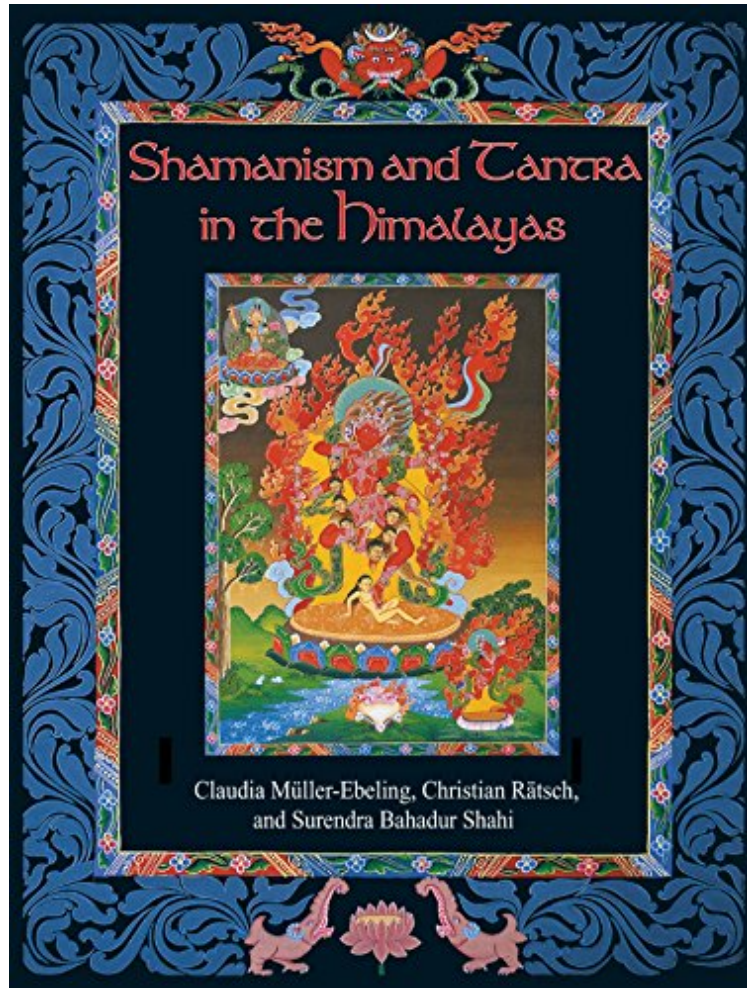


Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas

Surendra Bahadur Shahi, Christian Rtsch, Claudia Mller-Ebeling
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Surendra Bahadur Shahi, Christian Rtsch, Claudia Mller-Ebeling : Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. VISUALLY STUNNING TRIBUTE TO SHAMANISM AND TANTRA !!!! (WITH ALTITUDE !!!)By jormaA quite visually stunning volume, exploring and defining shamanism and Tantra in Tibet. This is a collaborative effort between three authors, and each contributes to their area of expertise. This was a very in depth and enjoyable read, and while I felt it was more devoted to Shamanism than Tantra, the volume covers both admirably well.The photography and the Plates run away with the show here. Rich, sublime landscape shots of Tibet, Thangpas, and Mandalas with their exquisite detail and color are breathtaking to say the least!!!! HIGHLY (WITH ALTITUDE !!!) RECOMMENDED !!!!40 of 40 people found the following review

