

AWAKENING
TO THE
SPIRIT
WORLD

The Shamanic Path
of Direct Revelation

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& Hank Wesselman



SOUNDS TRUE
BOULDER, COLORADO

Contents

	Preface from Sandra Ingerman	xi
	Preface from Hank Wesselman	xvii
	Introduction	xxiii
<i>Chapter 1</i>	What Is Shamanism?	1
<i>Chapter 2</i>	The Shamanic Journey	29
<i>Chapter 3</i>	Reconnecting with Nature	55
<i>Chapter 4</i>	Visionary Work with Weather and Environmental Changes	73
<i>Chapter 5</i>	The Power of Ceremony and Ritual	89
<i>Chapter 6</i>	Dreams	111
<i>Chapter 7</i>	Creative Art As a Bridge	139
<i>Chapter 8</i>	Working with Sound and Light	157
<i>Chapter 9</i>	Death As a Rite of Passage	179
<i>Chapter 10</i>	Experiential Work with Death and Dying . . .	193
<i>Chapter 11</i>	All Change Involves a Death	215
<i>Chapter 12</i>	Our Children Are Our Future	225
<i>Chapter 13</i>	Working in Community	239
<i>Chapter 14</i>	The Transformational Community	259
<i>Chapter 15</i>	The Return of the Shaman	275
	Acknowledgments	291
	Notes	295
	Further Resources	301
	About the Authors	307
	About the Contributors	311
	About the Society for Shamanic Practitioners	315

Preface from Sandra Ingeman

Shamanism is an ancient and powerful spiritual practice that can help us thrive during challenging and changing times. In our modern-day technological world we have been led to believe that what we see, touch, hear, smell, and taste with our ordinary senses connects us only to the world that is visible around us. Conversely, shamanism teaches that there are doorways into other realms of reality where helping spirits reside who can share guidance, insight, and healing not just for ourselves but also for the world in which we live.

Shamanism reveals that we are part of Nature and one with all of life. It is understood that in the shaman's worlds everything in existence has a spirit and is alive, and that the spiritual aspects of all of life are interconnected through what is often called the web of life. Since we are part of Nature, Nature itself becomes a helping spirit that has much to share with us about how to bring our lives back into harmony and balance.

At the experiential center of shamanism lies the potent path of direct revelation, revealing that in this spiritual discipline, there are no intermediaries standing between the helping spirits and ourselves. We all can have access to the wisdom, guidance, and healing that the helping spirits and Nature have to share with us.

There are ways to achieve connection with these helping spirits as well as with the transpersonal aspects of Nature itself. Together with four other contributors, Hank Wesselman and I will introduce you to some well-traveled trails on which you may walk, giving you immediate and authentic access to the shaman's path of direct revelation.

There are multiple reasons why I was led to write this book and bring in other contributors to share their teachings. We have been seeing a spiritual awakening on the planet as more and more people are reading about and exploring different spiritual practices that lead to self-realization, personal development, and much-needed evolution of consciousness in humanity as a whole.

During this time of spiritual awakening, the term "shaman" has become part of popular culture. In the grocery store I see soaps and shampoos that have the word "shaman" on them. I see advertisements in newspapers and magazines that combine the title "shaman" with a host of professions. And even though I have been engaged in the practice of shamanism for thirty years, I seldom know to what these advertising references to shamanism refer. I can only imagine that you might be wondering too.

As the terms "shaman" and "shamanism" have become watered down by such marketing endeavors, there has been a reaction by some who have tried to create rules about what shamanism is and what it is not. Despite good intentions, this has often tended to add to the confusion, and in many cases it has created misunderstanding and an injustice to the practice.

There is a paradox here, for first and foremost, shamanism has always been a practice in which each practitioner gets unique directions and guidance from their helping spirits—those same

transpersonal beings that are often referred to as spirit guides and angels. At the same time there exist time-tested guiding principles for the practice of shamanism, and so we have created this book together to share with you some of these principles so that you will be able to determine what shamanism is without giving you hard-line definitions and directions.

In times of great change such as we are experiencing today, many people react by turning within and becoming spiritual seekers, and often this includes searching for more personally sustaining ways of living and working, both individually and in groups.

