

*Living a*  
**SHAMANIC**  
**WAY OF LIFE**  
A Path of Direct Revelation



Michael Stone

# **Living a Shamanic Way of Life: A Path of Direct Revelation**

by Michael Stone

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## Introduction

Shamanism is a practice of direct revelation. To live a shamanic way of life means to go inward and connect with your own truth and access the wisdom of the spiritual realm to guide and inform you. It is customary in our culture to look to religious, medical, political, and other outside “experts” for guidance, yet those are no substitute for our innate wisdom. Each section of this book contains practices, poems, stories and meditations to assist us in building confidence, strength, and trust in our own heart as the source of our truth and to help bring us back to the spiritually centered path when we have wandered into the mind field.

***Shamanism is a way of life. It reminds us that everything is alive with energy and that we are all connected to and inseparable from a universal web of life.***

Sandra Ingerman

This book contains key fundamentals that can support us in living a shamanic way of life. The most important place to begin is to become still enough to hear your inner guidance. A teacher can be helpful to give additional clarity and inspiration along the way, but is never a substitute for the cellular wisdom and intuitive creativity that has been evolving for thousands of years. In stillness it is possible to access and open ourselves so that Spirit can guide and inform us in our moment-to-moment journey through life.

As with any practice there will be days when you are fully engaged in all of these steps and others when you only manage to spend a few moments connected to this path. In the end, the middle and the beginning, it’s all about love. We must first learn to love and embrace ourselves when we don’t do it perfectly or live up to our own expectations. Can we love whatever arises in our heart,

mind and body? When we listen from love we awaken to the eternal evolutionary impulse and generating force that animates the pulse of our lives. We learn to open our hearts to all life, and become guided by and connected to our profound interconnection with the web of life and the Spirit that lives in all things.

Shamanism is the oldest spiritual healing practice on the planet dating back 50,000 to 100,000 years. It is distinct from other mystical traditions in that, while there are many different forms, systems and practices that have arisen independently from each other, it is not bound to form and tradition. It is an evolving earth based wisdom school that draws on the cycles and elements of the earth and its relationship to the cosmos. It cannot be commoditized because it is always moving, growing and expanding like the universe itself. True wisdom emanates from the spacious inner world that is imbued with the story of evolution itself. Therefore shamanic intelligence defies, in spite of the current marketing efforts, commercial branding and attempts to claim it as intellectual property. It evolves as life itself evolves.

Direct Revelation is at the heart of all of the world's religions, which were originally based on shamanic practices. The word shaman means "one who sees in the dark." Shamans enter into what is called Non-Ordinary Reality, to access information that is not accessible in linear time or to the belief bound mind. Often referred to as the Dream Time, this cauldron of possibility is our true source of creativity, compassion and wisdom. Here we not only have access to the ancient wisdom of our ancestors, we can also learn how our everyday thoughts, actions and prayers can influence our lives and those of future generations.

The basic principle behind this work is that if we want to change the outer world of form and substance, we must first transmute the inner world of toxic thoughts, beliefs and assumptions

into the golden light of loving awareness. We live in a time when the solutions to today's challenges can only be solved by a transcendental awakening on the planet. Without this awakening, future generations, if they are to survive, will live very challenging lives. This book explores some basic practices that can support us in living in a shamanic way.



## Cultivating Presence

*Your true home is in the here and the now.*

Thích Nhất Hạnh

Our contemporary world is one of distraction, denial, distortion and disturbance. To live a shamanic life we must learn to focus the mind. Concentration on the breath is a traditional way of transcending our constant preoccupation with the remembered stories of the past and imagined fears of the future. Presence is already here. Mostly we aren't. As we learn to mindfully put our attention on what is happening moment to moment, we discover a new access to the rich fullness of life itself.

To be awake is to stop and say, "I am here, now!" To do this all we need is the willingness to let go of our personal story and the strategies we have developed in an attempt to control the uncontrollable. When we release our involvement in our "I" story we meet life and greet whatever is arising moment to moment — our joy and pain, love and fear, happiness and despair — the world of duality dissolves into one without separation. When we move from an "I" story to a "We" presence, our worldview is transformed. As we release the attachment to trying to be some particular way, the suffering that comes with it disappears. Cultivating presence opens us to an expanding freedom from our story, projections, opinions, thoughts and beliefs. Presence releases us to the truth of our interconnection with all life.



***The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence.  
When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers.***

Thích Nhất Hạnh

For the most part we rarely really listen or bring our full presence to what others are saying and sensing, let alone attempting to understand what might be the intention behind their words. In our normal conditioned state of consciousness we are constantly assessing whether we agree or not, being distracted with thoughts that get triggered, preparing our rebuttal or thinking about what's next in our lives. The greatest love offering we can make to another is to simply bring our whole attention to being fully present to the sacred other before us.

The word respect comes from the root to look again newly. To transcend our thoughts, beliefs and opinions we can learn to lovingly lean into any conversation or interaction with a beginner's mind. Respect is a key ingredient for health, healing and vigorous human relations. It shows people that they are valued and seen. Isn't that what we all want — to be loved, appreciated, included and respectfully held in the light of love?

