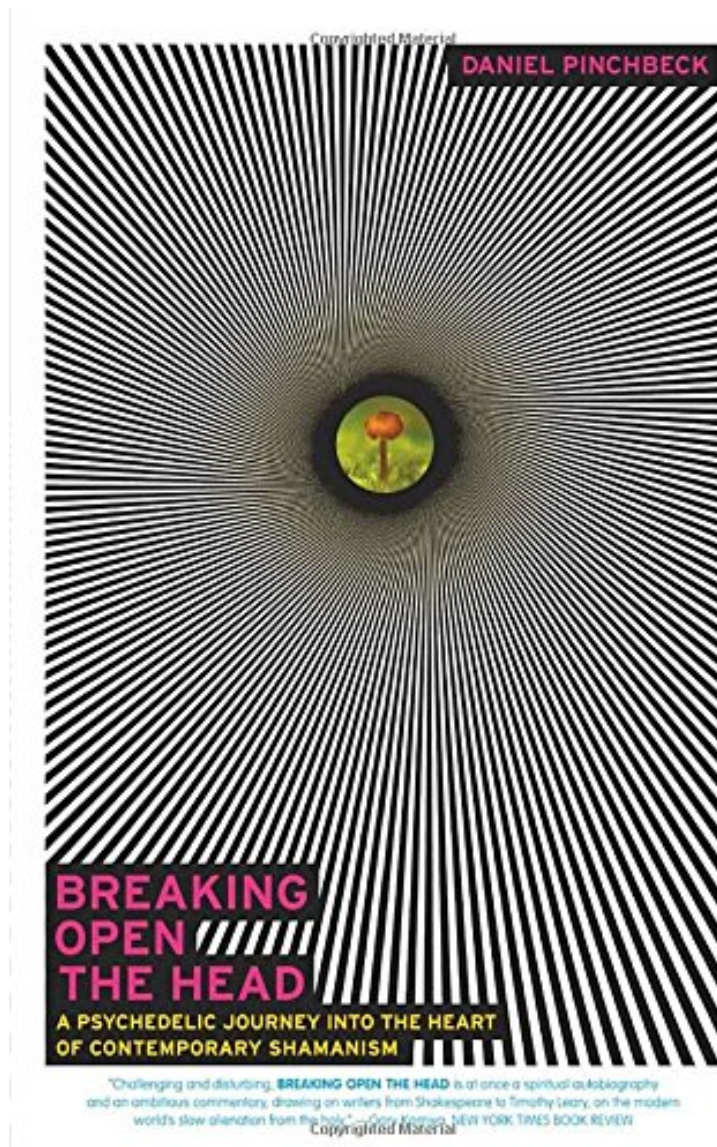


# Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism

Daniel Pinchbeck

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**Daniel Pinchbeck : Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Engaging writing, paradigm engendering conclusionBy Denise GreenePinchbeck's book was absolutely riveting for me. While I have no experience whatsoever with hallucinogens, I have had similar experiences, albeit not quite as intense as he describes, as a practicing mystic. He has an engaging journalistic style. I picked up the book after watching the 2 hour Manifesting the Mind video; I found his thoughts there most curiosity piquing, and, along with this book, I am driven to research much more deeply on the subject.I keep reading his final chapter over and over. It is creating a new paradigm shift for me, leading me to greater awareness and action. Reading his conclusion as well as the conclusions of other authors I have read subsequently, thanks to Pinchbeck's references, has been a huge Aha! experience for me. His book can be a "breaking open the head" kind of experience for anyone who approaches it with an open mind and a willingness to "test all things." The concepts to which this new thinking has led me reach back to my childhood, bringing many more pieces of the puzzle together for me.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Breaking Open the Head is a Joy to ReadBy Peggy E. FutrellDaniel has performed a sweeping review and acute analysis of what goes on in shamanic cultures the world around with respect to the use of psychedelic substances for cultural understanding. Daniel's writing is wonderful, and this book is a joy to read.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Mind alteringBy RPKDaniel Pinchbeck is an exciting and elegant erudite, hurtling through concepts, experiences and history, drawing upon and critiquing the writings of an eclectic list of authors ranging from Shakespeare to Rudolph Steiner, through Walter Benjamin and Aleister Crowley, and testing them against his own experiences with psychedelic drugs. He's also a masterful storyteller, his book gently luring you in with fascinating insights, getting you hooked on esoteric magic realism, frightening the hell out of you with occult nightmares, before climaxing in urging you to find your inner shaman. Just as with the drugs he writes about, reading this forced me to temporarily suspend reality, and gave me mixed feelings of euphoria and dread. Coming down now, I can only think of the monumental journey of self-discovery that lays ahead.