Among these seekers, some tend to be drawn to systems that create rules and regulations that tell them what to do, thinking that this will bring them safety and reassurance. In much the same way, there are people who turn toward the practice of shamanism who want to be given rules for contacting the helping spirits and wish to be told that there is a right way and a wrong way to do the work.

There is also a pervasive tendency for people to give their power away to others. Such seekers often desire to find a teacher who will act as an intermediary between themselves and the helping spirits—a trait that is more characteristic of our organized religions in which bureaucratized priesthoods stand between us and the sacred realms. This is not typical of the path of shamanism and it is not a path of direct revelation.

In my workshops on shamanism I lead people into connection with their helping spirits, and I convey to them that once in connection, they can rely on their spirit helpers to teach them and advise them. When I offer workshops on powerful and effective healing methods, I advise my students that the best healers are inevitably those who abandon their workshop notes and rely instead on the guidance provided directly by their helping spirits.

In the discordant times in which we live today, new diseases of the mind and body have appeared, and the problems that are occurring on the planet all demand our creation of new solutions, encouraging us to tap into our own unique creative genius to help

with the change. These times call for us to be willing to seek out the guidance of the helping spirits who can help us grow and progress through our life stages and life transitions with grace and power.

This also means that we must own our power and find new and unique ways of working with each other.

As I train some of my advanced practitioners to become teachers themselves so that they may carry on the shamanic tradition in our own time, I explain how I was guided by my helping spirits to teach as well as why I use certain exercises in my shamanic workshops. I then ask those in my Teacher Training Programs not to teach as I do but rather to follow the lead of their own helping spirits because it is in this way that the ancient shamanic tradition has come down to us across tens of millennia—and this is how it continues to stay filled with spirit, power, and meaning for those who practice it.

The goal of any spiritual path is to bring us into connection with our own divinity and into awareness of our own creative genius. All of us have great creative potential. To believe that only some people have the answers will not necessarily move us toward creating a harmonious life on a healthy planet.

We can all share different answers on different levels as we express our unique talents and gifts. We can all express different aspects of divinity in the same way that a diamond has different facets that shine together to create our own brilliant and dazzling light. By engaging in the shamanic path of direct revelation, our inner light is ignited, and when it is combined with the sparks of others around the world, I believe it will create the light needed to manifest a planet filled with harmony, love, light, peace, and abundance for all.

I have been writing books on shamanism since the early 1990s—books in which I have expressed my passion about bridging this ancient practice into our modern-day culture in a way that addresses the issues and needs of our times. One book led to another and then to another, and what I have found is that

as the times have changed, my helping spirits have shared new forms of guidance and new ways of facilitating healing with me in order to help others as well as myself. My professional background as a psychotherapist has also encouraged my process of working with shamanism to be an organic one that has been, and is, ever-changing.

Across the years, I have come to understand that it is our responsibility to upgrade this ancient tradition into a new form that is meaningful to modern spiritual seekers and visionaries today. The challenging times in which we live are calling us to work together as a community to create positive and enduring changes that will benefit us all. In this regard, I was guided to invite some other shamanic teachers to contribute to this book, for in doing so I wanted to introduce you, the reader, to different ways of working as you too are called to the path of direct revelation.

In 2005 I became a founding board member of the Society of Shamanic Practitioners, whose purpose is to bring together a global shamanic community in which we might share what we have learned about bridging the ancient and time-tested visionary practices of the shaman into our modern-day cultures—an impulse that underscores the importance of this book.

In 2008 I asked those board members of the Society who are accomplished teachers, practitioners, and writers to come together to share some of their wisdom in this book so that together we may be of service to countless others in society at large. All six of us who have contributed to this project have a great deal of personal history and experience with the shaman's path.

As I reorganized the book accordingly, I invited anthropologist and author Hank Wesselman to be one such contributor. As we talked about this project with growing enthusiasm, I was guided to invite him to co-author the book with me and to help create the main fabric of the narrative text. As this project progressed, he also assisted in the weaving together of the teachings of all the contributors. I really enjoyed co-writing this book with Hank, a

practitioner and shamanic teacher whom I have known as a friend and colleague for almost thirty years.

