus asks the following question: “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” As Bunyan points out, the supposition behind this is “That the soul is capable of being lost; or thus ‘tis possible for a man to lose his soul” (Bunyan, 1845, p.5). And it becomes clear that the concept of “soul-loss” can be found in Christianity in the same way as it can be found in shamanism, though the way of dealing with the problem in each case is different (as will become apparent upon examination of the tales). The same value accorded to the soul in Christianity can be found accorded to the soul in the Old Testament too, as Bunyan then goes on to illustrate:

[W]hat shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? ... Nothing at all, though he hath by that loss gained the whole world; for all the world is not worth a soul, not worth a soul in the eye of God and judgment of the law. And it is from this consideration that good Elihu cautioneth Job to take heed, Because there is wrath, saith he, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. Will He esteem thy riches? No, not gold, nor all the forces of strength (Job 36:18-19) (Bunyan, 1845, p.7).

Bunyan sees the cause of soul-loss as being sin and quotes from the Bible to support his case:

The cause is laid down in the 18<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ezekiel, in these words Behold, all souls, says God, are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die (5:4). ... It is sin, then, or sinning against God, that is the cause of dying, or damning in hell fire, for that must be meant by dying; otherwise, to die, according to our ordinary acceptation of the notion, the soul is not capable of, it being indeed immortal, as hath been afore asserted. So, then, the soul that sinneth, that is, and persevering in the same that soul shall die, be cast away, or damned; yea, to ascertain us of the undoubted truth of this, the Holy Ghost doth repeat it again, and that in this very chapter, saying, The soul that sinneth, it shall die (5:20) (Bunyan, 1845, p.53).

As for the solution he proposed, though attitudes have course changed in more recent times, it was to instil transgressors or potential transgressors with fear of damnation to encourage them to change their ways.

Let us now briefly consider soul-loss from an Islamic or, more specifically, a Sufi perspective. According to our cultural preferences in

the western world, the proposition “To God belongs the East and the West, wheresoever you look is the face of God” (*Qur’an 2:115*) is imaginary and thus not considered to be real.

That existence can be imagined to be the “Face of God” signifies a way of perceiving which ... has been called the Active Imagination [or what Sufis call the “heart”] and ... is a term used by classical Sufis ... [for whom] only God, i.e. the Self, is real, while the “I” that separates itself from this unified reality is unreal ... The Active Imagination ... unveils the hidden reality. It helps to return the facts of this world to their spiritual significance, to see beyond the apparent and to manifest the hidden ... Losing one’s soul refers to a condition of having the soul dominated by material, sensual, and egoistic concerns. Such a “heart and soul” is veiled, dim, unconscious (Helminski, K. ‘Soul Loss & Soul Making’ <http://www.sufism.org/books/sacred/soulloss.html> [accessed 11/1/06]).

In other words, a person suffering from soul-loss is considered to have lost the ability to perceive through the Active Imagination the interworld between the senses and the world of ideas and could thus be described as being spiritually unaware.

As for the other major world religions, in early Hinduism the soul or self (*atman*) was regarded as the principle that controls all activities and defines a person’s identity and consciousness, and the Upanishads identify the *atman* with the divine (Brahman)—thus adding an eternal aspect to the soul. Bound up with matter, the human soul is believed to be caught in the cycle of reincarnation until it achieves purification and knowledge and merges once again with ultimate reality.

The teachings of Islam on the soul are similar to those of Judaism and Christianity in that God is considered to have breathed the soul into the first human beings, and at death the souls of the faithful are said to be brought near to God. In Buddhism, however, the individual soul is believed to be an illusion. There is thus no place for a soul or self that can survive death since the decision-making centre of karmic continuity resides in *vijnana*, and it is the amorphous power of the deeds of men which survives after death, not the personal traits.