A dazzling work of personal travelogue and cultural criticism that ranges from the primitive to the postmodern in a quest for the promise and meaning of the psychedelic experience.While psychedelics of all sorts are demonized in America today, the visionary compounds found in plants are the spiritual sacraments of tribal cultures around the world. From the iboga of the Bwiti in Gabon, to the Mazatecs of Mexico, these plants are sacred because they awaken the mind to other levels of awareness--to a holographic vision of the universe.Breaking Open the Head is a passionate, multilayered, and sometimes rashly personal inquiry into this deep division. On one level, Daniel Pinchbeck tells the story of the encounters between the modern consciousness of the West and these sacramental substances, including such thinkers as Allen Ginsberg, Antonin Artaud, Walter Benjamin, and Terence McKenna, and a new underground of present-day ethnobotanists, chemists, psychonauts, and philosophers. It is also a scrupulous recording of the author's wide-ranging investigation with these outlaw compounds, including a thirty-hour tribal initiation in West Africa; an all-night encounter with the master shamans of the South American rain forest; and a report from a psychedelic utopia in the Black Rock Desert that is the Burning Man Festival.Breaking Open the Head is brave participatory journalism at its best, a vivid account of psychic and intellectual experiences that opened doors in the wall of Western rationalism and completed Daniel Pinchbeck's personal transformation from a jaded Manhattan journalist to shamanic initiate and grateful citizen of the cosmos.From the Hardcover edition.

From Publishers WeeklyOpen City editor Pinchbeck's book debut is a polemic that picks up the threads that Huxley's The Doors of Perception, Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters and counterculture idealism left in the culture. Charting his gradual transformation from a cynical New York litterateur to psychedelic acolyte, Pinchbeck uses elements of travelogue, memoir, "entheobotany" ("the study of god-containing plants") and historical research to ask why these "doorways of the mind" have been unceremoniously sealed, sharing Walter Benjamin's melancholy about the exasperating nature of consumerism: "We live in a culture where everything tastes good but nothing satisfies." Pinchbeck travels the earth in search of spiritual awakening through tripping, from Gabon to the Nevada desert. At happenings like the Burning Man festival or a plant conference in the Ecuadorean jungle, Pinchbeck meets "modern shamans" and tells their stories as they intersect with his. In his reporting, he manages to walk a difficult tonal tightrope, balancing his skepticism with a desire to be transformed. He thoughtfully surveys the literature about psychedelic drugs, but the most exhilarating and illuminating sections are the descriptions of drug taking: he calls this visiting the "spirit world," which is "like a cosmic bureaucracy employing its own PR department, its own off-kilter sense of dream-logic and humor... constantly playing with human limitations, dangling possibilities before our puny grasps at knowledge." There's little new drug lore here, but Pinchbeck's earnest, engaged and winning manner carry the book. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalIn this firsthand account of the world of psychedelic substances today, Village Voice and Rolling Stone writer Pinchbeck weaves elements of his personal life, including vivid descriptions of his reactions to the substances he takes, with larger topics, such as the history of psychedelic substances in the modern world and the foundations of shamanism. To aid his inquiry, he participates in visionary rituals around the world, e.g., taking iboga as part of a tribal initiation in Gabon. He also discusses key figures such as Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, and Terence McKenna. Pinchbeck repeatedly decries

the rationalism and destructiveness of Western culture and the shortsightedness of completely outlawing psychedelic substances. The book is not an extended diatribe, however. The author offers various viewpoints on how certain drugs should be used and on whether a modern, Western shamanism is possible. Pinchbeck posits a universe that may be difficult to accept, but his book will be of interest for public and academic libraries. Stephen Joseph, Butler Cty. Community Coll. Lib., PA Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist \*Starred \* Stop the eye-rolling--now! The words psychedelic and contemporary can be used in the same subtitle, as can contemporary and shamanism without referring to American consumer shamanism ("I took a weekend workshop") but to the real thing, practiced by the Bwiti of Africa and by brujos. Pinchbeck's startling and absorbing book flashes from German philosopher Walter Benjamin and British mind-explorer Aldous Huxley to the literature of anthropology to the politics of drug use, all while touring Gabon's outback, the lush South American jungle (six miles and several world-views away from industrialization), and the wild, evanescent culture of Burning Man in the Nevada desert. What keeps the book from being just another apologia pro wasted vita sua is the depth of Pinchbeck's personal searching. An agnostic with yearnings toward mysticism at the book's beginning, he underwent, and he documents, a genuine experience of the divine that resulted from "breaking open" the rational mind. He achieved a sophisticated vision, but one not without unease, for he encountered demons as well as gods in the otherworlds. But nothing is more demonic, he concludes, than a society whose relentless commodification blasts a short route to addiction. Grippingly dramatic, powerfully moving, this is a classic of the literature of ecstasy. Patricia Monaghan Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved