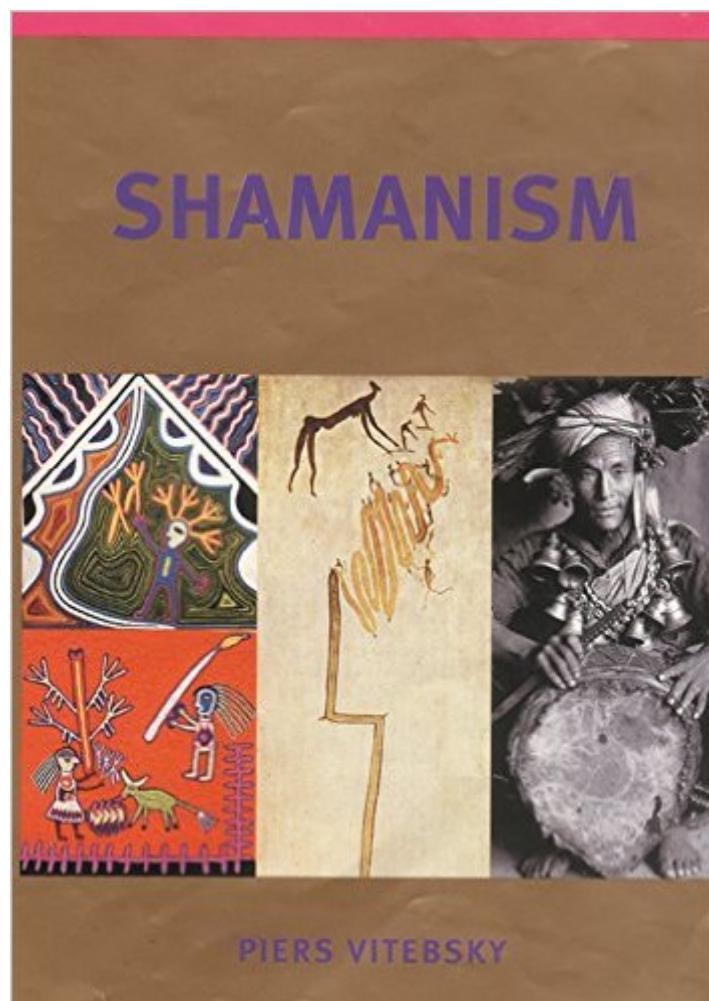


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Shamanism



Synopsis

The shaman occupies a key role as a healer mediating between the world of the living and the world of spirits and is a potent figure in alternative medicine. Shamanism, a richly illustrated guide, looks at both historic and present-day manifestations, from the snowscaps of Siberia to the jungles of the Amazon. The book discusses visions, initiation rites, shamanic chants, shamanism and mental health, the shamanic use of plants, and the political and social background to the shaman's work. Also covered are the links between the shaman's sense of unity in nature and the recent growth of ecological consciousness in Western societies.* Includes more than 250 color illustrations that present a unique pictorial record of shamanism in practice and as represented in art and artifacts.* Includes a detailed region-by-region survey of shamanism with full-color maps* Explores both spiritual and psychological aspects of the subject, as well as the relevance of shamanism to contemporary Western culture

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anthropologist Piers Vitebsky, Head of Anthropology and Russian Northern Studies at the Scott Polar Research Institute, has been doing fieldwork among shamanic cultures since 1975. His researches range from Siberia to India to Sri Lanka and beyond. In this book he has provided a clear, non-technical introduction to a badly misunderstood field. Included: bibliographic information (including citations of his own studies) and a glossary. The book begins with a discussion of shamanism and its worldview, moves on to regional traditions, talks about shamanism from the

shaman's viewpoint, and ends with a brief discussion of the new shamanic "movements" (fads). As with "Far Eastern wisdom" reinterpreted and sold by people educated in the West, shamanism has been the target of intense cultural appropriation. A worldwide esoteric spiritual tradition has been diluted into self-help, with guided imagery exercises sold as "shamanic journeying." As Vitebsky notes, "Many forms of neo-shamanism use elements from North American native religions which I have characterized in this book as not strictly shamanic. In addition...native organizations have started to criticize some of these systems for cultural imperialism or intellectual piracy." It would seem to be a characteristic of the empire psychology so many of us share but do not see that we feel entitled to uproot practices and traditions that grew up in very different societies instead of exploring our own. A strength of this book is its presentation of shamanism as actually studied in its indigenous contexts. This frees it of the choking layer of common mischaracterizations (e.g., shamanism as dark night of the soul, self-improvement method, or spiritual path for people taking drumming lessons).

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