

# The Soul, Nature Spirits, and Developing a Personal Relationship with Nature and the Natural Environment in the Light of Tibetan Shamanism

## Seele und Naturgeister: Das Entwickeln einer persönlichen Beziehung zur Natur und Umwelt im Licht des tibetischen Schamanismus

John Myrdhin Reynolds, USA

Die Wurzeln der tibetischen Kultur finden sich im fruchtbaren Boden des alten zentralasiatischen und nordasiatischen Schamanismus. Trotz der 1.200-jährigen Präsenz des indischen Buddhismus auf dem tibetischen Hochplateau gibt es in den Dörfern noch immer Praktikanten des traditionellen Schamanismus (tib. *lha pa* oder *dpa' bo*). Die alten heidnischen Götter Tibets, die großen Himmels- und Berggötter, sind großteils in das tibetisch-buddhistische Pantheon als Schützer der buddhistischen Lehre integriert worden. Aber die wilde Bergwelt ist für die Tibeter noch immer von ungezähmten Naturgeistern bewohnt, die den Menschen gutmütig, aber auch feindlich gesinnt sein können. Die Hauptfunktion des tibetischen Schamanen besteht im Heilen von Krankheiten, die von erzürnten Naturgeistern gesandt worden sind, irritiert durch Einbrüche und Zerstörung der Natur, ihres Lebensraumes. Die Beziehung des Tibeters zu seiner Umwelt ist insofern sehr persönlich, denn Natur wird nicht wie in der westlichen Welt-sicht rein mechanisch, sondern als organische Ganzheit verstanden. Die tibetische Sichtweise und Beziehung zur Natur und Umwelt, sowohl buddhistisch als auch schamanisch, bietet somit eine heilsame Alternative zum rein mechanischen und ausbeutenden Umgang mit der Natur aus westlicher Perspektive.

### *Preface – Methodological Considerations*

This paper does not pretend to be a 'scientific' anthropological account of Tibetan shamanism, supposedly an 'objective' report of what Tibetans do with regard to shamanic practice as seen and observed from the outside. On the contrary, there can be no purely objective observation of human behavior seen from the strict standpoint of an impartial witness as a 'neutral observing consciousness.' This is because no human consciousness is pure and objective: it is always embedded and engaged in a reality that is culturally and socially constructed. No human consciousness can be totally unbiased and without unconscious assumptions and presuppositions that condition, even create our perception of reality. Every human consciousness has its limiting cultural assumptions and presuppositions, its hidden agendas, its conceptual constructions of reality, its paradigms as to what constitutes objectively existing reality. Therefore, we must be suspicious of so-called scientific objective observation, with its supposedly neutral detached witness, removed from its object. This is especially true when engaging the concepts and observing the behavior of human beings belonging to non-Western cultures. But it also applies to our approach to nature itself.

This disembodied neutral consciousness is an erroneous methodological assumption of an earlier scientific establishment, one belonging to a supposedly superior Western rationalism (especially in the colonialist era) as against the assumed irrationalism of the natives of non-Western cultures. My approach here is different. I speak from the standpoint of participant observation, which in the last few decades has tended to become accepted in cultural anthropological and ethnological circles. Even though in my present life I am not a Tibetan, having been born in North America, for more than thirty years I have closely participated in Tibetan culture and society, especially in the sphere of Tibetan Buddhism. In fact, I identify my perspective on life and reality with the Buddhist viewpoint and feel it important to state this at the outset. But my personal involvement with Tibetan Buddhism does not mean, as a Buddhist scholar and cultural anthropologist, that I cannot also look at Buddhism and Tibetan culture from the standpoint of a scientific historian, relying upon observed evidence, both in terms of texts and contemporary behavior.

In the Tibetan cultural context, I am especially interested in the interface between the high literary culture of Buddhism and Bon, on the one hand, and Tibetan folk culture and practice, especially shamanism and shamanic healing, on the other. In particular, I am vitally interested, not just in the philological study of old texts, which of necessity, involves a hermeneutical process in their translation and understanding, but in how the Tibetan Lamas of today understand their own religious tradition and how both Lamas and lay-people practice this tradition. In my translation and interpretation of old Tibetan Buddhist texts, I have often found the interpretation of contemporary Lama scholars who rely upon their native oral traditions, to be closer to the mark than the current fashionable theories in Western 'scientific' circles.

I was predisposed to this sort of study because of my Celtic ancestry, especially the Irish side, and because of my personal psychic experiences in childhood where I encountered and communicated with certain nature spirits. But I soon realized that these anomalous experiences of nature spirit contact and communication in the forests of North America were not socially accepted nor permitted by our Protestant Christian establishment and by our official scientific culture in America with its materialist-mechanistic paradigm of reality. This official culture dismisses spirit encounter as imaginary, fantasy, hallucinatory, or just plain pathological and 'crazy.' I soon learned to keep silent about such experiences and encounters. Indeed, our Western official scientific culture seeks to legislate reality, that is, what can and what cannot exist, and due to social pressure, our perceptions and experiences must conform to this officially sanctioned reality. Our scientific culture does not objectively and impartially discover and simply observe reality and the outside world — but rather, as a cultural construct and process, it actually creates the reality that it is perceiving and therefore believes what it sees and observes is objectively real. But this modern scientific culture, with its hidden agenda of preconceptions as to what constitutes reality, is not actually open to the full range of phenomena within human experience. As the Christian Church once did in the West, the scientific cultural establishment seeks to legislate what is ultimately real and what we humans are permitted to experience, so that those individuals who have perceptions outside the permitted perimeters are dismissed as 'crazy.'

Indeed, this culture maintains that everything, all phenomena that manifest to human consciousness, must have a rational 'scientific' explanation, that is to say, one that is materialistic and mechanistic. But this is neither genuine science nor the scientific method, neither of which I am arguing against. These both represent valuable tools for human beings in the world. And fortunately, in recent decades, perspectives have been opening up in the various sciences themselves that go beyond a narrow materialism.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it is 'scientism', a system of dogmatic metaphysical beliefs as to what constitutes reality, which goes far beyond the proper scientific method in its assertions that seek to define and exhaustively legislate reality. Thereby reality is constricted and re-created in a very limited sense. In the perspective of scientism, all one discovers as external reality is a dead machine-like universe devoid of life and consciousness. This is the culmination of the Cartesian agenda. According to the view of scientism, humanity is alone as intelligent life in a vast dead universe and this universe is itself a machine gradually running down into an ultimate stasis or entropy. This is a dark vision that yields only despair. But is this vision real? Or is it something that is culturally constructed? Do modern Western people no longer see and speak with the spirits because the latter do not objectively exist? Or is it because our own vision has become so limited and impaired and desensitized by our present scientific cultural construction of reality? In actuality, we do not live in reality, but in our cultural constructions of reality.

Here I intend to approach certain human experiences from a different perspective. What I am speaking about here is not 'religious belief' such as faith in God the Creator, a concept familiar in our Western intellectual heritage. Rather, I am speaking about the actual experience of most non-modern people, namely, the personal encounter with the spirits who dwell in wild nature. This experience is well attested in all pre-modern cultures, including here in the West. This raises certain questions of a fundamental and existential nature. Are we human beings the only 'intelligent' life forms in the universe? Here I am particularly interested in the philosophical and psychological implication of the existence of the spirits in terms of our relationship to nature, that is, to our wild and uncivilized natural environment.

