

ANCIENT WAYS: This shaman is wearing a mirror around her neck to protect her from bad vibes

Spirit in the sky

In part two of her travel tales, photographer and film maker *Ghislaine Heger* recounts her experience of witnessing a shamanic ceremony in Siberia

It was my half-Vietnamese grandmother who taught me about animism; she believed everything has a spirit, which is an idea shared by shamans. I'd always felt some sort of connection to nature and Spirit, and, one evening, a few years back, I received a strong message from my own guide that showed me the connection between my sensitivity and previous experiences, and how this related to the shamans in Asia.

At first, I did not know what to make of the information but, as I'd studied cinema and film making, it suddenly made sense to make a documentary about the shamans. I had no idea what I was going to find but, after some months of planning, I travelled to Nepal, where many signs led me from one thing to another, and to channelling the the title for my film, *The Calling of the Drums*, from my guides.



PREPARATION: The beginning of one of the shamanic ceremonies



BEAT IT: Drums are a large part of the ceremony



TOOLS OF THE TRADE: The wands to extract any bad energy



TREE TALK: It's a spiritual tradition in Siberia to tie pieces of tissue around trees and make wishes. Nowadays, unfortunately, sometimes use plastic instead of tissue



THE JOURNEY
BEGINS: A shaman
starts drumming to
get into trance



INCOMING: It takes a few minutes for the spirit
to come into the shaman's body



POSSESSED! The shaman is taken over by the spirit



MAKING CONTACT: The assistant is
the only one who's allowed to talk to
the spirit, and must bow while talking

However, it was in August 2010 that my journey really got under way, when I attended a shamanic symposium in Arshan, Siberia, close to Lake Baikal. There, a group of anthropologists, artists and shamans all met for a ceremony, led by shamans of the Tengeri lineage, who were surrounded by villagers. Despite the festive atmosphere, the tension was palpable – spirits are not to be messed with. The shamans' task is to protect the whole region, and the villagers expect a lot from them. When we arrived in the location, four shamans performed a short ceremony to welcome and protect us by calling on the local spirits; it lasted about 15 minutes and involved a drum and bottle of milk, the latter of which is used both in Siberia and Mongolia to purify everything in, and around, the area.

It was there that I met India, a young British shaman who explained how the spirits were coming in and out while the shamans were possessed. It took the whole day, and

many trances, for all of them to ask for protection and deliver messages to all the visiting villagers. They used drums to get into an altered state of consciousness, and lambs were also sacrificed to feed the spirits' appetites.

Milk and vodka were also used in the ceremonies as a way of purifying what left the Earth to return to the spiritual world. The ceremony ended with the burning of a tree – the smoke a symbolic representation of physical form returning to Spirit, as it rises to the heavens and is also said to help the shamans see the invisible dimensions.

Personal journeying

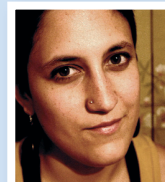
A few months later, I met India again in London and she taught me how to do a shamanic journey on myself. I lay down on a bed and she put headphones on me to listen to drumming sounds recorded on a CD. She told me how to leave the Earthly world and go either to the upper or lower realms, where I

would meet my guide in animal or human form, leading me to answer my own question. I was amazed to see how easy it was. Messages come in a symbolic way, much like in dreams. They reveal who and what we are, and what we should be looking at and listening to. What matters when carrying out a shamanic journey is to have a clear intention while asking a question. I have always received signs and am very aware when it happens but, with journeying, it is slightly different as you actually have some control over the messages. What also struck me was the the feeling of gratitude and happiness afterwards, and a sense of accessing my consciousness, getting to the centre of the universe, and realising there is no difference between me and anything else – we're all one.

TREE TALK: The last part of the ceremony
consisted of blessing and burning the tree



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Ghislaine next travelled to meet the shamans in Mongolia. Don't miss her spectacular images of the snow-covered mountains in our next issue!