**Spotlight on Spiritualism, Spiritism, Shamanism, and Animism**

by Daryl E. Witmer

**What is Spiritualism?**
Spiritualism is a set of beliefs and practices that promotes communication with the spirits of deceased individuals through mediums and psychic exercises such as séances, telepathy, and trances. Terms often associated with Spiritualism include: clairvoyance (visual), clairaudience (audio), levitation, divination, materialization, spirit healing, and necromancy.

Spiritualists often use devices such as tarot cards, crystal balls, or Ouija boards as a means of contacting the dead. Often grieving people who are lonely for contact with a deceased loved one are drawn to Spiritualism.

**How is Spiritism different?**
While both share many beliefs and practices, Spiritism is less of an organized religious body than Spiritualism. Spiritualists hold services that can at times resemble Christian worship services. Spiritists, on the other hand, do not have priests or ministers and do not follow specific rituals in their meetings, which are held in centers and referred to as societies or associations, not churches.

Spiritism teaches reincarnation and Spiritualism does not. Spiritists believe that reincarnation provides the path to a person’s moral and intellectual perfection in successive lives, and therefore does not accept the idea of rebirth as an animal, as that would be considered retrogressive.

Interest in Spiritualism and Spiritism may have peaked in America by the mid-1900s, but up to 70 million people worldwide still incorporate aspects of either or both in their religious views and practices, to one extent or another. Brazil is one continuing stronghold.

**What is Shamanism?**
Shamanism is variously defined as a belief system, an ancient healing tradition, and a lifestyle. Shamanism is based on the belief in guardian spirits who often assume animal form and who are able to heal those not able to be helped by licensed physicians or traditional medicine, who are able to empower those who turn to them, and able to guide those who have died on their continued journeys after death.

Ecstatic practices are often associated with shamanistic belief and might involve certain noisemaking objects (e.g. drums, rattles, gongs, roosters) intended to drive away evil spirits. Shamanism has long been associated with ancient African or Latin American witch doctors, but today often involves far more sophisticated and complex rituals and pharmaceutical strategies. It is still recognized and in use from Peru to India, China, and Mongolia.

**What is Animism?**
Animism is the belief that spiritual entities and agencies exist and interact seemingly with the material world, indwelling people, animals, plants, and rocks. Animism teaches that the soul is the basic principle of life and health. Animistic elements are often integral to such eastern religions as Shinto, Hinduism, and Buddhism. And they are central to most tribal and folk religions. Animistic creeds encourage communication with supernatural beings about very practical concerns, e.g. securing food, curing illness, averting danger.

**How are Spiritualism, Spiritism, Shamanism, and Animism alike?**
All four are occult-related, and all four encourage recognition of, and active human interaction with the mystical, disembodied spirits that inhabit the supernatural realm.

**How might all of this affect you?**
You may be personally and directly involved with such beliefs and practices. But even if you are not, the following list of associated phenomena and terms may serve to demonstrate their great relevancy to your world: Native American religion, totemism, UFOs, aliens, discarnates, paranormal activity and events, hypnotherapy, automatic writing, avatars, channeling, re-dedication of the earth. Kabala, poltergeist, parapsychology, ESP, Chi energy, Spirit Guides, Warlocks, Satanism, Unity School of Christianity, Christian Science, Neo-Paganism, and Theosophy.

**What does the Bible say about this?**
The Bible recognizes the existence of spirits in the supernatural realm. We are told that Satan and other fallen angels (demons) are evil in nature, yet able to manifest themselves in this world in a deceptively positive light. God sometimes grants these spirits influence over nature as well as the ability to tempt, deceive, mislead, and even harm humans. So in Deuteronomy 18:9-14 God warns against all forms of occult activity. We urge you to read this text as well as Acts 13:6-12, 2 Thessalonians 2:7-10, 2 Corinthians 11:14, 1 Timothy 4:1, and 1 Corinthians 10:20.

**Sources & Resources**
AMG's Encyclopedia of World Religions, Cults, and the Occult; Encyclopedia Britannica: World Religions (2008); Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs by John Ankerberg; Wikipedia (online encyclopedia); Shamanism.com, and Dictionary.com