That the Dalai Lama, who regardless of his schedule or things undone in his own life brings himself fully to each interaction with every person he meets, always inspires me. It is reported that this practice often leads to long lines of hotel staff queuing up to greet him each day as he emerges from the elevator. He stops and welcomes each person fully with his total presence and abundant love.

Cultivating presence is really about relaxing and settling into the spacious awareness that returns us to our natural state of awe, wonder and innocence. We let go of the need to know and begin to dwell in the mystery of just being alive. Each precious breath becomes a reminder of the miracle of just being here. We realize that we don't have to feed the anxious puppy mind more food to solidify our identity. We grow in the experience of embracing the truth that we have much to offer and discover about who we are and who we are becoming. There is a force operating in the world that is much greater than the identities we have patched together from our conditioning. Can we become still enough to feel the evolutionary impulse that is beckoning us towards our destiny and highest purpose in life?

To become fully present we must become embodied. The body is the ground zero of directly experiencing life. We have come to rely primarily on our mental activities to discern what is real and have denied the wisdom of the heart, gut and cellular intelligence. Experiencing and accepting the changing stream of sensations constantly moving through us is central to the alchemy of transformation and being fully present. With every thought there is a corresponding sensation and emotion. Embodied mindfulness teaches us that there is absolutely nothing solid or static about our experience. When we abandon our bodies and suppress our feelings, fears and pain, we entrap the very things we are trying to avoid in our body. Being fully present means being fully embodied.

## **Exercise #1: Stop Everything!**

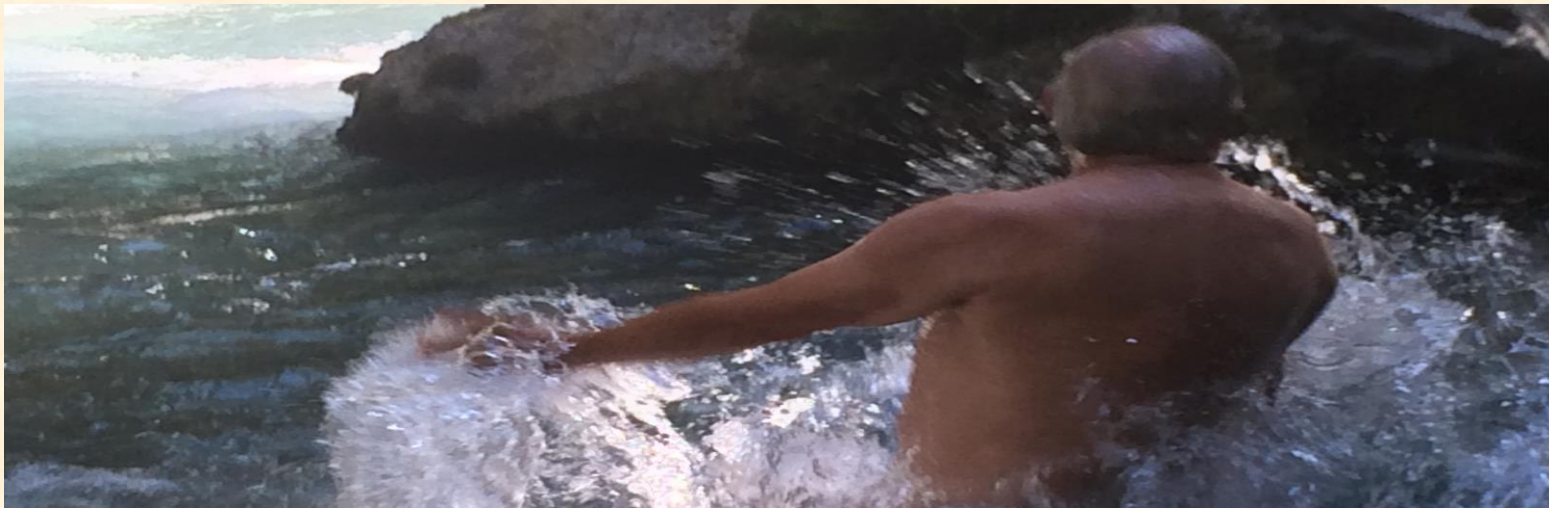
Intentionally cease all outward activity and, just as an experiment, sit or lie down and open to a spacious interior stillness with no agenda other than to be present for the unfolding of each moment. Do this at least once a day for five minutes and then write in your journal any thoughts, emotions, or sensations that you recall. Do this for thirty days and reread your journal entries at the end of the month. Notice the impact this has on your daily life.



## **Exercise #2: Body Centered Awareness**

Begin by sitting in a comfortable position and focusing your attention on the breath. Notice the quality of your breath and how it enters and leaves the body. How are you being breathed? Follow the breath as it moves into your body, envisioning where it goes. Is your breathing shallow or deep? Begin to direct your breath by bringing your attention to your chest and heart area, noticing any stuck or painful areas. Explore your body from the inside out.

Relax and soften your hands from the inside, move up the arms to the shoulders, slowly bringing awareness by following the breath. Explore each sensation in every body part from the inside. Feel the energy and the vibrant aliveness as you explore the inner world of sensation. Once you have gotten used to this kind of exploration, try it when you are with others out in the world. How is it different when you are with another person? Notice what thoughts or emotions arise as you move into each area of your body. Take a moment to write about this exploration in your journal.