helpful. More Shamanic than Tantric
By James S. Taylor
The purpose of this work is to explore the worlds of Shamanism and Tantra, specifically in Nepal, not all over the Himalayas, as the title would suggest. The authors divide the subject up into just over 30 major themes and then exposit to varying depths on the particular facets. Each chapter is a mixture of their personal experiences, the reports of their Shaman friends, relevant side-bar quotations from a wide range of sources, and full color photography from beginning to end. Over all, it has some very clear strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, the pages are dripping with stunning photography. Rich color reproduction shows off the details of the Shamanic world, Nepal, and over 50 gorgeous paintings of the relevant deities. These paintings are given their own descriptive addendum to insure they are properly appreciated. The majority of what is discussed in the text is pictured somewhere nearby, so if anything is unclear there is immediate visual help at hand. The text itself is clear, engaging, and stock full of details, many of which appear to have been overlooked by other authors writing both on the Himalayan region itself and on Shamanism in general. This wealth of information is because the authors were not satisfied with being arm-chair anthropologists, but spent over a decade among the Nepalese Shamans, becoming their friends, gaining their trust, and being allowed into their world. They are very sympathetic to this view of reality and write about it with passion, so it's rarely boring. On the other hand, there are some problems. First, despite the size and the comments in the other review, don't be misled into thinking this is encyclopedic. It isn't, and the authors clearly say so themselves. Their major focus is on making available data that is not found in most run of the mill books on Shamanism in this region. The general picture is there, but the details focus on trying to shed light where there has been little before. For this reason, it probably isn't the first book on Shamanism you would want to read. Second, if it's the Tantra angle that interests you, there is very little on it. There is so little, in fact, that there is really only one sustained discussion on it, which is only part of one chapter. The other information is scattered throughout the rest of the book's discussion on Shamanism. Again, this isn't the first book on Tantra you would want to read, but if you know enough about Tantra to connect the dots yourself it provides some really interesting links and suggestions regarding how the two worldviews relate, both doctrinally, artistically, and historically. On the picky side, the text suffers various lapses that will annoy people to different levels. Those involved with religious studies will be progressively irritated with the naive philosophy of religion that the authors display. Despite the book being a monument to the fact that Shamanism functions as a religion, they insist it isn't. They also claim it involves no faith, again in the face of many things presented in the work that must be accepted by faith. In fact, a number of the statements of the Shamans in here are factually inaccurate, yet nothing, no matter how far out, is ever questioned in the slightest, nor is the epistemological problem this casts on the information they gain from their trips, whether on hallucinogens or not, ever discussed. Social and psychological aspects that effect the Shamanic interpretations and the authors' research methodology are dismissed, if not completely ignored. If things like that don't bother you, the sloppy inconsistency on points might. For example, on the exact same page (186) they proclaim that destructive energies can be both destroyed and not destroyed. How about their claim on page 13 that "shamanism only exists in specific areas of Asia" today, which is contradicted by their displayed knowledge of it in the Americas elsewhere in the book? These should not be confused with the numerous contradictions between the various Shamanic schools that are presented, which are given for completeness. Finally, and this would not be worth mentioning if it didn't come up so many times in a book repeatedly promoting love, harmony and understanding: at least one of the authors is anti-Christian to the point of unreasonable bigotry. It ranges from statements of factual error (such as Christianity not being an historically oriented religion) to slander (such as the long disproved accusation that Wycliffe translation teams are covert CIA operatives, for which the authors can only provide a specious debunked source over 20 years old). All that aside, I bought it, read it, and it has a secure place in my library as a resource I can see returning to many times in the future. It's pricey, but it's worth it. It's the only book I've ever had where I constantly caught people stopped in their tracks looking at the pictures over my shoulder and interrupting my reading to find out what it was.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Easily the best coffee table book I have ever bought
By James
Easily the best coffee table book I have ever bought. The artwork contained is reason enough to buy this book but there is so much more than that. Highly recommended.

The first comprehensive guide to the shamans and tantrikas of Nepal 605 color and black-and-white illustrations, including 135 color thangkhas. Includes more than 20 psychoactives never before documented. The result of 18 years of field research. The Himalayan kingdom of Nepal may be the only culture in the world where both shamanic and tantric techniques are still alive and in full practice today. The result of eighteen years of field research, Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas presents for the first time a comprehensive overview of shamanism that is based on the knowledge and experience of the different tribes from that region. Included are original statements from the various ethnic groups and 135 color thangkhas, which act as visual guides to the specific practices of the tantric tradition. In addition to the thangkhas, the book is lavishly illustrated with numerous photos of different shamanic healing ceremonies, ritual objects, and culturally significant plants that have never been published before. The book also contains a wealth of original recipes, smoking mixtures, scientific tables, charts, and descriptions of more than 20 plants whose psychoactive properties and uses by shamans have never before been researched or documented.

"Shamanic and yogic traditions of the Indian subcontinent are closely linked together in many ways. Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas carefully examines the shamanic teachings of the region, along with their Hindu and Buddhist background. The book is well researched and well referenced, not merely from an academic perspective but in light of the living tradition. Anyone interested in yoga or shamanism will find a wealth of information in this fascinating book." (David Frawley, author of *Yoga for Your Type* and founder of the American Institute of Vedic Studies)"An exhaustive, comprehensive, no-nonsense 300 page volume--complete with photographs of shamans in action." (Lolita Lark, RALPH, January 2003)"Beautifully illustrated, very well written, and deeply insightful." (J.J. Preston, CHOICE, November 2003, Vol.41 No.3)"Readers are sure to get an introduction to both ancient and modern practices that are often invisible to Western eyes." (The Institute of Noetic Sciences, December-February 2004)"This book is big, broad, bold, and very very beautiful, literally and metaphorically, my favorite and most functional book." (John Yost, Pan Gaia, Spring 2003)"Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas provides well-documented research and insight regarding the contribution of pre-Buddhist cultures to our current understanding of Tantrism and Vajrayana. The depth of detailed knowledge regarding the symbolism, rituals, and the indigenous wisdom of the Nepali shamans can be attributed to the authors combined expertise in the fields of anthropology, ethnobotany, art history, and ethnography. A visionary masterpiece!" (Alex Grey, artist and author of *Sacred Mirrors and Transfigurations*)

About the Author
Claudia Mller-Ebeling, Ph.D., is an art historian and anthropologist. She is also the coauthor of *Hexenmedizin (Witch's Medicine)* and was editor-in-chief of *Dao*, a magazine about the Far East. She lives in Hamburg, Germany. Christian Rtsch, Ph.D., is a world-renowned anthropologist and ethnopharmacologist who specializes in the shamanic uses of plants (for spiritual as well as medicinal purposes). He is also the author of *Marijuana Medicine* and coauthor of the revised edition of *Plants of the Gods*. He lives in Hamburg, Germany. Surendra Bahadur Shahi was born in Kathmandu into a Newari family of the Shahi caste and is an accomplished thangka painter. He speaks 10 different languages and has a thorough knowledge of the Buddhist and Hindu religion and mythology and the cultural customs of the Newari people.

