

# The new fashion cure-all

*Kimberly Cutter investigates why so many women are FORGOING PSYCHOLOGISTS for shamans to help them find the key to happiness*

**L**ast fall during Fashion Week, three different friends told me that they'd recently been to visit a shaman. "Like, a feather-waving, rattle-shaking kind of shaman?" I asked.

Yes, a feather-waving, rattle-shaking kind of shaman. A soul healer.

"It was amazing," said Christina,\* gripping my arm over drinks at the Lion.

"Incredible," said Sophie,\* a fashion publicist.

These are New Yorkers, mind you. Chic New Yorkers in platform leopard Yves Saint Laurent stilettos and fur collars, with their lips painted into lovely little hearts. Talking about shamans. And soul healing.

At home, I asked my own soul how it was doing. After a long silence, it responded that it felt like it had been stuck in the dryer on high heat—for, like, a year. I called my friend Anna.\* "So, what exactly do these shamans do?" I asked.

"You're not really supposed to talk about it," she answered, texting me the number of her shaman, Elizabeth Clemants. "But if you go, make sure you ask for the bands of protection."

*The bands of protection.* The words alone made my beat-up soul give a parched little gasp. I called the shaman. "How soon can you see me?" I asked.

As it turned out, she was booked solid for three weeks. While I waited, I wondered: What, really, is a shaman, and why are all these fashionable New Yorkers suddenly so hot and bothered about them?

According to Wikipedia, shamans are "intermediaries or messengers between the human world and the spirit worlds." Historically, they've flourished in places like Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, and Peru. Basically, shamans think that

*Basically, SHAMANS think that if you're unwell (either physically or mentally), the thing to do is fix your soul*

if you're unwell (either physically or mentally), the thing to do is fix your soul. Once the soul is healthy, the body will become healthy too. The traditional shaman tends to look pretty much the way you'd expect: a gnarled little tribal guy with a crazy headdress who lives deep in the snowy heart of

Siberia and communicates with the spirit world in a trancelike state. Possibly there is a drug called ayahuasca involved. Possibly there is a rattle or a drum, which works kind of like an underworld pager to let the

ancestral spirits know they're needed up by the campfire.

When he emerges from his trance, the shaman usually believes he knows a) what is wrong with the soul of the person sitting in front of him or b) what is wrong with the soul of his tribe. Fixing the problem can involve anything from the shaman pulling your dead brother's angry green hand off of your neck to blowing a jaguar spirit into the ►



A photograph by Solve Sundsbø

top of your head. (This is a good thing.)

As you would imagine, New York City shamanism in the year 2011 looks a bit different. Take Emmanuel Faccio, a crisply dressed man in his 40s. Faccio, whose main office is in SoHo, gave up practicing traditional Western medicine about eight years ago in favor of shamanic techniques and what he describes as energy medicine.

Shamanism is becoming popular now because the whole paradigm that we've been operating under is falling apart," says Faccio, alluding to the recent global economic and environmental crises. Faccio, who received his training from Utah's Four Winds Society (the Harvard of neoshamanism), is still a proponent of Western medicine but believes that it must be used with more holistic methods. "The old ways are collapsing around us. They don't work anymore," he explains. "We can't just treat the symptoms. We need to ask why people are hurting."

Faccio does share a lot with traditional shamans. He's explored past lives, spirit guides, and soul retrieval. (Apparently, if you go through something highly traumatic, you can lose a chunk of your soul, and a shaman can negotiate with the underworld to get it back.) But, he says, "I live in the 21st century." To communicate, "I use a cell phone, not a rattle."

**A**bdi Assadi takes a similar approach. A "shamanically trained" acupuncturist and psychic healer, Assadi has a client list that's said to include Sting, Sheryl Crow, and Norma Kamali. Assadi has performed a number of shaman-type treatments like soul retrievals and past-life regressions, but he says that some acupuncture and a bit of energy clearing should do the trick for me. "I can see a lot of fatigue in you and a lot of fear," he says as he shows me into a treatment room, has me lie down on the table, and offers a set of headphones that are playing Bach.

After he's inserted the acupuncture needles, he holds his hands about three feet above my body and moves them around for a while—kind of like he's washing an invisible car. Later, he brings in what looks like a caveman's feather duster and waves that around above my body too. Apparently, this is a Lakota Indian technique called feathering that clears the "auric field" after the healer has pulled off any negative attachments.

"What are attachments?" I ask.

"Attachments can manifest as incessant, neurotic thought patterns, things like that. Other people throw them at you—often unconsciously—and these attachments feed off of your emotions."

Afterward, I feel extraordinarily relaxed and slightly boneless—sort of like a stoned jellyfish. But I have to admit that I'm also disappointed that the whole thing wasn't more, well, *shamanic*. I realize I want a journey.

At first glance, Elizabeth Clemants doesn't seem like the shamanic-journey type at all. A blonde, blue-eyed mother of three who greets me at the door of her airy TriBeCa loft, Clemants, 41, works as a mediator and conflict coach and is married to a corporate lawyer. Her calling to be a shaman came seemingly from out of the blue. "The first time I heard about shamanism, I was like, *what?* I almost fell out of my chair," she says, laughing.

But after a trusted therapist told her that nothing had been more healing than one session with a shaman, she decided to give it a try. The rest, as they say, is history. "The simplest thing I can say is this: Shamans work like surgeons. They locate heavy energy in you, and they take it out."

Like traditional shamans, Clemants believes in power animals, multiple incarnations, and the idea that we each have a "light body" (a.k.a. a soul) that travels from lifetime to lifetime, but she is more than happy if her clients would rather call it energy. "It doesn't really matter," she says. "People come to me to feel better, and I only know lighter's better. When you're carrying

around dense energy, these dark spots are constantly getting triggered and tripping you up. As you clear that heavy energy, you start to have a clean view of the world."

What I like most about Clemants (who also trained with the Four Winds Society and with shamans in Peru) is how straightforward she is. She talks about shamanism the way good mechanics talk about your car. If you want, they'll explain what all the trouble was about, but it's not necessary. The problem is just fixed.

"I've treated over 200 people now," she says. "My husband is a born-and-raised skeptical New Yorker. But me being on this path has shifted him dramatically. He used to be like, 'Yeah, you can do it, but don't tell anyone.' Now he's announcing it at dinner parties."

It turns out Clemants is all about shamanic journeys. Here's what I can tell you about my personal session with her: I sat on the couch in her lovely pale-green "shaman room" and told her about the trouble with my soul. I also told her that I was suffering from insomnia and anxiety. "Okay, let's see what's going on," she said. I stood against a wall, and she looked through my "energy field." (This was sort of like a doctor checking your joints—while shaking a rattle.) She examined my chakras. She broke out the crystals. Later, I lay on a table and she worked on me (and the air around me) with her hands, sort of like a ghost masseuse. Past lives were explored, and soul chambers were illuminated. Apparently, a large "fluid entity" with thick tentacles that had been clouding my energy was pulled out of me. And a great deal of light was poured in. Those mythical bands of protection were applied. It sounds scary, but it wasn't. I still can't pretend to understand what it all means. But I can say that I have never felt better. ■

*Afterward, I feel  
extraordinarily  
RELAXED and  
slightly boneless—sort  
of like a stoned jellyfish*