## The Significance of the Soul in Shamanism

As Lindquist (2004) points out, soul retrieval is based on the premise that a human being has a soul, a non-ordinary essence within the ordinary body, whose wholeness determines the state of both our physical and psychic health and which, as the centre of our sentience, enables us to perceive the world in all its fullness.

In shamanism soul loss is the term used to describe the way parts of that essence become detached when we are faced with traumatic situations. In psychological terms, it is known as dissociation and it works as a defence mechanism, a means of displacing unpleasant feelings, impulses or thoughts into the unconscious. In shamanic terms, these split-off parts can be found in non-ordinary reality and are only accessible to those familiar with its topography (see Gagan, 1998, p.9). Soul retrieval entails the shaman journeying to find the missing parts and then returning them to the client seeking help. The shaman, in the words of Eliade, “is the great specialist in the human soul: he alone ‘sees’ it, for he knows its ‘form’ and its destiny” (Eliade, 1989, p.8).

In psychological terms one could compare a person in a fairytale who is bewitched [or suffering from soul-loss or soul theft] to someone in whom one structural entity of the human psyche has been damaged in its functioning and is unable to function normally (Franz, 1980, p.17). People caught in such a neurosis “are apt to behave in a manner uncongenial and destructive towards themselves as well as to others” (Franz, 1980, p.7) and it can be a state people find themselves in both involuntarily and innocently. This shows how the condition is thus not necessarily the result of sinful behaviour as some would have us believe. It should also be mentioned at this point that the term soul loss need not only have negative connotations either. For ancient and modern Nahuas, for example, “it took place nearly every night in sleep as the tonalli abandoned the body to travel and have adventures in dreams” (McKeever Furst, 1995, p.121).

The idea of the soul as the immaterial and immortal part of man surviving after death as a ghost or spirit is an ancient and widespread belief. The ancient Egyptians represented it as a bird with a human head. Aristotle believed in the existence of the soul too, considering it to be the vital principle, propelling humanity toward its highest purpose—the acquisition of knowledge. And “his theory of the human being’s inner

potential is considered a forerunner of self-actualization theory, reflected in the twentieth-century approaches of Carl Jung and of Abraham Maslow, a champion of humanism” (Gagan, 1998, pp.28-29). As for the Neoplatonists they held that the soul was located in the whole body and in every part. The Muslims, on the other hand, believed that the souls of the faithful assumed the forms of snow-white birds, and nestle under the throne of Allah until the resurrection (see Brewer’s *Book of Myth & Legend*, 1992, p269).

"Soul", however, is a Western concept that in many cultures does not have an exact equivalent, which is why at one point the idea of referring to "modal states" (their imbalance and their restoration), rather than soul loss was considered as an alternative for the title of this work.

Take, for example, the case of the Kodi people of Eastern Indonesia. What they believe in can perhaps best be described as a double soul in Western terms, but there is no neat correspondence to what we understand the soul to be:

The Kodi *hamaghu* or vital spirit ... is believed to be located at the fontanelle, where small infants will often have a slight dent in their skulls at birth. This is the site of vulnerability, since the *hamaghu* can be lost due to serious illness, injury or a supernatural attachment by witches. The soul has another, more durable part, called the *ura ndewa*, which is located in the swirls of hair at the crown. This is the ancestral soul which can be reincarnated in future generations, and is associated with patrilineal transmission (Hoskins, 1996, p.289).

Geoffrey Samuel makes use of the term modal states in his multimodal framework (MMF). One of the advantages of the “paradigm” he proposes, as he himself points out, “is its ability to make sense of concepts and modes of operating within traditional societies that have been very hard to incorporate effectively within Western modes of knowing” (Samuel, 1990, p.3). The MMF assumes we “have the ability to operate in several different ‘modes’, each involving a different culturally provided framework, and that individuals in some way select an appropriate mode and framework for the situation at hand” (Samuel, 1990, pp.36-37). When the modal state we are operating in is out of balance we are susceptible to illness, and this is when the services of a shaman are called for.