## ***WHERE IS GOD?***

Mark Nepo

It's as if what is unbreakable —  
the very pulse of life — waits for  
everything else to be torn away,  
and then in the bareness that  
only silence and suffering and  
great love can expose, it dares  
to speak through us and to us.

It seems to say, if you want to last,  
hold on to nothing.  
If you want to know love,  
let in everything.  
If you want to feel the presence  
of everything, stop counting the  
things that break along the way.

## **Living an Intentional Life**

*Our intention creates our reality.*

Wayne Dyer

All spiritual traditions teach the power of intention to bring about change and facilitate the manifestation of a healthy, happy and fulfilled life. Intention is the key to living in an intuitive and self-revelatory state of awareness. Imagining and expressing the kind of world we want to live in and not being distracted by the daily dose of bad news or the myriad disruptions that present themselves moment to moment is essential to living the life we were born to live and manifesting the quality of living that is our longing. Letting our own luminous self shine needs only that we hold the intention to bring our light forth into the world and shine. All manifested dreams start with intention. Creating daily reminders of the future we want to live into keeps us focused on our intention.

When shamanic practitioners journey into the spiritual realms they always hold a clear intention of what guidance they are seeking from their spirit animals and guides. When we set an intention it might feel like we are in a mental or imaginary state at first. But setting an intention activates our own subconscious to manifest our goal. What might feel like a mental concept at first moves quickly into being a full body experience. It is important to hold this intention as we meditate or journey (*see Appendix*) and bring our whole being into the process, body, mind, emotions and sensations. To have a felt sense of our intention already being fulfilled transforms the blocks to its accomplishment. As we set our intention to wake up out of the dream we are now living in, we will find ourselves moving into more clarity and a deeper sense of awareness of our interconnectedness with all life.

It is so easy to get caught up in the prevailing story of how bad things are and what's wrong with life and the world. Our media bombards us with endless examples of our march towards disaster and Armageddon. It is true that the old economic, social, religious and political systems are breaking down. Yes, our ecosystems are disintegrating, species are dying at unprecedented rates, climate change is real and our economy is rigged for the rich to become richer as the rest of the planet is struggling to keep food on the table for their family. These are strong signals that change is imperative and imminent and that we are witnessing the greatest social transformation in human history.

Imagine the power of transformation that will result as more and more people embrace the intention and generate the creativity to speak and step into a new story of an evolving human species in the midst of an evolutionary transformation, based in love, compassion and recognition of the interconnection with each other and all of life.

To live an intentional life is to examine the thoughts and beliefs that are shaping our actions and begin to transform them by intentionally holding the vision and speaking a new story into existence. Our words shape our world and we have total control over the stories we tell and the words that come out of our mouths. Spiritual traditions teach that words are vibrations that shape our lives. As children many of us used the phrase "abracadabra." This is actually an Aramaic phrase "Abraq ad habra" and means, "I will create as I speak." The daily use of words and phrases that come from love and speak from vision have the power to bring forth the world we long for.

Consider the possibility that the changes that are happening on our planet right now are triggering an evolutionary impulse within humanity to become co-creators with the earth and the

Spirit that lives in all things. What is being called for is for us to let go of the strangle hold that our old stories have had on us and become intentional partners with the Divine force that is calling forth a new humanity, one that is deeply connected to the natural world. We must learn to be co-creators in the new story that is emerging. There is just as much evidence for the story that a great change towards love and inter-being with all life is emerging as there is for one of fear and the destruction of all life. The life that we live, the thoughts that we feed, and the words that we speak constitute the future we are creating.

***Imagination lays the tracks for the reality train to drive down.***

Carolyn Casey





## **Exercise #1: Imagining the World We Want**

What kind of world are you longing for in your heart of hearts? Begin to write what it would look, feel and be like to live in that world. As you do this also write on another page the blocks that come up, all the reasons why you can't have that, and the beliefs that prove that it is not possible (you can work further on blocks in Exercise #2). Be very clear and specific about the way people would treat each other, how they would connect with the natural world, the life style they would experience... When you have a clear picture of the life and world you are intentionally calling into being, look at how you can align your current actions and ways of being in the world now. Keep track of your success and blocks in your journal.

## **Exercise #2: Transforming the Blocks to Living an Intentional World**

Intentionally transforming the energy behind our negative thoughts, emotions, attitudes and beliefs empowers us to not only change our inner world, but is the key to transforming our outer world. Working with the blocks to manifesting your intention from Exercise #1, we can create the space to bring forth our desired outcome.

Return to a meditative state by relaxing into a comfortable position and slowly breathing into your belly. Think of a beautiful place in nature that you love and imagine yourself there. Focus all your awareness and senses as you experience the beauty of this place. Feel the sun on your body and imagine every cell in your body beginning to shimmer and vibrate as you merge with the pulse of this light. Recall the blocking attitudes, beliefs and assumptions that you feel are keeping you from living into your ideal world. Allow and see the light vibrations beginning to dissolve those beliefs and attitudes as they fall into the earth and become compost to support the

intentional world you are co-creating with the help of the elements and the emerging evolutionary impulse that is arising on our planet right now. See and feel each limiting belief and attitude transforming into new ways of being in this new world we are calling into existence. When you come back from this meditation write these new ways of being in your journal and look at what actions correlate to this transformed way of being. This becomes your intentional road map to living the life you have longed for until now. Live it, Be it, Share it and Become it!