### *Buddhism in Tibet*

When we hear the name 'Tibet', we usually think of colorful monks, monasteries, the Dalai Lama, elaborate ceremonies, abstruse metaphysics, and so on, that is to say, a high literary and intellectual Buddhist culture, ultimately of Indian origin. Indeed, Indian Buddhism came to Central Tibet in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries and was firmly established at court in the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century with the erection of the first Buddhist monastery at Samye. This was roughly contemporary with the establishing of Roman Christianity in Central and Northern Europe in the age of Charlemagne. In Tibet this occurred during the reign of the great Tibetan Buddhist king Tisong Detsan who invited the monk-scholar Santarakshita to his country in order to ordain the first native-born Tibetan monks, thereby introducing the Vinaya

<sup>1</sup> On the recent dialogue between the modern sciences of mind and Tibetan Buddhism, see Jeremy W. HAYWARD and Francisco J. VARELA, *Gentle Bridges: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on the Sciences of the Mind*, Shambhala, Boston 1992, and Francisco J. VARELA (ed), *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying: An Exploration of Consciousness with the Dalai Lama*, Wisdom Publications, Boston 1997.

(monastic discipline) and the Buddhist scholasticism of the Sutra system with its Madhyamaka philosophy. Moreover, the same king invited Guru Padmasambhava, the great Tantric Buddhist master from the country of Uddiyana, in order to subdue in magical combat the local gods and demons (tib. *lha 'dre*) who opposed this introduction of the Buddhist religion into Tibet. This was because the local gods and spirits knew that the Buddhist monks in India were adamantly opposed to the practice of blood sacrifice (tib. *dmar mchod*) to which these spirits were addicted. Assuming the role of the archetypal shaman, Padmasambhava was ultimately successful in this enterprise and converted many of these local gods and spirits into guardians and protectors of the Buddhist teaching, binding them with fierce oaths to protect henceforth the Dharma of the Buddha. At this time, Indian Buddhism, in both its Sutric and its Tantric forms, became the official religion at the court in Lhasa and thereafter generous government subsidies were granted to both the monks and the temples during the eighth and ninth centuries.



*Padmasambhava (8<sup>th</sup> century) was invited to Tibet by King Tisong Detsan because the local gods and spirits resisted all efforts to build the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet. — Im 8. Jh. wurde der Guru Padmasambhava von König Tisong Detsan nach Tibet eingeladen, weil die lokalen Götter und Geister sich seinen Bemühungen widersetzen das erste buddhistische Kloster Tibets zu errichten.*<sup>2</sup>

However, a reaction against monastic Buddhism led to a coup in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent persecution in Central Tibet which closed the temples and defrocked the monks. With the collapse of the Tibetan empire a Dark Age ensued

<sup>2</sup> Statue of Padmasambhava in Samye Monastery, first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, Photo: Loseries

and not much is known of conditions in Tibet until the great revival of monastic Buddhism in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, there was renewed contact with Buddhist teachers in India and fresh influences, such as the translations of the so-called 'New Tantras'. The center of this activity was at first in Western Tibet. The translations of Sanskrit Buddhist texts by Rinchen Zangpo inspired the second spreading of Buddhism in Tibet, with its New Translations and the New Tantra system. This movement led to the founding of the newer monastic schools of Tibetan Buddhism, namely, the Kadampa, the Sakyapa, the Kagyudpa, and finally in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the reforming zeal of the great monk-scholar Tsongkhapa, the Gelugpa.<sup>3</sup> These orders of monks grew into large monastic universities, which equally emphasized the study of the Sutra system and the practice of the New Tantra system. The followers of the Old Tantra system of practice deriving from the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries thereupon came to think of themselves as the Nyingmapas, 'the ancient ones.' At first this Nyingmapa tradition was preserved among lineages of married Lamas known as Ngakpas or Tantrikas, who could claim direct descent from Padmasambhava and, indeed, the Ngakpa style of practice continues to thrive in Tibet in many areas even today, in parallel to the monastic system.<sup>4</sup>

In their historical accounts, the medieval monk-historians tended to denigrate the native Tibetan culture, preferring to derive all higher culture from India with the arrival of Buddhism. This was largely done in order to glorify the role of Buddhism in Tibetan history and culture, much like early medieval monk-historians in Europe tried to connect European tribal origins with the Biblical narrative of the sons of Noah after the flood. In these Tibetan histories, the native Tibetan people are depicted as illiterate savages before the 7<sup>th</sup> century, addicted to the worship of evil spirits. And earlier, in the time of Sakyamuni Buddha (c. 881 B.C. according to the Tibetan calculation), they had not yet even reached the human level. They were red-faced monkeys swinging in the trees, until tamed and humanized by Buddhist influence, that is, by the appearance of the great Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara in the guise of a monkey king who fathered the ancestors of the various Tibetan clans upon a rock ogress.

### *The Interface of Indigenous Shamanism and Indian Buddhist Tantra*

However, in actuality, since ancient times Tibet possessed a richly developed culture, even a pre-Buddhist literature and a native script for writing it, before Indian Buddhism came to Central Tibet in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> In general, this pre-Buddhist religious culture was called Bon. This term may have come from an old Tibetan verb *'bond pa*, meaning 'to invoke the gods and spirits.' A practitioner of Bon is known as a Bonpo. Some of these ancient Bonpos were no doubt shamans of the classical Northern Asian type, who experienced spirit possession, as do shamans in Siberia even today, while others appear to have been magicians, ritualists, and priests. They seem to have formed family lineages in certain clans. But Bonpo was

<sup>3</sup> on the ancient and medieval history of Tibet in general, see David SNELGROVE and Hugh RICHARDSON, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, Geo Weiderfeld & Nicolson, London 1968.

<sup>4</sup> on these two trends within Tibetan religious culture, the monastic and the tantric, see Geoffrey SAMUEL, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington 1993.

<sup>5</sup> see Namkhai NORBU, *The Necklace of gZi: A Cultural History of Tibet*, LTWA, Dharamsala 1981.

a very general term for a variety of religious practitioners, some of who were of foreign origin. When the eighth king of Tibet died, there were no native priests who knew how to perform the royal funeral ceremonies. Thus Bonpos from Kashmir, Drusha and Zhang-zhung in the West had to be invited to do so. Moreover, there existed a higher religious culture also called Bon that centered in the country of Zhang-zhung located in what is now Western and Northern Tibet. Before the 7<sup>th</sup> century Zhang-zhung was an independent country with its own language, culture, and religion before it was conquered in the 8<sup>th</sup> century by the Central Tibetans and incorporated in their growing empire. This centuries old Zhang-zhung culture had close links with Central Asia or Tazik and with the Silk Route that ran to the north. Extensive ruins may still be seen in the lake country of Northern Tibet and its royal residence was located at Khyunglung Ngulkhara in the Sutlej river valley to the west of Mt. Kailas.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the rise of the great literary religious traditions of Buddhism and Bon, with their monastic institutions since the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, shamanism in its classical Northern Asian form continues to be practiced even today in Tibet and among Tibetan refugees in exile, side by side with the monasteries of Buddhism and Bon. The principal function of the shaman, whether in Tibet or Central and Northern Asia, is that of healing. This indigenous shamanism in Tibet is not a separate religion opposed to Buddhism and Bon. For centuries in Tibet, shamanist practitioners have been either Nyingmapa or Bonpo. And moreover, this shamanist practice of entering into an altered state of consciousness by way of drumming and chanting, as well as other methods, belongs to a much larger cultural area extending throughout most of Eurasia in the past.

The classical model of shamanism as defined by Mircea Eliade in his *Shamanism: The Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*,<sup>7</sup> was based on anthropological descriptions of practices in Siberia. He emphasized the out-of-the-body experience of the shaman, and expressed a bias against spirit possession, feeling that this represented a degenerate form of shamanism. But this is not necessarily so. Nor do these two experiences, soul travel and spirit possession, necessarily exclude each other. The experience of an individual shaman may evolve beyond spirit possession. Entering into an altered state of consciousness, the shaman comes to journey through the landscapes of the mind, returning home again to ordinary reality with lost fragments of the soul, as well as treasures of knowledge and power. The near landscapes of the mind are indeed culturally conditioned. This appears to be true also with the journey of the dead through the Bardo or after-death experience. Because of his out-of-the-body experiences and his journeying into the other world of the spirits, the shaman is able to function as a psychopomp or guide of souls.

