

Jakub Szczęśniak, *The role of altered states of consciousness in the process of religious symbolization. An analysis of the phenomenon, illustrated by the figure of guardian spirit in the religions of North American Indians*. Doctoral thesis written under the supervision of prof. dr hab. Andrzej Szyjewski.

Abstract

In my dissertation I carry out an analysis of the degree to which altered states of consciousness (ASC) take part in the process of religious symbolization, as illustrated by the symbolic figure of guardian spirit in the religions of North American Indians. The source material analyzed in my thesis includes myths, legends, tales and first-hand reports of vision quests, as well as academic papers on the guardian spirit complex.

In the first part, I discuss the phenomenon of symbolization, including religious symbolization, and I define the concept of symbol as used for the purposes of my dissertation. In the next chapter, I analyze so called *trip reports* – subjective descriptions of experimentation with psychoactive substances, found on the Internet. As a result of the analysis, a unified model of the course of ASC and an idealized cognitive model of intelligent beings that appear in visions have been developed. The model of ASC includes the course of the process, the phenomena appearing in the visions, and their mutual relations. The idealized cognitive model is based on the conceptual metaphor theory. The above mentioned models have provided the reference framework for the next stage, i.e. the analysis of the source material on the guardian spirit complex, in which I compare the phenomena and the processes from the ASC model with the phenomena and processes described in the guardian spirit complex. In the next step, I compare the defined cognitive models for the figure of a guardian spirit and the beings that appear in ASC. Moreover, I examine the source material in order to identify the evidence for biological foundations of symbolization, such as synesthesia or specific series of analogization, with special emphasis on atypical forms of association.

Intelligent beings, such as guardian spirits and beings that appear in altered states of consciousness, are greatly varied, they take different forms (body, size) and use diverse forms of communication. The outer form of their distinctive features is strongly conditioned by culture. However, the common characteristic of the above mentioned beings is their superiority over man, determined by their access to strategic information. Man becomes a subordinate, a ward of a being that takes the initiative, adopts man and befriends him. Furthermore, intelligent beings are characterized by minimal counterintuitiveness that gives advantage to ideas in the process of cultural transmission and increases the probability that a given idea will be categorized as supernatural. Guardian spirits that are inherited or traded reflect the original vision of the clan founder and are a result of cultural transmission of the original vision.

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