## Wolf Story

One evening, an elderly Cherokee Brave told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside of people. "My son," he said "there is a battle between two wolves that live inside us all. One lives in anger, jealousy, sorrow, doubt, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, superiority, false pride and ego. The other is filled with pure love, innocence, wonder, peace, possibility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion, joy and humility."

The grandson thought about it for a moment and then asked his grandfather: "Which one will win, grandfather?" The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed, my son!"



## Honoring the Web of Life

*Man does not weave this web of life. He is merely a strand of it.  
Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.*

Chief Seattle

Humanity is suffering from a serious case of “Nature Deficit Disorder.” Every part of nature works in collaboration with every other part, except the human species. We are currently reawakening our relationship with the seasons, elements and cycles of the natural world, which will lead us to rediscovering how to live in harmony with each other and the earth. Shamans call forth their power from the trees, mountains, rivers, sun and moon. They know that everything that exists has a spirit and the spirits of nature are their allies. Indigenous peoples have always known that the role of the human on this planet is as a caretaker of the earth and all life. The elements themselves are imbued with intelligence, a unique spirit and gifts that work in cooperation and collaboration with each other to produce the symphony of nature and the song that sings us into existence.

Our earth is the ground on which we stand. She feeds and nourishes us as well as all other living beings on the planet. Her beautiful landscapes inspire us, titillate our senses and provide us with habitat. The Earth is our home. She is nourished by the water from which we and all life forms emerged. We are water beings, fluid, flexible and ever changing and yet our essential spirit remains the same. Water nourishes, cleanses and revitalizes us. She reflects our own deep inner beauty and flows with the cycles, seasons and changes of nature.

Water works miraculously in concert with air to form our hydrologic cycle, as she evaporates into the air from the ocean's surface, the moist air is lifted, cleansed and condensed into cloud shapes which float in changing forms around the globe until she is once again released to return and nourish the skin of our mother earth in the form of precipitation. The life giving water feeds our rivers, oceans, streams and the thirsty inhabitants as it has for over four billion years. Air constitutes our first breath as we enter life and the last gasp as we transition back into pure spirit without form.

Fire purifies, transmutes, transforms and regenerates. In shamanism it is a powerful ally for healing ceremonies and removing discordant energies. The sun provides us and all life with the energy we need to grow and flourish. It gives us light, which imbues and animates our material form. It reminds us of the power of unconditional giving, and is reflected in the core of the earth and the center of our hearts. When we embrace our own inner light, we radiate the purity and passion of our most beautiful, radiant and authentic selves. In this time of great evolutionary change, fire reminds us of the power to burn what is ready to die and make room for that which wants to be born.



*Even  
After  
All this time  
The Sun never says to the Earth,  
"You owe me."*

*Look  
What happens  
With a love like that,  
It lights the whole sky.  
Hafiz*

We have been living as though we were somehow above and separate from nature and the natural world. Embedded in this mind-set is the unexamined belief that we are somehow the ultimate creation, a species at the pinnacle of evolution. As a culture we have looked upon the natural world as a giant resource yard for us to use for our gratification and profit. This belief in our separation is at the heart of the destruction of our ecosystems and the life support system from which we were born. Now we find ourselves at a crossroad; in order to survive and thrive we must have an evolutionary leap into a new kind of human. Barbara Marx Hubbard sees the current human species as a transitional one that is currently expanding in consciousness, empathy, connectedness, and creativity towards what we might call a universal species, a species that has dissolved the myth of separation and reconnects with and is informed by the entire web of life.

Quantum physics has affirmed this interconnection and how the power of the way we view the world can change the world. Babies today are being born into a totally new reality, one that allows them to become co-creators in, not only their own lives, but in how life unfolds in the future. According to physicists, reality is based on the observer effect, meaning the way in which we see the world is continuously shaping our reality. To honor the web of life and our part in it we can begin to examine and challenge our deeply held beliefs and assumptions about our place in the natural world as an evolving species.

***The Lord God took the man and put him in the  
Garden of Eden to care for and keep it.  
Genesis 2:15***



## **Exercise #1: Romancing the Trees**

Find a quiet place in nature to walk. See if you can still the mind and move without making a sound, feel your breath filling your lungs and nourishing every cell of your body, softly and slowly release your exhale. Know that every in breath is a gift from the trees around you and every out breath is a reciprocal giving back to them. Everything in nature is connected. Feel gratitude for the gift of the breath you are receiving and the joy of knowing that your out breath is your offering to the forest.





## **Exercise #2: Accessing Tree Wisdom**

Sit down by a tree that calls to you. Spend some time in stillness just being with tree, breathing in the oxygen that is being generated by the tree and all the plants around you. Envision its roots going down into the earth and at the same time imagine your own rootedness extending downward, branching out and absorbing the water and nutrients from the soil below. Feel the sun above you feeding you, the tree, and all life, replenishing the animating light embedded in all form. Ask the tree a question that is important to you and wait for the tree to answer. Listen with every cell of your body and feel the gratitude pulsing in your heart.