The shaman, whether male or female, enters into an altered state of consciousness or 'ecstasy' so as to act as an intermediary between our human dimension of existence and the other world of the spirits, the primary function here being to diagnose and cure diseases caused by the spirits. The two principal methods employed are soul travel and spirit possession. The Tibetan shaman in Central and Southern

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<sup>6</sup> see John Vicent BELLEZZA, 'High Country Culture: A Civilization Flourished in the Himalayas before Buddhism Reached Tibet,' *Discovering Archaeology*, vol. 1, no. 3, May-June, 1999, pp. 78-83.

<sup>7</sup> Mircea ELIADE, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Pantheon Books, New York 1964.

Tibet is called a Pawo (tib. *dpa' bo*) and in Ladakh and in Eastern Tibet is called a Lhapa. This is also the name (Pawo and Lha) of the spirit-guide that possesses the shaman and speaks through that individual as through a medium.

In Tibetan society generally, the Lama has come to usurp the classical role of the shaman as the healer and the guide of souls, especially the guiding of the souls of the dead through the perilous Bardo, the intermediate state between the death and the rebirth of the individual. Moreover, the Lama's literary tradition and his reading from texts is felt to be more potent and efficacious than the oral tradition of the shaman. But Tibetan shamanic culture is unique because so much of it has been put into writing, even before the 7<sup>th</sup> century by the Bonpos. The coming of Indian Buddhism in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries especially inspired the Tibetans to commit their oral traditions into writing. This meant that much traditional know-ledge was not lost to later generations. Often the old Bonpo shamanic ritual texts would preface the ritual proper (tib. *gto*) with a myth of origin (tib. *smrang*) that would give an account of when and how the ritual was performed for the first time. These myths have no Indian Buddhist associations, although there appear to be clear Central Asian and Iranian connections.

The Bonpo tradition has preserved a large corpus of these ritual texts and ritual techniques and many of them were adopted and incorporated in all the Buddhist schools, including the Gelugpa. It was felt that it was important to keep the spirits of wild untamed nature propitiated and in a harmonious relationship with humanity. By these means one could prevent hailstorms and bring forth abundant harvests, prevent the spread of infectious diseases and keep cattle fertile. By making regular offerings to the nature spirits, one kept them peaceful, contented, and well disposed to humanity. In this way, human society maintained a respectful and harmonious relationship with the natural environment. Indeed, the origins of this old Tibetan culture known as Bon lay in the rich fertile soil of Northern Asian shamanism. But with historical times, it came into interface with Buddhist Tantra of Indian origin and a creative syncretism of indigenous Tibetan shamanism and Indian Tantra evolved, which gives Tibetan Buddhism its unique and colorful character.

In general, the most important old pagan pre-Buddhist gods and spirits were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon as Guardians of the Buddhist teachings and community of practitioners. For Tibetan Buddhists generally, Padmasambhava has assumed the role of the archetypal shaman who tamed and subdued the local spirits and mountain gods, thus transforming even the physical landscape of Tibet. Originally, Padmasambhava was invited to Tibet by King Tisong Detsan because the local gods and spirits resisted all his efforts to build the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet. Padmasambhava subdued these spirits in a series of magical combats and bound them with fierce oaths to henceforth protect the Dharma, the new higher religion. In effect, he converted these spirits to the Buddhist teachings. They thus became oath-bound (tib. *dam can*), assuming the role of Guardians (tib. *srung ma*) and Dharma Protectors (tib. *chos skyong*).

Each Tibetan monastery of the different schools has its own cult of the Guardians. Each evening after sunset, for the spirits wax stronger after the sun has set, the monks of the monastery assemble and perform a puja offering ceremony, a Rite of the Guardians, using the big shaman's drum to summon the spirits. In the New

Tantra tradition, this ceremony is the Mahakala Puja. Mahakala represents a wrathful form of the compassionate great Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara whose presence can subdue negative energies. Nevertheless, the archaic element of reciprocity remains: a bargain made with the spirits in exchange for offerings and charging them to perform certain deeds. The performance of these puja ceremonies is considered in traditional Tibetan culture to be one of the most important functions of Lamas and monks. With these pujas and with the exemplary moral conduct of the monks, both the natural and the moral orders are preserved in our world. The Lama, as does any priest, communicates between our human dimension of existence, our human society and community, and a higher spiritual order. But like the shaman, he also communicates with the other world of the spirits who inhabit the natural wilderness beyond the village and the cultivated fields. These spirits in wild uncontrolled nature also have to be propitiated with offerings to maintain their good will. The ancient Bonpo text of the *kLu 'bum*, provides many narratives or myths (*smrang*) recounting occasions when mankind first began disturbing the natural environment in the course of the process we call civilization. This process disrupted the primordial harmony (*ye*) and the healing ritual with its exchange of energies represents a means to repair and restore this pre-existing harmony. The healing ritual aims not only to heal the human patient, but the Nagas or nature spirits as well, who have fallen ill due to mankind's inconsiderate actions in relation to the natural environment. Thus, the healing of the natural environment is equally important to the maintaining of human welfare. And this process is seen in very personal terms. An important part of the human interaction with the other world of the spirits is this joint participation in the healing of the effects of pollution and destruction upon the natural environment.

#### *The Ontological Status of the Spirits — Are They Real?*

For the Tibetans, like other ancient and tribal peoples throughout the world, the spirits of nature are real. However, our modern materialistic world-view categorically rejects the existence of the spirits. This is done for ideological and paradigmatic reasons, which ignore the empirical evidence of anomalies, such as well-attested psychic phenomena. The majority of modern Western people are conditioned by their culture to assume that everything must have a rational, natural, 'scientific' explanation — one that is materialistic and mechanistic in terms of causality. Nevertheless, for the Tibetans, the spirits are empirically real and not just symbolic or metaphoric, such as Ancient Greek mythology has now become for us. Nor are they simply psychological projections or hallucinations. Principally the spirits inhabit the wilderness, the wild places of nature, which are outside of human control in untamed nature. This wilderness symbolically represents the outer chaos, as against the order of the human habitat. In Tibetan culture, this is the distinction made between what is wild or uncontrolled (tib. *rgod pa*) and what is tamed, controlled and civilized (*'dul ba*).

Tibetans relate to these 'wild' spirits or outsiders in very personal terms. This person-to-person relationship contrasts with our modern impersonal mechanistic and functional relationship to nature. The Zhidak (*gzhi bdag*) or local nature spirits may be well-disposed and benign toward humans or they may be hostile. Hence they



are called the *Lha 'dre*, the gods and the demons. The majority of them are indifferent and neutral towards human, if left undisturbed. But when disturbed, they may become offended or irritated by human beings and then they cause problems. The spirits are not just symbolic personifications or psychological projections because they have autonomous minds and wills of their own. They are outside of our control. However, these spirits generally manifest in natural phenomena, which serve as the supports (*rten*) for their manifestations, and they often inhabit unusual and striking features of the natural landscape.



*Tibetans communicate with local gods und spirits by sending out the windhorse (tib. *rlung rta*) as 'prayerflags' for good luck and prosperity. — Wenn Tibeter „Gebetsfahnen“ aufhängen, lassen sie das Windpferd (tib. *rlung rta*) als Glücksboten zu Göttern und Geistern reiten.*<sup>8</sup>

In the main, these spirits are not fully material, yet not fully immaterial either. They are intermediate between matter and mind or 'psychoid'. In terms of our human dimension of existence, they phase in and out of the sphere of human perception. Sometimes we see them and sometimes we do not. They seem subtle, watery, ethereal, extra-dimensional, as with the accounts of UFOs in recent times, which would seem to represent modern spirits. In ancient pagan pre-Christian times, the spirits appeared as gods, in medieval times the spirits appeared as angels and devils, and in our modern science-fiction age they appear as UFOs and their 'extraterrestrial' occupants. The spirits inhabit an intermediate world or dimension between matter and mind, one called energy and psyche.

But they interact with us directly, even when we do not see them, because we also as human beings participate in this dimension of psychic energy. They can affect us humans directly at the conscious level, appearing visibly as a spirit manifestation,

<sup>8</sup> Photo: Eubomír Sklenka, <<http://www.lungta.cz/obr/prapor04.jpg>>

or only subliminally, experienced as strange moods and vibrations. As energy beings, the spirits can influence and affect our personal energy fields with inexplicable moods, impulses, even illness. The Ancient Greeks believed these irrational emotions, impulses, and obsessions were sent by the gods. They appear to inexplicably arise from outside of ourselves, from outside of our rational ego consciousness. Moreover, our personal energy field is linked with our immune system. Therefore, the actions of the spirits can affect our immunity and consequently we fall ill. Basically, for the Tibetans, the spirits are real because

1. their effects are real and experienced in everyday life,
2. we can communicate with them and they can make their desires known to us,
3. they are the custodians of wild nature, its treasures and its wisdom,
4. they can influence, even control certain natural processes and phenomena such as the weather, the rains, fertility of the earth, and so on, that directly impact upon humanity, and
5. they can cause diseases among humans and cattle and cause other natural disasters when they are disturbed, irritated, angered, and alienated.

Thus, belief in the existence and influence of the spirits is not something irrational or childish.

Furthermore, these spirits, in the Buddhist perspective, are regarded as living sentient beings. They belong to Samsara, or cyclical existence characterized by death and rebirth, just as humans and animals do. One often reads in Western books that Buddhism teaches the doctrine of *Anatman*, which denies the existence of a self or a soul. But what is denied here is not our experience of self-identity, but the existence of an unchanging mental substance or entity called the 'self.' On the contrary, Buddhism tends to speak in a process language, asserting that there is a stream of consciousness, rather than an entity. Like humans, the spirits represent individual autonomous streams of consciousness. Buddhism is not atheism. The Buddha did not deny the existence of the celestial gods or Devas (*lha*) of the old Vedic religious tradition of India. Nor the existence of the nature spirits of the popular folk religion of his times, the tree spirits known as Yakshas and the water spirits known as Nagas. But the Buddha did explain that these gods and spirits were not enlightened beings who are all-wise, all-knowing, and all-powerful. They are sentient beings like ourselves who are conditioned by their desires, emotions, and their karma. These conditioned sentient beings are still inside Samsara. No matter how exalted their status, their power and their wisdom, still they are limited. They too will eventually die and be reborn elsewhere when their stock of good karma is exhausted.

Our world and all the life forms contained within it came into existence and undergo evolution in accordance with the collective karma inherited from previous worlds. Our world represents the aggregate result of the collective karma of all the living beings who inhabit it. There has been an endless series of world-systems that have been born, endured for a time, and died again, just as individual living beings do. Samsara is without any absolute beginning in time; it is like the rim of a wheel relentlessly turning on and on. The gods and the spirits are sentient beings like ourselves. They are part of our cosmos or world-system, subject to the law of karma and subordinate to the Dharma, the moral and spiritual order.

Conventionally, the Buddhist teachings speak of six Lokas or destinies of rebirth, representing different dimensions of existence. These are parallel worlds in terms of time and space, brought about by different causes and conditions. The dimensions of the Devas, the Asuras, the Pretas, and the Narakas represent the existence of spirits. Also the Bardo that is experienced between rebirths represents a kind of spirit existence. Humans and animals, on the other hand, have material as well as psychic bodies. In spirit existence, there does exist a kind of subtle psychic body where both the mind and the senses are intact and function accordingly. It is a psychic existence, like living in a prolonged dream. These beings experience emotions and desire and also the images raised by their individual and collective karma. It is much the same in the Bardo and in soul travel or out-of-the-body experiences. In both cases, one's psychic body resembles, in almost every way, the body one has had in one's normal or previous life. The shaman is able to maintain his form during soul travel, but in the Bardo one will become distracted and eventually change form as one's new rebirth approaches.

How is it possible for consciousness, either in death or in out-of-the-body experiences, to be truly disembodied? Consciousness abhors a vacuum or empty dimensionless state. Therefore, it creates a subtle body for itself out of psychic energy. According to the Dzogchen teachings of the Tibetan Books of the Dead, in the process of dying, the physical body, the psychic energy, and the mind all gradually dissolve back into the vast empty space of the Nature of Mind out of which they initially arose. When all these constraints and special limitations have dissolved, the experience of the Clear Light of Reality, which is the intrinsic awareness of one's own Nature of Mind, arises spontaneously. This is not to be confused with the angelic visions and photic phenomena that may arise in the dying process or in near-death experiences. The actual Clear Light is beyond form; it is the naked presence of Mind, which is characterized equally by spaciousness and luminosity according to Dzogchen. Failing to recognize its own nature, consciousness does not long remain in this condition of space and light, but due to karma and past memories, when mental processes again come into operation, it creates for itself a limited dimension of space known as a body. This process is almost automatic and unconscious. Consciousness awakens to find itself outside and in the vicinity of its old physical body, now an inert corpse, inhabiting a body of psychic energy, precisely resembling its old body in every detail including clothing, with thought processes and the senses functioning intact. This is not a physical body, but one composed of subtle psychic energy. In other words, one has become a spirit and now inhabits a spirit body. For a time, this spirit haunts old familiar scenes and tries without success to communicate with its relatives and loved ones. Finally distracting thoughts arise and consciousness drifts off into other dimensions of experience in the Bardo depending on individual karma, much like one does in a dream. So, each time one dies, the individual returns to the other world of the spirits until reborn again. Therefore, after death in the Bardo, consciousness is reconstituted as a mind in a body, a subtle spirit body, and because of memory and past karma it continues for a time to resemble one's old physical body. This is like dissolving a crystal of salt in hot water. Later this water cools down a bit and the crystal precipitates once more out of solution. In the same way, the individual stream of con-

sciousness dissolves into the spacious state of Shunyata or pure potentiality and then undergoes a recrystallization.

### *Soul and Spirit: Nature Spirits and the World-Soul*

According to Buddhist teaching, there are three dimensions to our being, which are known as body, speech, and mind. The physical body is our material dimension and the mind is our mental dimension. But speech is sound and sound is energy, so the reference here is to our entire dimension of energy. This intermediate dimension between material reality and mind is known as psyche or soul. This is reminiscent of the Platonic triad: *Soma*, *Psyche*, and *Nous*. The dimension of the soul or psyche is an intermediate world, a world of images. According to the Tibetan shamanic tradition, each living sentient being, including humans, has a *La* (tib. *bla*) or soul, often visible as an aura of psychic energy around the physical body seen as a radiance (tib. *brjid*) in shifting colors. Although plastic in its nature, it normally takes the form of a soul-body that is an exact replica of the physical body. It is also believed that this soul-body can be projected out of the physical body and travel about in the other world. Basically, the soul or *La* serves as the vehicle for the individual's emotional life. When whole, complete, and healthy, the individual can live at optimum. But the soul can also become fragmented and lose its energy. When there is soul loss or soul fragmentation, the individual will feel depleted, depressed, listless, without any energy or enthusiasm for life. Today we would say such a person is neurotic and chronically depressed. One feels that one has lost a part of oneself. Where do these lost soul fragments go? They go into the collective dimension of the psyche, into the other world of the spirits.

Each human being has this *La* as part of their personal energy field. The spirits can impact and influence this *La* with negative provocations of energy (tib. *gdon*) and it is believed that they can steal fragments from it and conceal them in the other world. Much of traditional shamanic healing deals with soul loss and the recalling of lost fragments of the soul. Recalling and reintegrating them, the human soul is restored to its original wholeness. The shamanic methods of soul retrieval, known as *bla 'gug* or *bla bslu*, summoning or recalling the soul, have been incorporated in Tibetan Buddhist practice.

Our planet earth, considered as a living organism, is also said to have its soul or energy field or psychosphere, known in the West as the *Anima Mundi* or world-soul. It surrounds the earth like a psychic atmosphere. All life participates in it and it permeates all features of the nature landscape. It has its own biorhythms, which may be calculated, and its own power spots where the spirits will congregate. This is the dimension of the collective psyche that is shared by all life on this planet. Spirits live in this dimension of energy, this ocean of psychic energy, much like fish live in the sea.

But this intermediate realm is multi-dimensional, so that we human beings do not normally perceive the spirits, except subliminally. They are a bit out of sight or at the borders of our perception. But they can impinge on our senses and waking consciousness under certain conditions and circumstances. Therefore, in terms of Buddhist teaching, the spirits in general represent a type of conditioned existence within Samsara. They are Samsaric beings just like we humans are. One speaks of it

as another world only in relation to our normal waking consciousness, what may be called our human karmic vision and perception. We come to experience this other world especially in dreams and after death in the Bardo. At those times we ourselves will have a spirit existence. These spirits in the other world are autonomous beings. They are not under the immediate rational control of our ego consciousness. Therefore they do not fit in our modern mechanistic model of reality. They are anomalous. Nevertheless, they respond to communication and to exchanges of energy. We can relate to them. These spirits are real because their effects upon us are real; they affect our health, our well-being, our emotional stability, and our natural environment.

*Reciprocal Relationship: The Human World and the Other World of the Spirits*

Moreover, there exists an on-going personal communication and interdependency and mutuality between our human world and the other world of the spirits. This is true not only in terms of shamanic trance and altered states of consciousness, but also in terms of the rituals used to re-establish the harmony and balance of energies between our human world and the other world of the spirits. This represents not only dialogue, but a process of bargaining and negotiation. All of this is based on a reciprocal relationship. We humans need the spirits because they control forces in the natural environment that are beyond human control. These phenomena of nature are not impersonal material forces that may be simply manipulated by mechanical means. Nature is not a machine, but a living organism. But the spirits need us also. We give them energy. Our two evolutions on this planet are inextricably intertwined. We have a symbiotic relationship with the spirits and with our natural environment.

The primary principle involved in these shamanic rituals is the exchange of energies. On the human side we make offerings and sacrifices and prayers. A sacrifice offers the prana energy liberated from the blood of the sacrificial victim. This vital energy is liberated into the surrounding atmosphere and the spirits feed upon it. These offerings may be actual or they may be substitutes visualized in the mind because these mental visualizations are also invested with psychic energy and the spirits can perceive them. In substitution or ransom rites (tib. *glud*) a consecrated effigy is offered as a substitute for the afflicted person. The process of consecration invests this effigy with energy. In the traditions of Buddhism and Yungdrung Bon, the Torma (tib. *gtor ma*) or sacrificial cake represents a substitute for the original blood sacrifice of a living being. Nevertheless, the Torma comes to be accepted by the spirits, for they see what we visualize rather than what we see with our normal waking consciousness.

Therefore, the first principle here in performing these shamanic rituals is to never evoke and invite the spirits unless one has prepared the appropriate offerings for them, whether actual or symbolic and created by the mind. The spirits are like small children. They can become easily irritated if they are summoned and one has nothing to give them. They are emotionally immature and therefore are called *dregs pa* or arrogant and easily offended. They may turn negative, even violent. Therefore, it is necessary to behave in a polite, courteous, and honorable manner (tib. *ya*

*rab spyod pa*) toward them and when inviting them, one should always present desirable and clean offerings.

By way of his spirit guide and helping spirits, the shaman, in his journeys into the other world, acquires knowledge and power over certain spirits. Later he can summon them again and again into his presence. He knows their songs, even in spirit language, and he knows their secret names and heart mantras. When summoned, he offers them a Torma (sacrificial cake) and then charges them to perform certain actions. He can even threaten them when they disobey and coerce them when necessary.



*The Tibetan practice of Torma-offerings is performed to summon local gods and spirits inhabiting the natural environment. — Die tibetische Praxis des Torma-Opfers dient dem Versammeln von Göttern und Schutzgeistern, die stets auch einen lokalen Bezug in der Natur haben.*<sup>9</sup>

Thus, in the ritual the individual gives something to the spirits as offerings, and therefore one can expect or even demand something in return. The spirits may even be charged to carry out certain specific actions. What is exchanged here is energy, rather than something material. This material object or substance merely serves as the support (tib. *rten*) for the manifestation of energy.

#### *The Modern 'Scientific' World-View: Living in a Soulless Universe*

Our own Middle Ages in Europe was abundantly populated by spirits, both good and bad, whether considered angels or devils. The Roman Church dealt with these spirit entities after its own fashion, but largely consigned the old pagan deities, as well as the local nature spirits, to the role of devils sundered from heaven. Renaissance philosophy also accepted the objective reality of the spirits within the great

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<sup>9</sup> Torma offerings for local deities of Turquoise Mountain (Mt. Taylor), New Mexico, USA; photo: <members.tripod.com/thssite/shell1/turq.html>

chain of being. The Renaissance philosopher-magicians worked with these energies embedded in nature in terms of Natural Magic, as well as with Angelic Invocations. In the Renaissance of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, there evolved a synthesis of Neo-Platonic philosophy with Hermetic, Cabalistic, and Alchemical traditions in the works of such writers as Marcilio Fecino, Pico della Mirandola, Reuchlin, John Dee, and culminating in the *De Occulta Philosophia* of Cornelius Agrippa. This Renaissance synthesis may have rejected Aristotelian scholasticism, but it maintained the view of a harmonious universe where all similar events were linked together by sympathies. It saw the world as a living organism.

Before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, consciousness and subjectivity did not represent the problem that they do in modernity. The position of humanity was not so problematical. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the ordered cosmos, and he created man from the clay of the earth and breathed his spirit of life into this image. Therefore, as the middle term between heaven and earth, the human being is both earthly and divine in origin. The human being possessed a three-fold constitution of body (*soma*), soul (*psyche*) and mind or spirit (*nous, pneuma*). He has his secure place in a hierarchical universe between the animals and the angels. He therefore knows his place, but also his potentiality for apotheosis, the potential for divinity and immortality, moral perfection and the realization of the human potential. Subjectivity was not yet a problem because of the correspondence of the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, nature and man. As the Hermetic maxim states it: as above, so below. What was outside was also inside. So there was a similar cosmic vision in medieval times and in the Renaissance, an organic model of the world of which the human being was an integral part.

This unity was split apart in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of modernity, which represented a veritable intellectual and spiritual revolution that rejected the irrationality of the devastating Protestant-Catholic religious wars of that century. This intellectual revolution not only rejected Aristotle and the entire medieval world-view, but also it rejected the alternative Renaissance world-view, where nature as a whole was seen as a living organism, bound together by sympathies, in which human beings were integral participants. In such a world, the light of nature also illuminated the human soul. But this Platonic-Hermetic-Cabalistic synthesis with its holistic and organic world-view was crushed by the Counter-Reformation and by the subsequent rise of modern scientism. Exhausted by the Thirty Years War and the English Civil War, the European aristocracy with the Peace of Westphalia abandoned the medieval religious basis and justification for a single universal church and a single universal empire and sought new principles for the rational ordering of human society. This rational basis was supplied by modern scientism, which rejected the organic world-view of macrocosmic-microcosmic sympathies. This Renaissance world-view was now forced underground and became the 'occult' and the 'esoteric,' the rejected shadow side of scientism. This holistic organic vision of nature and of man prevalent in the Renaissance was replaced with a world of mechanistic causality and atomic individualism. In the modern world, human beings become atomic individuals or isolated monads who can only relate to each other in an extrinsic mechanical fashion. Even when this extreme individualism was dignified with the name of democracy, it largely led to alienation, estrangement, and

the loss of community. Modern social solidarity is no longer organic, but mechanical.

