

Hiram a-lam-a Shaman. Hold the Abif.

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Introduction

Freemasonry is probably the last place we might look for elements of Shamanism. Though it certainly *isn't* Shamanism, it has some surprising Shamanic elements woven into the fabric of its tradition. Tracing the fraternity back through the years, we can discern a few potential links to Shamanism and we *do* see elements of Shamanic practice in modern lodges. A quick overview of the Shamanic thread in modern Freemasonry:

The Mason bone connected to the Rosicrucian bone
The Rosicrucian bone connected to the Hermetic bone
The Hermetic bone connected to the Egyptian bone
The Egyptian bone connected to the Shaman bone
Come hear the word of Amen Ra

Leitch and Churton Play Ping Pong

Aaron Leitch (2005) **ping** posits that Goetia may have originated in Africa and cites links between Santeria and Middle Eastern culture. He notes that distinctly Shamanic material made its way into Egyptian religious observance via their Book of the Dead. However, it became stylized to the point that it was believed going through the motions, like Greek actors reciting a play, was enough to cause the wanted results (Leitch, 2005) **ping**.

Even with this sterilization of the source material, Churton (2002) **pong** points out the deep reverence medieval Hermetic tradition had for the magical and spiritual practices of Egypt. He also highlights links between the Sabians, a distinctly Hermetic sect in the Islamic world, and the Picatrix, the great granddaddy of the magical grimoires (Churton, 2002) **pong**.

Leitch (2004) **ping** goes a bit further and shows that many Hermetic/Goetic/Alchemical systems follow a process that breaks down, dissolves, purifies, and reassembles the magician. He notes the striking similarity between this process and the spiritual dismemberment and reassembly of the new Shaman (Elaide, 1974). ** game and match **

Interestingly, both Case (1985) and Churton (2002) held that Freemasonry was heavily influenced by, if not a direct descendent of, Rosicrucianism. The Rosicrucianism of the seventeenth century was clearly Hermetic and, as we've seen, the Hermetic links go all the way back to Shamanism. I do need to back up the truck a bit and point out that most modern Freemasons hold there is no link to the Rosicrucians, Hermeticists, or any other kind of esoteric Thingamajiggery. They hold that, by gumbo, the teachings come from the ancient moral symbolism taught by old Mason's guilds.

Thread Commons

Shamanism and Freemasonry have some surprising characteristics in common. Elaide (1974) highlights Shamanic symbols such as the World Tree and World Pillars. This symbolism clearly exists in traditions we generally don't consider Shamanic. The World Tree found a home in Hebrew Qabala. Masonry *is* influenced by the Qabala, but doesn't have a World Tree that needs ascending. What is telling is the masonic use stairs as an allegory. The Pillars of the Qabala most certainly found their way into masonic symbolism. They emphasize two of the pillars. And two out of three ain't bad.

Shamanism traditionally holds to a threefold division of the world (Elaide, 1974). Masonry has no three-fold division of the universe; however the number three does play an integral part in its symbolism and organization. This can be traced to Hermetic and Qabalistic thought. And we already know where that leads.

Elaide (1974) also provides evidence that Shamanism was a psychotherapeutic occupation that helped psychologically and physiologically challenged individuals find a constructive place in tribal society. In contrast, Masonry is a relatively safe refuge from the neurosis of society. In fact, it seems that the Shamans of today also see their craft as a safe harbor from the madness of society instead of a channel for their own personal demons. The fact that modern society isn't above stoning, burning, or hanging (metaphorically or literally) probably has something to do with their change in approach. In the end, each path helps the initiate to heal themselves and, by extension, the society in which they operate.

There are distinct differences in how a seeker becomes a Shaman or Freemason. A Shaman is called; a prospective Mason joins the fraternity. In fact, a Mason has to ask. He can't be "called." Both types of candidate do undergo initiatory trials, though the Shaman's are significantly more

rigorous and dangerous. Masons rarely face the possibility of death as a result of their chosen path. Yet, acknowledging physical death is a part of Masonry.

The Shamanic process of death and rebirth survives in Masonic ritual. Spirits took Shamans of old, dismembered, and then reassembled them in a way that conferred superhuman powers. When they returned from this ordeal, their task was to help the tribe. Masonic initiates in the third degree ritually die and are reborn. Brothers of that fraternity are also tasked with making themselves and their world a better place. It's not a new story. Isis, Osiris, and Horus lived it. Christ and his Mother. Mithras. Odin. They all travelled beyond, came back, and attempted to make humanity better for the experience.

Sensory deprivation also exists in Masonry. It isn't anywhere *near* the level of isolation a Shaman endures, but the hoodwink is a mainstay of Masonic ritual and serves much the same purpose, even if Masonic ritual gives a different reason for its presence.

In Shamanism there is the art of ecstasy. It includes activities like singing, dancing, and pretty much anything that can over stimulate the practitioner into an altered state of consciousness (Leitch, 2004). There ain't nothin' remotely ecstatic about Masonic ritual, unless some geezer has a heart palpitation during lodge. Palpitations aside, this lack of outward demonstration hides a subtlety and power that impacts each participant, whether they are aware of it or not.

Masons everywhere, except in France and the occasional South American Grand Lodge, insist on belief in deity. Shamanism utilizes spirits and gods. In fact, the Shaman learned quite a few things from spirits that couldn't be taught by normal means. Leitch's (2004) observations on the Shaman's work with a sky god are quite interesting when we consider the general slant of Masonic belief and its predominantly Judaeo-Christian orientation. Masons are encouraged to develop their relationships with religion and deity and, like their Shamanic counterparts, look to the god(s) of the sky for relief, instruction, and transcendence.

The Results Are In

The prohibition against favoring one religion over another allows Masons to bring all manner of deity into the lodge. More telling is the way they sometimes bring that prohibition into their everyday lives and quietly communicate tolerance while sidestepping the divisive issues of class, religion and politics. This fits rather nicely with the Shaman's place *in* society but *outside* the norm.

This liminality has a positive side. Churton (2002) states that wherever Hermeticism flourished a more tolerant and forward thinking state of affairs also existed. In a Masonic lodge, tolerance flourishes because the main causes of strife and hatred between humans are removed (religion and politics). We can also imagine tolerance flourishing around a tribal Shaman... I mean, it probably took more than an open mind to put up with that crazy prancing dude in the feathery bird suit. This "tolerance teaching" also extends to modern Shamans. Because the modern Shaman pushes the boundaries of what is acceptable and real, they can and do stretch the boundaries of anyone they come in contact with, whether this is intended or not.

As modern Shamans redefine their reality in magical terms and transform it, so too do Freemasons seek to redefine themselves and their place in society. As each practitioner chips away at the task of finding their true self, they bring themselves closer to that pie in the sky ultimate person. This transformation touches the individual *and* the society in which they operate. And this is a good thing.

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