Among the other contributors, Tom Cowan is a wonderful writer and teacher about the Celtic ways, and you will notice how Tom writes in a poetic fashion. Carol Proudfoot-Edgar and I have co-taught workshops together across many years and became spiritual sisters and good friends the day we met. Like Tom, Carol is an amazing poet. I have known José Stevens since the early 1980s when I first started my formal shamanic training and we were in a journey group together in the Bay Area for three years. I have deep respect for the integrity that José brings to the work and appreciate his devotion to living what he teaches. And for many years now, I have known Alberto Villoldo, whose commitment to being in service has touched so many on the shamanic path. I am delighted that all of these people have contributed to this book.

After reorganizing the chapters for the book, I asked all the contributors to share their teachings in those chapters to which they felt called. In this regard, not every contributor wrote something for every chapter.

Hank and I have a dual role in these pages. Throughout most of the book, our voices are merged, reflecting the unity as well as the flow of our shared wisdom and friendship across many years. As such, the narrative that forms the fabric of the book will be our collective voice. And yet we are also contributing members of the group of six and we teach in our own way. So in those passages where we share our own unique ways of working, we will use our individual names to present our teachings.

Here I would like to introduce you to Hank Wesselman, and then together we will share the format of the book and how to work with it in the Introduction.



Preface from Hank Wesselman

In accepting Sandra Ingerman's gracious invitation to co-author this book, I was immediately aware as an anthropologist that an opportunity has been created to explore the dimensions and boundaries of an extraordinary subculture that has taken root in the Western world in our time, a community to which you, the reader, most likely belong.

We could think of it as the Transformational Community, and since the word "transformational" has become a buzzword in this time of change, there is something quite mysterious we should mention right at the onset.

A new spiritual complex is quietly, yet definitively, taking form within the heart of this community, one that brings us to the subject that lies at the epicenter of this book—the path of direct revelation.

This is the path on which each of us, as individuals, may directly engage with the Great Mystery of existence, however we

may think of it, bringing it into our everyday lives and, by association, into our relationships and our work in the world.

This is the ancient, time-tested way of the shaman, the mystic, the visionary—the spiritual path that may take each of us straight into the experience of authentic initiation—a way that may guide us into the irreversible vortex of personal awakening that is referred to in the East as “enlightenment” and in the West as becoming “God-aware.”

This is the path on which each of us may discover who and what we really are, gaining insights that may be quite in contrast to the scripts that society at large has handed to each of us to act out. In the process, we may discover that these scripts have suddenly become completely and utterly outdated.

As Sandra and I begin to share our thoughts about this extraordinary social transition with you, the reader, my attention inevitably turns toward those parts of my life spent working as an anthropologist among the tribal peoples of Africa, for it was there in the bush, among the indigenous traditionals hundreds of miles from the nearest road, hot bath, or cold beer, that I first stumbled upon this path more than thirty-five years ago. It happened through a series of spontaneous dreamlike visionary experiences that were intensely real and that became utterly life-changing.¹

I was thirty years old then, a member of a scientific research expedition exploring the arid, eroded landscapes of eastern Africa's Great Rift Valley in search of answers to the mystery of human origins. In those days, I suspected that my fellow scientists were unlikely to be receptive to talking about these anomalous experiences, so I turned toward some of the African tribal men who were working with me. We had become friends across the years, living in a tented safari camp in remote areas of southwestern Ethiopia far from the tourists' tracks. In my discussions with these men, I slowly discovered that they held a perspective that was quite foreign to my scientist's way of thinking about the world.

Right at the core of their worldview lay the perception that the multi-leveled field of the dream is the real world, that we human beings are actually dreaming twenty-four hours a day, and that the everyday physical world came into being in response to the dream, not vice versa. These assertions were always accompanied by a conviction, strongly held, that the dream world is minded, that it is consciousness itself—alive, intelligent, and power-filled—infusing everything that emanates from it with awareness, vitality, and life force.

Of course it took me many months, even years, to fully comprehend and assimilate what these indigenous men were talking about, but I did understand right from the start that this was not a philosophical theory for them, nor was it a concept. It was a percept, an absolute known based upon direct experience—upon direct revelation if you will. It was also among them that I first encountered shamans.

Interestingly, I was also to learn from them that shamanism is not a religion, nor does it conflict with any religious tradition. It's a method, and as I was to discover first-hand it can become a way of life when practiced with humility, reverence, and self-discipline—a way that has enriched my own life beyond measure.

So allow me to take up Sandra's invitation, and in the book that follows she and I will share with you something of what we have learned along the path—something that may have provided us with priceless and quite unique pieces of the puzzle about who we are, how we got this way, and where we are headed.