For Samuel a “shaman” is a ritual specialist “concerned with the manipulation and balancing of modal states and / or with the introduction

of new modal states, such as processes involving communication with some supposed other mode of being or realm of existence” (Samuel, 1990, p.107). He goes on to qualify this by adding that “Within the MMF, “genuine” shamanic practice presumably involves shamans moving into special MS [modal states] that are different from the normal body of modal states within the social group” (Samuel, 1990, pp.107-108). On this point we disagree, as my contention would be that the nature of the state the shaman is in is in fact immaterial. What matters is whether he or she is able to bring about the desired state of affairs (what Samuel refers to as a particular “goal structure”) within the client (or community) that is the purpose of the ritual.

The modal states that Samuel refers to are not (except in a secondary and derivative way) modal states of the individual but of the community as a whole, and the shaman is able to “re-balance” the modal states because s/he is also part of, and directly engaged with them. The séance within indigenous communities is thus seen to operate at the level of the group, unlike what we find in the descriptions of Sandra Ingerman-style one-to-one shamanic healing sessions in the contemporary Western context.

“[T]he feeling of singularization, of being cut off from the community and one’s intimates, forces the individual to deal with the unconscious as a personal problem” (Alston, 1997, p.21), but from the point of view of the indigenous community the imbalanced modal state is seen to be caused by the individual’s loss of connection with the group’s ways of being for living successfully in the world. The function of the shaman is to restore this and to reintegrate the patient. Mumford, writing about the Gurung shaman found in Gyasmudo in northern Nepal, refers to the way in which “Their visions do not emphasize a path of self-realization, but rather are meant to promote a world harmony that benefits the community” (Mumford, 1989, p.8), and what he observes can in fact be applied to the visions of indigenous shamans in general.

There is often, however, a cost to be paid on the part of the patient as the interests of the “community” (which could mean its elders or senior figures) may take precedence in certain circumstances over those of the individual and it is part of the shaman’s job to impose that on the patient—which in a sense involves changing the individual into somebody slightly different.

As the term Samuel employs is not in general use though, it was felt that it would not be particularly helpful for the purposes of this study. Consequently, it was decided, despite its inadequacies, to stick with the term "soul loss" as it does at least have the advantage of being recognised and understood within the field in which it is used. On the other hand, it is essential not to lose sight of the fact that "The typical distinctions of modern Western society are not universal, and we cannot afford to have an overall theoretical framework that is tied to the local and parochial assumptions of our society" (Samuel, 1990, p.96), or that does not at least take such lack of equivalence as we have referred to above into account.

### **The Belief in Multiple Souls**

Hultkrantz argues that there are two soul complexes in human beings, one encompassing the several souls "that sustain individuals when they are in lucid consciousness, the other consisting of just one soul that is the image of the person and is active when one sleeps or is entranced or unconscious—in other words, an extracorporeal soul, representing a person in his / her entirety" (Hultkrantz, 1989, p.243). However, this description is an oversimplification as the belief systems of indigenous peoples can be much more complex than this, as we shall see.

As for the search for the origin for the belief in souls, it can be nothing more than speculative. One possibility is that the appearance in dreams of other people known to live in remote places could have led to the belief there was a detachable soul part that could leave the body in certain situations while another soul part remained in the person's body and kept it alive. From this it was possible to draw the conclusion that man awake was kept functioning by his body-soul or souls, whereas man asleep was represented by his dream-soul, and the interaction between the two has been referred to as soul-dualism (see Hultkrantz, 1984, p.28).

As Jonathan Horwitz, the founder of the Scandinavian Centre for Shamanic Studies and core shamanic practitioner, explains in his article "Coming Home",

Most traditional peoples are aware that animals, including humans, have at least two souls. One of these souls is the *fixed soul*, the soul that belongs to the physical body and takes care of the normal body functions, for example growing, breathing, digestion, heartbeat and the circulation of blood, reproduction, and all of our natural bodily cycles. The second soul is often referred to as the *free soul*, or spirit, that which feels and has emotions, that

which leaves the body at night during dreaming, or during a shamanic soul-flight. Indeed, some peoples, including the Inuit, are aware that each part of the body has its own soul, and the Evenki, the people whose language gives us the word shaman, were aware that human beings had up to seven souls, each with its own function.