*Lost*

Robert Waggoner

Stand still.

The trees ahead and the bushes beside you are not lost.

Wherever you are is called Here,  
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,  
Must ask permission to know it and be known.

The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,  
I have made this place around you.  
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.  
No two trees are the same to Raven.  
No two branches are the same to Wren.  
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,  
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows  
Where you are. You must let it find you.



## Walking in Beauty

*The Navajo people have a saying: May you walk in beauty. In saying this, they mean never say anything that will create fear or harm in another.*

*Do not curse others with your words. Rather, bless them with words that create beauty in their lives.*

Sandra Ingerman

Our perception creates our reality, as quantum physics and ancient mystics have been telling us all along. To change our reality we need only to change our perceptions and the beliefs that shape them. Most of us have been trained by our culture to focus on what's wrong rather than basking in the beauty that surrounds us. If we want to transform our suffering, struggling and despair we must attune ourselves to the miracle of just being here. It's easy to find fault with our parents and ancestors, but can we celebrate all the things we appreciate about our lives and what they bequeathed to us? Turn off the radio and TV news and open to the radiant joy of each breath. Celebrate the little things each day that bless and make your heart sing. What you shine your light on will reflect your own divinity and what you appreciate will grow and transform your outer circumstances.

We adopt our beliefs from our family, our culture and our environment which shapes and reinforces our distorted perception. To change our reality we must examine the unconscious thought patterns, beliefs and assumptions that block us from living in beauty. For the most part the unconscious beliefs, attitudes and dysfunctional strategies that protect our egoic identity were established early in our lives. These beliefs can sabotage our unlimited potential and the

power of our intention and derail our journey towards wholeness and unity with nature's unfolding.

We project these beliefs onto others and create a false sense of separation that keeps them intact and operational. We are bombarded with cultural beliefs by the marketing and propaganda machine of the status quo, which creates an agreement reality that this superficial world we live in is the real one. But in reality it is far more elegant, wondrous and beautiful than the illusion of our prevailing culture. We can replace these unexamined beliefs by making a commitment to speak and act in beauty, to pause before we speak or act and make sure that our expressions are contributing to creating more beauty in the world.

There is an aesthetic that emerges in the search for truth. It emanates from an evolutionary impulse to grow and thrive. It is a harmony that we hear when we are still enough to perceive the stars singing and the plants growing. When we align ourselves with this greater universal force, life flows and unfolds naturally and beautifully. We find ourselves in an evolutionary river, receiving an endless procession of gifts that come from the source of life itself, running through our ancestors into future generations, each one bearing gifts for the ones that follow. It is a tapestry of time woven by an unseen hand that has always been there to guide us on our journey.

One of our greatest gifts is the gift of speech. Our language not only describes the world, it also creates it as we speak. Some people say, "Talk is cheap"; perhaps it's people that cheapen talk. Gossiping and complaining are rampant in our conversations. If we could eliminate these two habitual ways of being in the world, we could transform our own lives and bring beauty to the lives of those around us. When we fail to listen to the words that come out of our mouths and notice the impact they have on others and the world around us, we reinforce the prevailing

culture of death, despair, distortion and destruction. To walk in beauty is to speak with the intention of painting our most essential loveliness onto the canvas of the world. What if we spoke with the intention that everything that came out of our mouths was a blessing?