Everywhere during the following centuries, the mechanistic world-view with its Newtonian universe became triumphant. Scientists such as Galileo and Isaac Newton developed the science of celestial mechanics with mathematical precision. Because this model of mechanics replaced the earlier four-fold causality of Aristotle, there remained no formal and final causes, but only mechanistic causality as the sole explanation for the phenomena of the universe, including man himself. The model of celestial mechanics, the machine or clockwork, was extended to nature and to the human being. The root metaphor for the modern scientific age of the last four centuries has been the machine. Despite the technological advances, this itself has become the problem. Neither nature nor the human being is a machine. However, mechanism and materialism did not triumph simply because of superior philosophical arguments, but because they produced technological power. This technological power was very persuasive and it has become all-pervasive in our modern urban-industrial civilization, creating an entirely artificial environment for human beings and further alienating them from nature, with wild nature being reduced to recreational theme parks.

Already in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes had come to separate the soul, mind, and consciousness from the body, regarded as something purely material and mechanical. Fascinated by the new science of anatomy, he saw the human body as a mechanical device little different than a clock, a machine made of flesh, blood, and bone. The soul or human consciousness he located in the pineal gland lodged in the brain. Therefore, there existed two independent substances or orders of reality: mind characterized by consciousness and matter characterized by extension in space. But once they were separated, there then arose the problem of accounting for their interaction — a problem, when cast in those stark dualistic terms, that remains unsolved until this day. At the birth of modern science, Descartes had sundered the old macrocosmic-microcosmic correspondence and made the existence of mind in relation to matter problematic. Consciousness, which is what we actually experience, became simply ‘the ghost in the machine.’

At first the soul was still needed in order to move and direct the physical body. Moreover God was still necessary to design, build, and wind up the clockwork of the universe, after which it could run mechanically on automatic. Indeed, the universe was seen as a machine, but God was still needed to wind it up once again when it ran down. But with the Nebular Hypothesis in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the theory of evolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even God could be eliminated as an unnecessary hypothesis. He was not needed any more to set the cosmic machinery running, as is also the case nowadays with the fashionable Big Bang theory. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the human body came to be seen as a machine made of organic materials that was not a special creation made by God, but something, according to Darwin, that had evolved over time as the product of a mechanical process known as of ‘natural selection.’ The human being, bereft of any divine purpose, was merely a chance occurrence, alone in a vast universe without meaning or purpose.



In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the movement in psychology called Behaviorism proposed to replace consciousness itself with a little black box in the brain called the stimulus and response mechanism. Human and animal behavior can be fully explained in terms of stimulus-response actions that are observable and measurable. What cannot be observed and measured does not exist. Since one cannot do this with consciousness, it therefore does not exist. Only the primary qualities of space, time, mass, and motion are measurable, whereas the secondary qualities associated with consciousness and subjectivity are not and may be dismissed as unreal or at least irrelevant. Thus, human consciousness itself became an unnecessary hypothesis. And with the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cognitive psychology would attempt to open up this mysterious little black box in the brain and explain its cognitive operations on the model of the computer and information theory.

The spirits and the angels were driven out of nature, their very existence denied and ridiculed, replaced by impersonal mechanical natural forces and given abstract mysterious names like gravitation, electricity, and so on. Consciousness had been sundered from the body, much like the traditional Christian opposition of flesh and spirit. Spirit was equated with consciousness. But the third term in the tradition triad known as soul or psyche became lost altogether in this triumphant Cartesian dualism. Mental existence maintained its precarious existence, but only the material and the natural were firmly established as real. The machine model for man and the universe became triumphant everywhere by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. This model in its hubris asserted that it could explain everything, ultimately providing a theory of everything. The celestial universe, the human being, and the wilderness of nature all became machines, the products of impersonal material natural forces.

And what of the spirits? Where have they gone in all this? Is there no place left for the ghosts in the machine? Have they all climbed back on board their UFOs and departed? No, the spirits remain with us, even in our urban-industrial environment, although they are not perceived in the same way as in pre-industrial cultures. They live among us, but are perceived as inexplicable moods, strange vibrations, and anomalies, even as neuroses. We explain them away and do not enter into dialogue with them, even though they remain in symbiosis with our psyches, both individually and collectively. And although, as modern rational people, we deny their existence, we meet them in dreams and more especially after death, for they dwell in our souls. And the spirits are now reappearing, even at times abducting us to get our attention, to give us warning of our destructive situation. Through its unbridled technology, the human race is now creating the means to destroy itself, as well as the planet. Humanity has become a cancer on the surface of the earth that is mutating and growing out of control.

The basic problem with modernity is how we perceive the world and our place in it. We have become alienated from ourselves and from nature. We need again to heed the voice of the soul and this is what we learn from the shaman and the spirits.

### *Consciousness, the Unconscious, and Subjectivity*

But where are the soul and the emotions in all this? They are inconvenient to this mechanistic model of reality and so they are banished from sight or explained

away. In general, in the modern era, the soul has been left to the medical profession and to psychopathology. At the turn of the last century the soul was rediscovered by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. However, both of them were trained in Cartesian medicine and tended to perpetuate the basic Cartesian dualism, that is to say, consciousness, 'I,' and Ego, on the one hand, as against unconscious, 'it,' and Id, on the other. They set up conscious and unconscious as two separate orders of reality; the unconscious being seen as a receptacle and container of what fell out of consciousness, or which had never become conscious. For both these doctors, healing basically represented the bringing unconscious contents into consciousness. Otherwise, repressed traumas would give rise to neuroses. But basic to this psychoanalytic way of thinking is this fundamental opposition of the conscious as against the unconscious.

With Freud, the unconscious is seen as a dark foul-smelling cesspool of animal and infantile sexual desires. He adhered to the phylogenic model: our primitive instinctual heritage set off against our rational male ego consciousness that is socialized and civilized. This repeats the old Pauline Christian struggle between the flesh (the Id) and the spirit (the Superego). In human experience, desires and impulses inexplicably emerge into consciousness from the outer darkness. Their source is unknown. Ego consciousness is like a small sunlit island surrounded by a dark turbulent ocean; this little island is in perpetual danger of being flooded, overwhelmed, and drowned. This is the danger represented by the emerging contents of the unconscious psyche. This darkness threatens to extinguish the light of consciousness and rationality. Passion threatens to overwhelm reason.

In the psychoanalytical model of Freud and Jung, the contents of the unconscious, including Jung's archetypes, are not us, but belong to a separate primitive order, although we, as rational human beings must learn to live with them, much like we do with our physical body. Thus, the Cartesian dualism is perpetuated: the self, ego consciousness, rationality, on the one hand, as against the soul, the irrational unconsciousness, and the body on the other. Here one finds a radical denial of the soul, which is felt to be dark, irrational, and feminine (both the nouns Anima and Psyche are of a feminine gender). The soul came to be relegated to the outer darkness of the unconscious. In Freud, there is a total negative evaluation of the feminine soul as against masculine ego scientific rationality. In Jung, the matter is much more complex, because he appreciated the positive feminine aspects of the unconscious, but the duality and the alienation remained.

Unlike Freud and his Id, Jung gave the unconscious a spiritual dimension and that is all to his credit. But for Jung, this unconscious remains forever unknown and unknowable. The Ego conscious cannot know the archetype of the Self or wholeness directly. For Jung, the self is the God image embedded in the individual human being. But both Freud and Jung were addicted to oppositions. Light-consciousness-ego-reason- spirit-masculinity is opposed to darkness-unconscious-instinct-emotions-femininity. Consequently, Jung warned Westerners against practicing Eastern methods of spirituality such as meditation and yoga. He believed that in practicing meditation, there exists the danger of dissolving the rational ego and individuality and, therefore, becoming overwhelmed by the contents of the unconscious.

Freud and Jung perpetuated the Cartesian dualism of the conscious ego or 'I' being inside, representing subjectivity, and the unconscious Id or 'it' being outside, representing objectivity. There was formed an almost adversarial relation between them: ego rationality as against the irrational passions. As modern human beings, we become increasingly alienated from our emotions and think that 'They are not us!' Thus, in modernity, we witness alienation from the soul as well as from the body. Thereby we reduce and diminish ourselves, denying the larger part of ourselves, relegating it to the outer darkness. We become, as human beings, lessened, diminished, and impoverished. The soul is banished to the outer darkness, along with the body and nature. Originally consciousness-spirit-soul-passion-body-nature formed a single integrated whole and now this integration, this wholeness and unity, has been sundered. And the soul has gone into exile.

However, this distinction between conscious and unconscious is artificial and contrived and is not made in Buddhist psychology. The most general name for mind in Tibetan is *sems* and animals are called *sems can*, 'having a mind.' *Sems* is not strictly identified with thinking or the thought process (tib. *blo, rnam rtog*), although it includes the latter as its context, matrix, and ground. Focused attention or consciousness is known as mind-work (tib. *ji byed*) and discursive consciousness, whether focused or unfocused, is called *rnam shes*. The operations of mind or consciousness are like the constant movements of a monkey in a tree, expansion and contraction, going from thought to thought, from object to object, movement from figure to ground and back again. Within the circle of focused consciousness (tib. *spyod yul*), everything is illuminated by the daylight of consciousness. Outside this circle there are also sensations and awareness, but they are subliminal. 'Mind' is not just the thought process and rational ego consciousness, but also involves our senses and embodiment, including our movements and spatial relations. Mind includes the awareness of being in a body in space and of our relationships with the environment apart from focused attention. It is like driving a car while thinking about something else.

Aside from focused attention, mind includes situational awareness, personal awareness, which is social, cultural, interpersonal, and historical, as well as environmental awareness. These latter three areas of awareness tend to be subliminal, unless focused awareness is drawn to them, but they are present in a diffused awareness nonetheless. Moreover, consciousness does not stop at our skins. It permeates the entire body and as well it radiates into the environmental space about us. This includes our *La* or soul, which is visible as an aura about the body. This aura is part of our dimension of energy and awareness. Our soul is not only in the body, but penetrates and intersects with the natural environment, like an energy field. And there it interacts with other energy fields in terms of resonance and dissonance. The personal soul interacts with other soul-fields in the natural environment and these fields represent living energy. Our personal ego consciousness is a very limited process and system embraced within a much larger field of consciousness. This is true, according to Tibetan shamanism as well as Buddhism, for the three dimensions of our human existence apart from the physical body, namely, vitality (tib. *srog*), soul (tib. *bla*), and mind (tib. *sems*). This space-field-process model of consciousness as embedded in both the body and its environment is rather different than our familiar modern model of atomic or monadic

individualism and the mechanical interrelations among these monads, envisioned to be like billiard balls bouncing around on the surface of a gaming table. The Buddhist and shamanic perspective represents an alternative model for consciousness. We are not an isolated monad, a lone subject lodged in the pineal gland in the brain looking out at the external world outside through our eyes and senses, but rather we are active participants in the field dynamics of our natural and artificial environments. These environments are socially and culturally constructed in terms of our active and creative participation. Our very culture, which conditions how we perceive the world, is itself an energy-field that also conditions external reality. Consciousness is not merely a passive witness to the outside world; it is an active participant in its creation.

When the human individual encounters the spirits, these field dynamics are involved. The inner and the outer are not separate spaces. Therefore, when we pollute the environment, we make ourselves sick. When we destroy the natural environment, we destroy part of ourselves, literally. When we exclusively limit our subjectivity to the focused attention of ego consciousness, we impoverish and diminish ourselves. On the other hand, we can expand our subjectivity in personal terms - we can assimilate our emotions, including our impulses, and we can assimilate our sensations and our embodied existence. It is natural for consciousness to have an embodied existence, whether material or psychic. But also in transpersonal terms, we can assimilate the energies of our natural environment. Thus, we can discover our own soul in nature.

Conventionally, we locate our mind and our consciousness in our head. And nowadays we tend to locate it in the brain. This is because the majority of our sense apparatus is located in the head. But in ancient and medieval times, people located the center of their being in the heart. However, nowadays in our hospitals we transplant hearts and so the heart is no longer felt to be the center of our human existence. Nevertheless, consciousness actually diffuses throughout the body. In the traditional Buddhist perspective, this is represented by the network of subtle psychic channels and vital winds that move through the channels. These winds or currents of psychic energy acts as supports or vehicles for consciousness, like a rider mounted on a horse. Thus, consciousness is not just located in the electrochemical activity of the brain or in the pineal gland as Descartes thought. By means of the mind and visualization, one can channel psychic energy to different parts of the body. There may also exist blocks to the flow of these energies, linked to traumas, repressed emotions, and so on. Consciousness is not limited to our body and strictly enclosed within our skin. It extends throughout our personal energy field and aura. Therefore, our feelings and emotions also interpenetrate and effect our natural environment. They can directly affect the plant and animal life about us. Even though plants do not have the nervous system to support focused consciousness, they do indeed possess life-force or vitality (tib. *snog*).

Emotions are primary for the soul. Human existence is not just intellection and abstract reason alone. The emotions are fundamental to human existence and usually dominate our consciousness, rather than abstract thinking. As energy, our emotions directly effect our natural environment. In the West our culture has become obsessed with the false image of a rational, purely objective observer consciousness, coolly observing phenomena in a detached and scientific manner without in-

fluencing what we observe. Although emotions define our human existence, they have been down-graded in Western rationalism and felt to be alien to the rational ego consciousness. They are felt to come from outside. But emotions are crucial to our human existence and help mould our reality field and not just our perceptions of reality.

We can experience our consciousness entering into the natural environment in the experiences of lucid dreaming, out-of-the-body experience, near-death experience, astral projection, shamanic journeying, the Bardo experience, and so on. But before our physical death, we are still tied to our body and our waking state reality, and so we return to it. But at death, our consciousness is cut loose from the body. The body and the mind separate and consciousness enter the other world of the spirits. Also in the case of soul loss according to the shamanic view, the soul-fragments become detached from the whole and become lost in the other world that embraces the natural environment.

If this is so, where is this other world of the spirits? This other world is the collective psychic dimension that extends into our natural environment. From the perspective of the spirits, the other world does not look the same as does the natural environment to our normal eye sight in the waking state of consciousness. Rather, it is a symbolic dream-like landscape filled with semi-visible presences. In one sense, entering this other world, we are traveling through the interior landscape of the mind, the collective unconscious psyche, but in another sense, we are journeying outside of ourselves in an external other world of the spirits. It is in this dimension that we encounter the nature spirits face to face. But this dimension is also part of our subliminal consciousness, where outer and inner spaces are no longer separated, but merge for a time. This world is familiar to the shaman, but it is an alien landscape to the modern rational ego consciousness. This consciousness does not know what to make of such a landscape filled with presence and meaning. However, because the shaman is familiar with it, he can act as a guide for the deceased soul on its perilous journey after death.

How is this possible? It is because our psyche-mind-consciousness is not limited to our brain or to a little black box in our heads. Consciousness resides in space and its nature, according to the Dzogchen teachings of Tibet, is space and energy. When the human being dies, one severs the connection with the brain and the nervous system, which has served as a physical support and medium for its manifestation, even though this does not occur all at once. Nevertheless, one's stream of consciousness continues in space itself. According to the Dzogchen teachings, space and awareness are inseparable. Although one can logically distinguish them for purposes of human discourse, they are inseparable and always occur together as two sides of the same reality, like the two sides of a coin. This vast space, which is the Nature of Mind, is awareness itself. Therefore, the consciousness of the individual is not exclusively located in the brain and neural pathways. It penetrates the entire physical body. But more than that, it subsists in space, both internal space and external space. Break a clay jar upon the earth and the internal space and the external space become one. There is the same experience after death when the physical body is broken. Moreover, one may experience this directly in meditation practice.