Among the Ob Ugrians, as Chernetsov reports in his study “Concepts of the Soul among the Ob Ugrians”, the belief is that men have five souls and women four. The first, known as the shadow-soul, is believed to be present not only in people and animals but also in “inanimate” objects. During the course of life it is attached to a person, apparently never leaving him, and after death it follows the body to the grave. If it so wishes, it can then abandon the dead body and take the form of an apparition (see Chernetsov, 1963, pp.6-7). The second soul is referred to as “the soul that goes down (on the river),” normally only appearing after a person’s death. While the person is alive and well, the second soul is present regularly and can only leave during sleep, though shamans are believed to be able to part from their second soul without harm to themselves (Chernetsov, 1963, pp.13-14). The third soul is said to resemble a wood grouse and mainly lives outside the person, in the woods. It returns only during sleep, and for this reason is called “the dreaming soul”, “the soul of sleep,” or “the bird of sleep.” When this soul flies away, the person suffers from sleeplessness, and death is almost certain if this soul should perish. The fourth soul is known as the reincarnation soul and it is believed that after someone dies, this passes into the body of a newborn child belonging to the same clan the dead person was a member of (Chernetsov, 1963, pp.21-23). As for the nature of the fifth soul, in man there are said to be two reincarnating souls or that the fifth soul is “strength”.

To give another example of the wide diversity of beliefs, according to an English summary of an essay by V.I. Anuchin on Enisei Ostiak Shamanism that originally appeared in *Sbornik Muzeia antropologii I etnografii* 2, no.3 (1914), among the Ostiak people, a human being was believed to have seven souls.

The major one is called *ulvei*. According to the Ostiak worldview, people become ill when their *ulvei* leave their bodies. Essentially, human beings themselves can never be sick with physical illnesses. It is their *ulvei* that become ill, which affects human bodies ... Therefore, when Ostiak people become ill, they always approach shamans, whose job it is to retrieve an *ulvei*, find out what happened to it, and to take necessary “measures,” for example, winning back an *ulvei* from a hostile spirit or releasing an *ulvei* if

it is stuck somewhere. The Ostiak believe that people die simply because the “evil” goddess Khosadam catches and devours their *ulvei*. Yet eventually, an individual *ulvei* comes out from Khosadam’s body along with excrement and “moves” into another human host (in Znamenski, 2003, pp.61-62).

Firdaus G. Khisamitdinova in his paper “Bashkir Concepts of Souls” describes how the Bashkirs, a Turkic-speaking people living in the Southern Ural Mountains, believe we have four souls—*yän* the “life-soul”, *isem* the “name soul”, *kot* the “fortune-soul” and *tin* the “breath-soul”. The life-soul is regarded as the most important because it decides over the life and death of a person. Although it resides within the body, it can fly away if its owner dies, sleeps, or loses his or her consciousness and can also return to the body. The name-soul also has an important role to play because choosing the permanent name of a baby is believed to determine the destiny, physical attributes and character of the child. As for the fortune-soul, if it flies away its owner is said to become unsettled. This might occur for a number of reasons including unfulfilled wishes or unanswered affections (see *Shaman* Vol 4 1-2, 1996, pp.109-113).