The shaman's practice of direct revelation is the ancestral precursor of all our religious and philosophical traditions, both ancient and modern. This is a given, and while some may consider this to be an extraordinary claim, the great antiquity of the shaman's path is confirmed by what we know from the archeological evidence of rock art and cave art from Ice Age Europe and elsewhere in the ancient world.

For example, a paper published in the American journal *Science* in January 2002 reveals that the shaman's path may date

back to at least 77,000 years ago. The evidence for this includes slabs of red ochre excavated at Blombos Cave in southern Africa along the Indian Ocean, several of which were deliberately inscribed with curious designs that seem to represent a matrix or web or grid-like net.

What these cryptic symbols meant to those distant peoples cannot be interpreted with accuracy by us today, but the symbol itself, once created, is repeated endlessly in rock art from that time forward in Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and in North, Central, and South America as well. Cross-cultural studies carried out with the last makers of traditional rock art, the !Kung San Bushmen of the Kalahari, reveal that this grid or net or web is a visual phenomenon seen by entranced shamans on their journeys to the “other world.”²

In the Western world, when we hear the word “shaman,” most of us tend to conjure up an image of a masked and costumed tribal person dancing around a fire in the dark, involved in some sort of mysterious ritual accompanied by drum beats. But inside that cultural shell of mask, costume, and ritual, there is a woman or a man with a set of very real skills.

All true shamans are gifted visionaries—masters of the trance experience who are able to achieve expanded states of consciousness in which they can dissociate their focused awareness away from their physical body and enter into an alternate reality in which they typically encounter numerous archetypal and transpersonal forces who are waiting just offstage of the human drama, yet willing to help us in various ways. Indigenous peoples and modern mystics alike usually refer to these forces as spirits, and specifically as “helping spirits.”

Among those forces frequently met are the spirits of nature, including the spirits of animals and plants and elementals, many of whom have been in service to humanity as helpers and guardians for tens of thousands of years. But visionaries of all traditions and religious faiths also encounter the spirits of their ancestors

and the higher, compassionate angelic forces, many of whom serve us as spirit teachers and guides. Among them can be found our own transpersonal spiritual aspect—our higher self or oversoul of which we shall make mention.

Perhaps the most fundamental shamanic principle from which everyone may benefit is that in the shaman's practice, there is no hierarchy or set of dogmas handed down to supplicants from some higher religious authority complex. Shamanism is the path of immediate and direct personal contact with Spirit, deeply intuitive, and not subject to definition, censorship, or judgment by others. On this path, each seeker has access to this transcendent connection and all that this provides.

Interestingly, shamans tend to run in families, a fact that has led some investigators to suggest that there may be a genetic foundation recorded in our genetic code—our DNA—for the ability to expand our conscious awareness and achieve trance. It has also been suggested that a substantial portion of the human population may possess this genetic program—a hypothesis supported by some anthropological field observations. Among the traditional !Kung San Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa, for example, up to 50 percent of the typical hunting-gathering band could “shamanize” when the need required it.³

This suggests that the ability to engage in the visionary experience of the shaman may be one of the hereditary birthrights of all people everywhere, revealing that one does not have to be a traditional tribal person to engage in this ancient mystical experience.

The shamanic tradition, like all the other mystical traditions, transmits a body of information and techniques that allows novices to re-create and directly experience the abilities of their ancestors, and if we go back far enough, we are all descended from indigenous ancestors, Westerners and non-Westerners alike, and they all had great shamans.

It was through rediscovering and re-experiencing our ancestors' abilities that each new generation took on the responsibility

PREFACE

to perpetuate and refresh a continuously recreated tradition, even adding to and changing the accumulating spiritual treasure of wisdom and technique. For it was always in this way that the visionary path remained vital and meaningful to those who chose to walk it across time.

The growing body of cross-cultural ethnographic literature about shamans and their unusual abilities confirms that the path of direct revelation is part of the cultural heritage of all people, although it was largely lost in the West for more than a thousand years due to ruthless and systematic suppression by our organized religions.

Introduction

This book, with its accompanying CD, may provide you with a body of sacred knowledge that contains the key with which to open your own inner, visionary doorway into the sacred realms.

Needless to say, it's not designed to replace the years of disciplined practice engaged in by the mystics of the world's many visionary traditions. But it may serve as a catalyst in helping you embark upon an extraordinary spiritual adventure, assisting you by double-clicking the "visionary program" on your own inner hard drive, your DNA, so that you may find your way into connection with your own inner sources of wisdom, power, and healing.

It is this extraordinary ability to access the transpersonal worlds that sets shamans apart from all other religious practitioners, something we shall examine in greater depth in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2 will explore the experiential centerpiece of the shaman's practice—the shamanic journey. It will also provide us with

guidance in how we may utilize techniques such as monotonous, rhythmic percussion (provided by the enclosed CD) combined with our focused intentionality, a safe and time-tested meditative way to access the sacred realms of the spirit world. And as we shall see, this practice is anything but primitive.

The shamans of antiquity were the first brave pioneers to begin to investigate our human body-mind-spirit complex as well as the nature of reality, both outer and inner. Their discoveries, derived from the path of direct revelation, have served as the foundation for who we are and what we have all become today.

In our time, the shaman's path could be equated with the path of the modern visionary—one that is very much available to all who care to walk it. In making this assertion, our thoughts turn inevitably toward our reconnection with Nature, for Nature is, and forever has been, the gateway into the invisible worlds that are all around us, and all the time—something we shall touch on in Chapter 3.

Surprisingly, most are able to do this on the first attempt, and once “there,” most are able to establish connection with those inner sources of wisdom and power that the traditional peoples call spirits, returning with accounts that would pass muster at any aboriginal campfire. Accordingly Chapter 4 is focused upon how we may work with Nature, including influencing the weather.

Motivated by the need to more fully understand what happens in these transcendent realms of experience, as well as how to access them, Chapter 5 will explore the nature of ceremony and ritual, allowing us to investigate aspects of the ancient technology of transcendence that was pioneered tens of thousands of years ago by the shamans of the Upper Paleolithic Period—the Late Stone Age.

In Chapter 6 we will focus upon this process with respect to dreams, the nature of dreams, and the experience of dreaming-while-awake. In Chapter 7 we explore other ways of accessing the sacred realms of the transpersonal, specifically through the creative arts that may serve us as another experiential bridge, revealing the

various paths on which the participants in our gatherings across the years have been able to find that inner doorway through which they were able to make the journey into the dream worlds while very much awake.

Allow us to add here that our many years of facilitating such groups have left us deeply impressed by the internal consistency of these experiences as well as by the transformative effect that they obviously confer upon the experiencer. We have watched, fascinated, as our inner explorers are led toward an inescapable conclusion shared by the indigenous peoples—that the fabric of reality is composed of a multi-leveled vibrational field that is conscious and intelligent—and when conditions are favorable, this field can and does respond!

In Chapter 8 we will explore how we may work with sound and light, and in this respect, we can observe with confidence that all authentic visionaries speak about the spirits, and the states of consciousness that become available to us through them, as “the light beyond the form, and the formless beyond the light.”

In Chapters 9, 10, and 11 we will discuss the death experience as a passage on the one hand and as a necessary and omnipresent force in all the changes that take place throughout our lives on the other. The fact remains that ten out of ten of us are going to go through this experience, and it was always the job of the traditional shaman to scope out the dimensions of the death transit, returning to describe where we will find ourselves and what we will experience at this stage, enabling these gifted visionaries to prepare the living for the experience of dying.

Chapter 12 is dedicated to our children as our connections with our future—bringing us into considering who we are today, who we are becoming, and what our responsibilities toward our communities and our children may be. There is absolutely no question that they, and their descendants, are our future.

In Chapter 13 we will describe ways of working together in community from the shamanic perspective, and Chapter 14 will

summarize and reveal who and what we are becoming as members of the transformational community. We will present an overview of those values and beliefs that we all hold dear, allowing all of us to understand more fully what the nature of our path through this life may be—the path on which we most likely chose to walk before we came into this life.

And finally in Chapter 15 each of the contributors, including ourselves, will share our visions for the future of the work, including the challenges that we face as practitioners and teachers and the insights we have gleaned along the trail.

HOW TO WORK WITH THE BOOK

Shamanism is a spiritual practice in which you can have immediate and dramatic access to the wealth of knowledge, as well as the power and protection, of the helping spirits. It is a practice that is difficult to learn by simply reading about it. You must experience it for yourself.

Accordingly, all the contributors have shared different meditative exercises that are seeded throughout the chapters to help you engage in the shamanic path of direct revelation. As some of these exercises involve shamanic journeying, we have included a journeying audio with recordings of drumming, rattling, and different instruments that will allow you to work with the practices in this book. Instructions for shamanic journeying are given in Chapter 2.

HOW TO USE THE AUDIO PROGRAM

The audio that accompanies this book includes four tracks. Track 1 is five minutes of whistling or rattling that will give you time to prepare for your journey by taking some deep breaths, setting your intention, and giving thanks to the helping spirits for the assistance you will receive.

Track 2 is a fifteen-minute session of drumming and rattling with a return beat. Track 3 is a fifteen-minute session of monotonous rhythm involving the *berimbau* (a Brazilian stringed

instrument), rattles, and Australian click sticks. This track also has a return beat. And Track 4 is twenty-five minutes including a return beat involving three drummers.

As you practice journeying with this audio component, you might notice that you prefer one track to another. Some people like a longer session for journeying and some a shorter. Just notice what works best for you. All the tracks are played at a steady rhythm, the theta brain wave rate of four to five beats (or shakes) per second.

One very important note: Don't listen to the audio program in your car or while operating machinery. The audio is designed to help you achieve the shamanic trance state, and for obvious reasons this is not appropriate while driving a car or mowing the lawn.

ENTERING THE CIRCLE OF ELDERS

In summation, we are going to explore the path of direct revelation as a personal practice in this book, and we will discover that it is essentially an ancient form of meditation. When practiced with humility, reverence, and discipline, it can give the spiritual seeker virtually instant access to many varieties of experience, including connection with the spirit world if that is his or her intention.

Speaking as highly educated persons who unknowingly stumbled onto this path decades ago, we can affirm with confidence that the ability to achieve the shamanic state of consciousness is a learned skill that improves with practice. We also know with absolute certainty that once the "visionary program" on our DNA is activated, this can enable us to ascend toward the luminous horizon of our personal and collective destiny as we travel across time in a completely new way.

The wise ones among the tribal people would agree with this statement because they know a great secret: any human activity or endeavor can be enormously enhanced through utilizing and eventually mastering this sacred technology. Another secret: if we go back far enough (as Hank has said), we are all descended from

indigenous tribal ancestors—Westerners and non-Westerners alike—and they all had great shamans.

The six contributors to this book are all accomplished professionals, writers, and fully initiated shamanic practitioners and teachers who walk the path: Sandra Ingerman, a psychotherapist; Hank Wesselman, a paleoanthropologist; Tom Cowan, a historian; Carol Proudfoot-Edgar, a psychotherapist; José Stevens, a psychologist; and Alberto Villoldo, a medical anthropologist. We all have different voices and we all bring our shared wisdom for you to soak up and work with in the ways that speak to you.

Together, we will shed light on how the shaman's time-tested method may help us awaken from the consensus slumber of culture at large, enabling our life experiences to manifest as a true hero's journey, as an upward quest that may lead us into the direct experience of spirit—a journey that becomes possible for us through the doorway of the heart.

It is through this gateless gate that we can personally experience reunion with unlimited power and a mysterious, godlike mind. Once in connection, we then know with certainty that no holy words or books, no secret ceremonies or rituals, no spiritual leaders or gurus or faiths can do this for us.

Once the higher evolutionary functions are triggered within us, some mysterious predetermined schedule is set into motion, activating a program that cannot be given to us by any outside agency. This is because most of us already have it.

In the chapters that follow, we will explore a path on which we may learn something truly interesting about ourselves, as well as where we are headed.

We are excited about this literary project, for in it we will be sharing different perspectives on how we as modern people may walk the shamanic path. We are also providing you with a book filled with enlivening narratives and spiritual practices that you may incorporate into your life—ways that may help you establish your own bridges into the sacred realms.

To create a readable narrative, we could not represent every shamanic tradition. Rather we are giving you a sprinkling of stories from some traditions, providing you with a foundation that hopefully will lead you onto your own path of direct revelation.

Now imagine yourself sitting in a circle of elders, listening to each share his or her stories and teachings with you. As you listen to and absorb their words and thoughts, you will inevitably cross-reference them with your own experiences and your own dreams ... and this is good medicine indeed.