Even without a physical body, consciousness and energy persist in space as a unit. Consciousness abhors a formless bodiless existence with no boundaries and dimensions. Thus, after death, memories reconstitute a psychic body to embody consciousness in the Bardo. But even during our lifetime, the total field of consciousness of the individual is not limited to the brain, or even to the body, but extends outward into the natural environment. The unconscious is not located in the brain, even the primitive reptilian part of the brain, but out there in wild nature. Traditional cosmology is actually a map of the psyche, not just the personal psyche, but the collective psyche. The shaman, when soul journeying, leaves his physical body and his normal waking state ego consciousness, in order to enter into and explore the landscapes of the mind, both the inner and the outer spaces because, in his altered state of consciousness, they are no longer separate. From this journey he returns with treasures of knowledge and power. We can gain the same access through dreams and through the Bardo. In these other dimensions we can meet others who can act as teachers, guides, helpers, and friends, or who can be adversaries. But these others are not just projections of our own limited ego consciousness.

Our concept of our so-called objective reality in modern times is just too limited a model. As modern people, we live in the very small and constricted space of rational ego consciousness, hemmed in and perpetually threatened with darkness and death on all sides. And this is because we have forgotten in ourselves our own transpersonal spiritual dimensions. It is our vision and our sensibilities that need to be expanded to encompass a wider, more profound reality. We may peer with telescopes to the limits of the known universe, beyond the galaxies and quasars to the time of creation, or to the minutest sub-atomic particles with our accelerators, only to discover our own face in the mirror of space looking back at us.

### *Conclusion — Wilderness and Civilization: Dialogue with Nature*

What will happen in the future, both near and far? There is no simple answer to this question and there are multiple scenarios. The human race with its overpopulation, industrialization, increasing pollution, artificial environments, and so on, has become like a cancer on the surface of the planet earth. This cancer must be cured or the organism, the planet earth itself, will die. The earth is a living organism and not a machine. It is our attitudes toward nature and toward ourselves that first need to change. Otherwise, perhaps the immune system of the earth will kick in to fight and eliminate this cancer with

1. increasing natural disasters, super storms, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes moving continents, and so on,
2. world-wide plagues from new infectious diseases, mutations that are resistant to antibiotics, and so on, and
3. an increasing collective madness, due to over-population, where the human race decimates and nearly destroys itself.

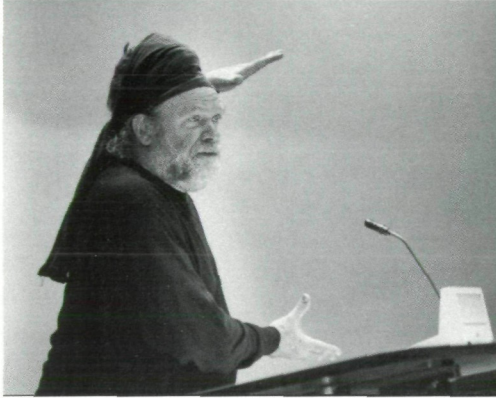
What can be done? Certainly not a neo-Luddite rejection of science and technology. Nor can there be a return to the organic society of the Middle Ages. These medieval organic societies were based on the then predominating world religions

such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism — but this is no longer an option because of globalization and multiculturalism. Therefore, new cultural and spiritual paradigms are needed to counteract the dangers of fascism, religious fundamentalism, and sentimentalization of the past. Any scenario or paradigm for the future will need to include science and technology. We now live in a science fiction world; the old world of villages and tribal societies is forever gone, barring the total collapse of world civilization. There is now no society, no culture, no community that is not touched by the globalization of modernity in all its aspects: economic, social, political, cultural, and technological. There remain no caves into which one can retreat from the modern world.

But the solution is not simply a matter of applying more technology to solve our problems. This in itself actually represents the Modern Agenda — the belief that we can apply technology in a rational manner in order to create a just and perfect world. But the Modern Agenda, this manipulative and mechanistic approach to the world, is one of the principal causes of our present predicament, namely, the destruction of our natural environment. This is like taking poison to alleviate the effects of poison. Something more is required; not just more technology. What is required is a looking inward at ourselves and a change in our attitudes toward wild nature and how we perceive the world. The external world is not just something that is 'given' out there, being presented to human consciousness as a neutral observer. Rather, human consciousness is a participant in the creation of this external world. Recognizing this, we need to enter into a dialogue with nature and not just try to manipulate it from the outside. We are part of nature; we are not above and beyond nature. We are embedded in it. It is a part of our soul. We discover ourselves in nature and nature in ourselves. If we take only our rational ego consciousness, this monad, to be our true self in isolation, we lose our sense of community among our fellow humans, but also with other life forms and with nature itself. In our extreme individualism and alienation, we would only know external mechanistic relations and lose our sense of being part of something larger, a whole, the living organism that is the earth.

Tibet was the last of the ancient and medieval civilizations to fall before the onslaught of modern civilization. But Tibet was never a static society nor merely a museum of lost cultures. What can we in the modern world learn from Tibet? From Tibetan shamanism and Buddhism, as well as from other traditional cultures, we can learn about the existence of the nature spirits and a personal relationship with our natural environment. This personal relationship and dialogue stands against relating to nature in merely impersonal mechanistic terms. Wild nature is a community of living organisms with which we can have a personal relationship. We can enter into communication and dialogue with wild nature by way of the nature spirits and thereby discover and draw upon the wisdom of nature. This was how women originally, at the beginning of the Neolithic period, discovered horticulture and herbal medicine. It is possible, indeed necessary, to live in a more cooperative and harmonious way with our natural environment. Traditional shamanism, such as that still found among the Tibetans, can teach us how to recover our psychic and spiritual dimension and how to access directly the rich store of nature's wisdom, the jewels guarded by the nature spirits in the wilderness.

John Myrdhin Reynolds  
Vidyadhara Institute for Comparative Studies in Religion and Philosophy  
c/o Reinhold Jacob  
Gartenstraße 3  
D – 44267 Dortmund  
vajranatha@botmail.com



JOHN MYRDHIN REYNOLDS studied Anthropology and Comparative Religion at Columbia University, NYC, Sanskrit at UC Berkeley, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at University of Washington, Seattle. He lived for more than ten years in India and Nepal, engaging in field work and research into the teachings and practices of both Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism. This included a two-year residence at Shanti Ashram in AP, South India, and another two years at Santiniketan in West Bengal. He focused on research into the texts and the practices of the Nyingmapa and the Kagyudpa Schools of Tibetan Buddhism, first in Darjeeling, India, and later in Kathmandu, Nepal. He was trained and ordained as a Ngakpa Lama in the Nyingmapa tradition by HH Dudjom Rinpoche, then Head of the Nyingmapa School. In Nepal he began his research into Tibetan Shamanism. More recently, he has been engaged in extensive research into Bon, the pre-Buddhist religious culture of Tibet. Since returning to the West, he has taught widely in Europe and the United States and his published translations from the Tibetan include many important works on Dzogchen, both Buddhist and Bonpo. Now living in Germany and Denmark, his Vidyadhara Project is engaged in a comparative study of Tibetan Buddhism and Shamanism with various Western philosophical and spiritual traditions to see what the wisdom of Tibet might contribute to the philosophical and spiritual crisis of the modern world.



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Jahr/Year: 2004

Band/Volume: [MNG2](#)

Autor(en)/Author(s): Reynolds John Myrdhin

Artikel/Article: [The Soul, Nature Spirits, and Developing a Personal Relationship with Nature and the Natural Environment in the Light of Tibetan Shamanism. Seele und Naturgeister: Das Entwickeln einer persönlichen Beziehung zur Natur und Umwelt im Licht des tibetischen Schamanismus. 57-80](#)