Among the Chukchee, records Bogoras, the soul is called *uvi’rit*, or sometimes *uvé’kkirgin*, both words coming from the same root meaning “body.” The seat of the soul is believed to lie in the heart or the liver and both animals and plants have souls as well as people. As well as the soul pertaining to the whole body, people are believed to have several other souls. For example,

There are special “limb-souls” for the hands and feet. Occasionally these latter may be lost, [and] then the corresponding limb begins to ache and gradually withers. The Chukchee call a man whose nose is easily frost-bitten “short of souls” (*uviri’tkilin*), meaning that some part of his vital force must have left his body unawares. The “limb-souls” stay on the spot where they were lost. A shaman, however, can call them to himself, and they become his “assistant spirits” (*ya’ña-ka’lat*). The “souls” are very small. When passing by, they produce a sound like the humming of a bee or the droning of a beetle (Bogoras, 1910, pp.332-33).

If one or all of the “souls” are stolen, then a person can become sick and die. The shaman, however, is believed to be able to find and restore a missing “soul,” which often assumes the shape of a black beetle.

When put on the body of the patient, it will crawl all over his head, trying to find a hole into which to slip. Then the shaman will open the skull, and

put the beetle in its proper place ... If the shaman fails to find the “soul,” he can blow into the person a part of his own spirit to become a “soul;” or he may give him one of his “assistant *ke’let*” [spirits] to replace the missing “soul” (Bogoras, 1910, p.333).

The alternative of giving an “assistant *ke’let*” to the patient by the Chukchee shaman is an interesting variation and is not one employed by neo-shamanic practitioners such as Harner, Ingerman or Horwitz. This could well be due to the fact that it is too culturally specific and thus not considered appropriate for use as a core shamanic technique.

As for the Yukaghir, they recognized three different souls.

[O]ld Tulya’ch on the Yassachnaya river told me the following: *There are three souls, a’ibi. One of the a’ibi dwells in the head, the second in the heart, the third pervades the whole body. A man falls sick, when the head-a’ibi itself departs for the Kingdom of Shadows, aibiji, or escapes to the subterranean world to its relatives, frightened by the entrance into the body of an evil spirit of the ku’kul or yo’ibe category. In such cases, however, death does not follow, and the shaman may still descend to the Kingdom of Shadows and bring back the soul. The soul of man significant for life is the second one, the heart-a’ibi. The third soul throws the shadow on the ground. The dead have no shadows. When a person dies, the head-a’ibi leaves for the Kingdom of Shadows, as to what becomes of the two other souls, Tulya’ch could not say. The ancient shamans knew everything, the modern ones do not. Everything that lives has three souls. In appearance the a’ibi resembles its possessor, only it is not visible to ordinary mortals and is diminutive in size. Immovable objects also have a’ibi but only one* (Jochelson, 1926, pp.156-157).

The belief that things were always better in the old days, that the ancient shamans knew more than the modern ones, was in fact commonplace. Shirokogoroff (1982) observed that the Reindeer Tungus of Transbaikalia, the Khingan Tungus, the Reindeer Tungus of Manchuria, among others, all shared the belief the shamans of old were much more skilful. He considered the idea of the deterioration of the human species to be a natural phenomenon functioning as a way of ensuring the preservation of the existing state of affairs by at the same time expressing dissatisfaction with it. And exactly the same process can be observed at work in our present day society.

The following data were recorded by me from words of the old Kudala’s on the Korkodon River. Man has three a’ibi. One of these, after death, goes

to the Kingdom of Shadows, a'ibiji, i.e., "land of shadows." The second hovers about the residence of the deceased. The third rides to the Upper World to Me'mdeye-Eci'e. The first soul, on its way to the Kingdom of Shadows meets an old woman, the gate-keeper, who asks the soul whether it has come for all time or only temporarily. Having been admitted, the soul approaches a river, at the shore of which a boat is standing. The soul unaided crosses to the other shore and joins its relatives. They lead a life similar to the one on earth. Relatives live together. All surrounding objects are also shadows or souls. Thus the tent, dog, snares are so many shadows of the same objects or beings as they have existed on earth. The souls hunt the shadows of reindeer, birds and fishes with the shadows of traps, snares, bows and rifles. The animals who are hunted by living relatives are the same ones whose shadows have already been hunted by the souls of the hunters in the Kingdom of Shadows (Jochelson, 1926, p.157).