## **Exercise #1: Creating a Complaint Free Zone**

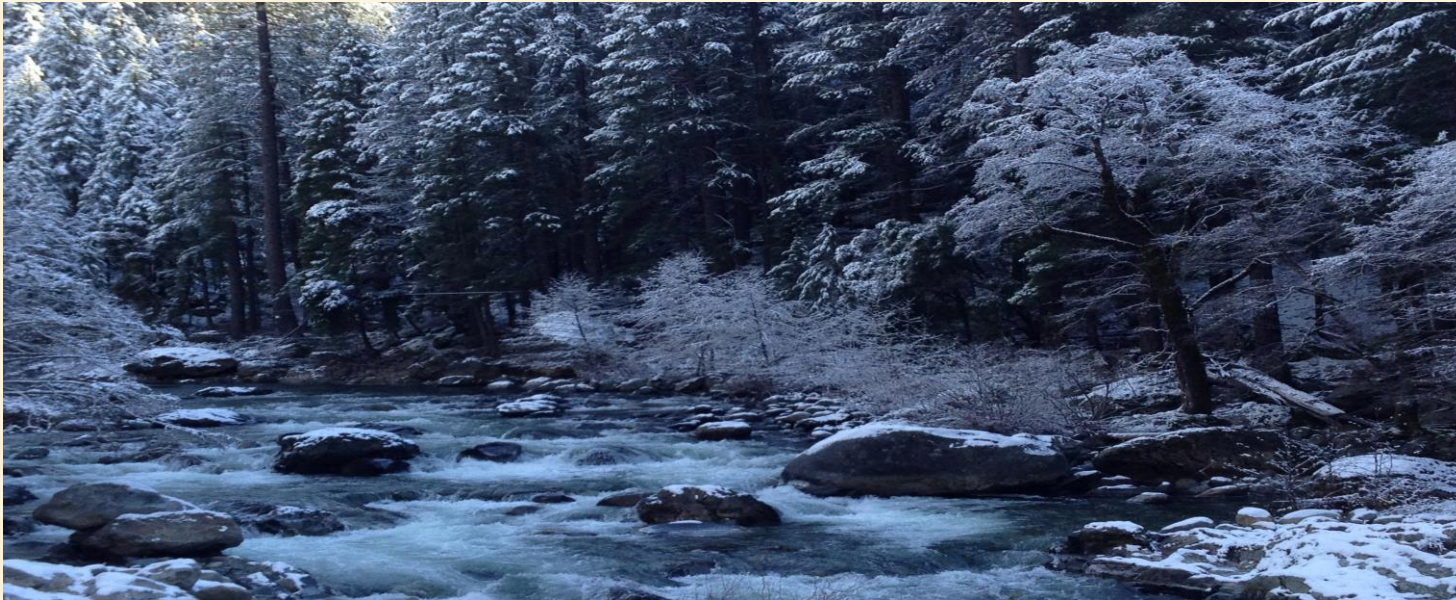
What would it be like if we just dropped all the complaints in our lives? In this exercise you are invited to experiment with dropping any claim that anything is wrong in your life and the world. Try dropping all complaints for just 24 hours. Keep your journal handy and include writing down the complaints that arise in your thoughts and the ones you hear coming from others around you. If a complaint arises, we might ask ourselves, “What is the feeling right now that I might be avoiding?” You may discover that the complaint or problem has been serving a function. It might be a strategy designed to obtain something you feel is missing in your life, often something that you have longed for since childhood. Complaints are also a great way of avoiding responsibility and taking action. You could also try the same exercise to begin to eradicate gossiping in and around you.



## **Exercise #2: Beauty Breaks**

Take spontaneous beauty breaks in your day by stopping what you are doing, taking a deep breath, and noticing all the beauty that surrounds you. Seeing the way the light reflects off the leaves of a tree, how the clouds make shapes in their movement across the infinite sky above you, or a beautiful piece of art in your home given to you by someone you love very deeply. These are examples of the beauty that can awaken the heart.

Again, go to your journal and write these things down and notice what feelings arise as you describe the beauty around you. This is a powerful process for shifting the way we view the world based on the negativity of the prevailing culture versus the deep sense of truth and wholeness that comes from simply stopping to take in the magnificence that surrounds us with a sense of wonder and gratitude.



***Wild Geese***

Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
Are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.



## **Holding a Vision for the Future**

*Some men see things as they are and say, "Why?"  
I dream of things that never were, and say, "Why not?"*

George Bernard Shaw

Psychology research has clearly shown that at the heart of most depression is not having a compelling vision for the future. It is important to hold a clear image of the life we want to live into, to literally have something to wake up for every day. Setting short and long term goals brings us more directly into contact with life. The future of life on this planet depends on our holding a picture of a positive future for our descendants and ourselves. Take the time to imagine and write down the life you envision today and watch the magic unfold.

To hold a positive and sustainable vision for the future we must engage all of our senses: seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling and tasting. It takes practice to fully imagine ourselves living in a world that embraces love, light, harmony, beauty, peace, abundance and equality for all. The attraction of the external world of fame, fortune and things is strong and enticing. It is what we have been taught and conforms to our beliefs and assumptions of what will bring us happiness. It is a hollow promise without experiential evidence, a world of false potential without substance or temporality. It takes strength, courage and commitment in action to maintain a positive vision for the future. We can work with our imagination to overcome the pull of the tranquilized routines from the past that breed apathy, resignation and despair. To hold a powerful vision for the future means we must be vigilant and awake to how our relationship to ourselves, each other and the world is shaping and regurgitating a vision that is no longer viable in the emerging new world.

Embedded in our daily conversations, our thoughts and the ways in which we approach each day are mostly unexamined beliefs that are constantly shaping our world. These beliefs are persistently laying down the reality track of our lives and influencing our finances, health, love life, spirituality and every other aspect of our lives. It is not easy to change a belief when it is who we consider ourselves to be. We must be willing to distinguish our dysfunctional beliefs and explore the truth of them as we begin to recognize how much we identify with and are attached to them. What would we have to give up to let these beliefs dissolve and experience a new way of viewing our lives? We cannot change the world without changing our beliefs.

***In order to carry a positive action we must develop a positive vision.***

Dalai Lama

So many of our conversations are based in what's wrong and what we don't want. Our media feeds our thirst for how bad things are and is quenched by our preoccupation with awful-izing the latest disaster or the impending doom on the horizon. Vision is about getting clear about what we do want and orchestrating our actions accordingly. When we push against the things we don't want, our resistance can increase the very persistence of what we are trying to change or overcome. Isn't it time to put our focus on what kind of world we want for future generations and ourselves and take the actions necessary to bring forth that desired state?