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The Way of the Shamans "The way of the shamans is the way of love." Despite all of their ethnic differences, Parvati Rai, Mohan Rai, Maile Lama, and Indra Gurung are united in this belief. As healers, they act in accordance with the ideal of transforming hate into love, jealousy into generosity, and ignorance into humility. With these three fundamental evils, which manifest as gnawing diseases, the shamans' magic number of three is encountered once again. Keep in mind that these three steps of diagnosis, therapy, and cure are merely an idealized progression. Because it is so easy to say (or write) but so difficult to fulfill, the shamans shall never become jobless and they must work for their lifetime on their own selves. They are only human. Jhankris become sick just like everyone else. They have burdens like we do, and fall as happily and as easily into their own traps. When they are in a trance, however, they are connected to a source of power which is only available in extreme situations in normal life. "When I cross the street I am afraid that I might be run over. But if I had fear of the dangers lurking in wait for me, I could not go into a trance," said Maile Lama with a laugh. The mission of bringing love, harmony, and peace to the hearts of patients who have been made sick by the gnawing poisons of hate, jealousy, and ignorance (regardless of whether it was generated in the breeding ground of the patient's own personality, or through poisoning by other people) cannot be fulfilled by someone who wears rose colored glasses. This assignment is no easy task. It requires the critical examination of uncomfortable truths, and necessitates encounters with dangerous adversaries. Many Jhankris are not capable of rising to the task. They escape into alcoholism or become "chicken shamans," or "professionals" in order to make their lives easier and to earn more money. A person who bluffs his way through as a "chicken shaman"--using sensational fire-eating displays, fantastical costumes, unnecessary animal sacrifices, and huge tom-toms--is not a Jhankri. Neither is the person who opens a practice with fixed office hours and a regular income. Again and again we heard from the Jhankris, who can swiftly see behind the faade of their false colleagues, "Chicken shamans and 'professionals' are not shamans." This may seem odd to us. As members of western consumer societies, we might ask ourselves: why shouldn't a Jhankri make a profitable business from his abilities? Why shouldn't he or she open a regular practice like a doctor and earn money from it? The stunningly simple answer to our questions was, "Because we Jhankris are not permitted to advertise ourselves. We are only dhamsi Jhankris because others are healed by us, and not because we say that we can heal them." Only the person who can heal is a Jhankri. Every Jhankri is a dhamsi, a healer, but not every dhamsi is a Jhankri, because only a Jhankri falls into trance; a dhamsi, on the other hand, is not able to do so. No one in the Himalayas becomes a Jhankri because they choose it as their profession. One is called upon to become a Jhankri. Many go out of their way to avoid the calling because it will mean a difficult life of deprivation. Shamans are just ordinary humans. They are farmers, craftsmen, mothers, housewives, factory workers. And in addition to this, they shamanize when someone comes to them who needs their help. Many patients leave nothing behind for them other than a few words of thanks. Others bring a small bag of rice or leave behind 10 to 15 Rupees. Whenever we saw "our" Jhankris on the street, we always asked ourselves whether or not anybody realized that the plain woman wearing a traditional cotton sari and flip-flops, or the man with athletic pants, a shirt, and a baseball cap, was actually a powerful healer who battled demons at night and took on the nature and mannerisms of animal spirits. Just as the forces of nature rage, so too do the Jhankris often rage in their chintas (healing ceremonies). They call authoritatively for their helping spirits

and then they send them away again when the trance is deep enough. The encounters with the forces beyond are reflected in their sweat-covered faces. They laugh or roll their eyes, roar or call out. No matter how deep the trance and how terrible the encounter is, no matter how ecstatically they convulse or spin in front of their altar, the Jhankris are always in the position to direct their journey through the three worlds and to control the trance. Often the diagnoses that they make while in the trance, bring back to the realm of normal consciousness, and announce to the patients are ruthless. We heard things such as, "There are hypocrites in your environment," or, " I have seen that you have often lied to your family." There is no trace of "gentle healing." The Jhankris take what their patients have carefully buried away, or repressed into their sub-consciousness, and lay it out on the table. At the same time, only what concerns the patient's current life is relevant to the diagnosis. For the person who has had a difficult childhood but is leading an overall happy life as an adult, the fears and anxieties do not resurface.