As is often the case with the Land of the Dead, it can be seen to mirror our own. Sometimes, however, it is antipodal, meaning everything there is reversed (day here is night there, and vice versa), though there is no mention of that in this particular account.

The Sakha believe there are three main souls too: the *iiə-kut* or "mother soul," the *buor-kut* or "earth-clay soul," and the *salgyn-kut* or "air-breath soul." In the case of the shaman, however, the mother soul is said to be spirited away to what is known as the middle world, where it becomes the *iiə-kyl* (*mother beast*). Though "It lives physically separate ... its fate is critically tied to the shaman's, for when it dies the shaman dies, and when the shaman fights with other shamans it can be in the form of the mother beast" (Balzer, 1996, pp.308-309).

The belief in multiple souls is not only found among indigenous peoples in Siberia or other areas of the former Soviet Union. "The Dakotas say that man has four souls, one remaining with the corpse, one staying in the village, one going in the air, and one to the land of the spirits" (Eliade, 1967, p.179).

As for the Mexica, they referred to three soul-like elements in their language – the *yolia*, the *tonalli*, and the *ihiyotl*. The *yolia* was believed to animate the body, partially provide character, and to survive after death. "The Mexica said that it also took the form of the breath, a shadowy double of the body, and a precious gemstone. Released from the flesh, the *yolia* was even embodied as a bird" (McKeever Furst, 1995, p.22). In the case of the *tonalli*, the deities *Ometecuhtli* and *Omecihuatl* were believed

to simultaneously breathe the tonalli into the child, thus igniting the inner fire, before birth. The tonalli “usually descended on the day of its birth, and the birthdate was crucial because ... it determined a child’s character and fate throughout its life and even into the next world” (McKeever Furst, 1995, p.75). Natural history observations and notions of the soul can thus be seen to intersect in that the tonalli is clearly identified here with body temperature. It was also believed the tonalli was carried in a name, “and this life force enhanced children’s fates, their energy, and their future. Destiny depended upon the infant’s birthdate in the 260-day ritual calendar, but a name ... could increase a child’s vital powers” (McKeever Furst, 1995, p.87). The third soul-like element, the dreaded *ihiyotl*, emerged as flatus or as the smelly gases from a bloated corpse and was considered to be “the inharmonious residue of the personality” (McKeever Furst, 1995, p.179). The nature of the *ihiyotl* would thus have been determined by the moral choices one made during life.

All three souls were, or were manifest in, the breath—a vital sign clearly present in the living and absent in the dead. What we tend to find is that indigenous equivalents for the soul, as in the case of the Mexica, “are primarily animating forces responsible for the health of the body and are usually described as being part of physical being” (McKeever Furst, 1995, p.122). This differentiates the indigenous equivalents for the soul from the Christian version with its purely nonmaterial functions.

The belief system of the Taulipáng, who live in Northern Brazil, incorporates five different souls, four of which can be seen as shadows. The fifth is unique because it enables one to speak and is said to be able to leave the body during sleep or during fits of sneezing. “After death the ‘speaking soul’ transmigrates to the other world, but the other soul-elements either remain with the body or transform into the shapes of animals such as birds of prey” (Sullivan, 1988, p.249).

As for the Matsigenka in Peru, in his paper “The One Intoxicated by Tobacco”, Gerhard Baer describes how they believe in three souls—a free soul or “dream ego”, an “eye soul” also known as “the mirror of the eye”, and a “bone soul”. The dream soul is said to leave the body temporarily in sleep or illness and permanently upon death, the eye soul is to be found only inside people who live mainly on the non-poisonous variety of divine manioc that comes from Father Moon, and the demonic “bone soul” is formed from the bones of a person who broke a serious taboo and can be used to bring about disease and death to the living (see Baer, 1992, p.81).