In order to deal with the overwhelming cruelty, destruction and unconsciousness that our media portrays as the current state of the world we have learned to deaden our senses. We overeat, drink, drug, shop, and have unconscious sex in an attempt to not feel the overwhelming sadness of the world. In order to bring forth a world of love and belonging we have to reignite the passion and fire that has been shadowed by the clouds of our unintentional collusion with the forces of

darkness. Imagining a world that works for all life with no one and nothing left out takes vigilance. It starts with the first light of opening our eyes, continues through every conversation and action we take throughout the day, and goes on into the night by calling forth dreams to reinforce our vision of the new world that is already arising.



## **Exercise #1: What Vision Are We Feeding?**

If you want to know what vision you are feeding you need go no further than your own life. What are your primary complaints in life? What are you grateful for? Are you enlivened by your vision? Does it call you to action? Are you thinking that it is too late, we have gone too far, there's no way we will survive? If we are holding an attitude of apathy, resignation or defeat we are surely lost. To hold a vision of a world that works for all life and future generation we need to let go of relying on the doings of the outer world. Can you hold a vision in the face of little or no agreement? This is how powerful people have claimed their power and changed the world. Take a moment to jot down your thoughts in your journal and describe the vision you have been feeding and the one that you are willing to begin to feed.



## **Exercise #2: Future State Actions**

Imagine the kind of future you would like to see for yourself, your family and future generations. Think about how you would be feeling and acting in that future state. Then extract these actions from the future and see which ones you can put into place now. As you put them into action notice what feelings arise. Journal on your experience and what obstacles you encounter as you express these actions in the present from your view of the future now. Take Action!



## Starfish Story

Early one morning, an old man was walking along the beach after a big storm had passed and found the vast beach littered with starfish as far as the eye could see, stretching in both directions.

Off in the distance, the old man noticed a small boy approaching. As the boy walked, he paused every so often and as he grew closer, the man could see that he was occasionally bending down to pick up an object and throw it into the sea. The boy came closer still and the man called out, "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?"

The young boy paused, looked up, and replied, "Throwing starfish into the ocean. The tide has washed them up onto the beach and they can't return to the sea by themselves," the youth replied. "When the sun gets high, they will die, unless I throw them back into the water."

The old man replied, "But there must be tens of thousands of starfish on this beach. I'm afraid you won't really be able to make much of a difference."

The boy bent down, picked up yet another starfish and threw it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he turned, smiled and said, "It made a difference to that one!"



## Seeing All Beings in their Divine Light

***Although you appear in earthly form your essence is pure Consciousness.  
You are the fearless guardian of Divine Light.***

Rumi

The heart of our suffering lies in our unexamined belief that we are separate; separate from our bodies, each other and the web of life. Identification with our ego and story of who we think we are keeps that false sense of separation alive. Our character and personality have very little to do with who we really are, which is the eternal light of Spirit. We don't have to condone the behavior of someone to see him or her in his or her Divine nature, surrounded by the light of love. In honor of the Spirit that lives in all things we can practice seeing others in their Divine light. When people are truly seen, they begin to transform, as there is no further need to engage in the dysfunctional ways we have learned to try and receive the love and attention we never got.

***As we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence actually liberates others.***

Marianne Williamson

Light is the essential spiritual power within us that is ready in potential to emerge into actualization and manifestation. This is the core essence within us that is longing to come out from hiding. Stepping into this light opens within us a great opportunity for freedom of expression. To see the light in others is to begin to see our own beauty and radiance and seeing our own brilliance allows us to recognize it in others. "As within, so without, and as without, so within." We cannot see in others what we are unable to see in ourselves. Learning to love our own

heart is a practice. It is not about elevating the image or status of how we see who we are in a narcissistic way and holding a grandiose view of our own talents in a craving for admiration. It is recognizing the Divine nature in ourselves and every other being on the planet. It is about liberation from our own egoic identity and the suffering that comes with it. Our Divine light is a living vibrancy of transformative power that everyone has available to use in the transformation of our world.

It can sometimes be threatening to stand in our own light or to see others at their most radiant and brilliant core. You may be judged, slandered or suspected to be up to something unsavory. The filters of one's persona can block out the ability to see the totality of that which is Divine. By dropping the concern and need for validation from external forces, we allow the fullness of our divine light to flare forth in love.

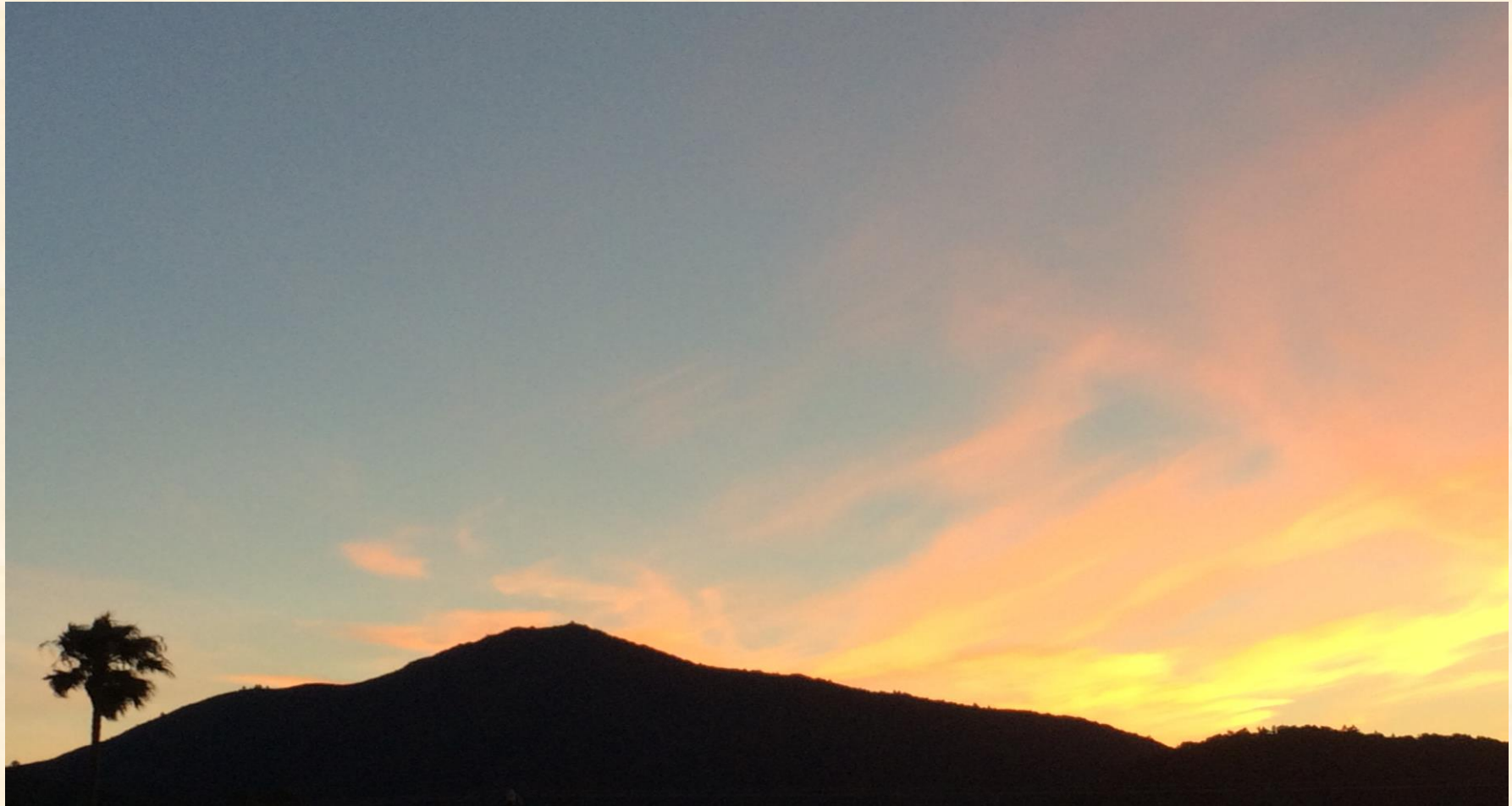
***We are light and we came here to shine. But most of us have forgotten our true nature as well as why we came here. We were created from love and light and we are love and light. It is our birthright to shine as fully in the world as we can.***

Sandra Ingerman

Drawing on the findings of modern physics, we can conclude that all human beings are made of light held in matter. When we witness the death of someone we can observe the light leaving them as they pass over the threshold. By looking at others in the light of love, derived from the practice of loving ourselves we can see everyone in their Divine Light. In this way we can begin to see others as they were brought into this world with innocence, infinite love and a sense of



wonder. It is our environment and culture that corrupts our innocence and profound lightness and it is time to reclaim our birthright.



## **Exercise #1: Seeing Ourselves and Others in Divine Light**

Lie down or sit in a comfortable position bringing your attention to your breath. Put your hands on your belly and heart and feel the spirit of air filling your lungs and body with nourishing and tranquil energy. Feel yourself sinking into the earth as she wraps her arms around you and imagine root tendrils running down from your spine deep into the fertile soil below you. Experience the waters within becoming calm and still, as a sense of peace and ease comes over you. Imagine a great light coming down from the sun above, warming you and filling every cell of your body. Feel the inner flame of your heart growing brighter. Release yourself fully into the light as you merge with the spirit of light.

When you experience yourself as light, ask the spirit of light to teach you how to be your most radiant and illuminated self and how you might learn to also see others in the fullness of their flaring forth into their own unique brilliance. Bring all your senses to listening for the answer, feel it, taste it, smell it, touch it and see it. Relax into the wisdom of your cellular memory and allow yourself to be enlightened in the majesty of the moment. When you have filled yourself with light, let yourself gently come back to Ordinary Reality and notice if things seem just a little bit brighter and clearer. Practice this on a regular basis and your inner light will grow and irradiate all you meet, see and do.

## Exercise #2: Planting Seeds of Light

Make a list of all the words that refer to light and begin to add them into your vocabulary (e.g. bright, brilliant, glowing, ignited, sunny, sunlit, inner light, cheerful, lit up, luminous, numinous, radiant, vivid, optimistic, beaming, joyful, shining). Begin to catch yourself using words of darkness and negativity and see if you can replace them with words that express light, hope, possibility and warmth. Track what happens in your journal as you begin to shift your speaking and thinking.

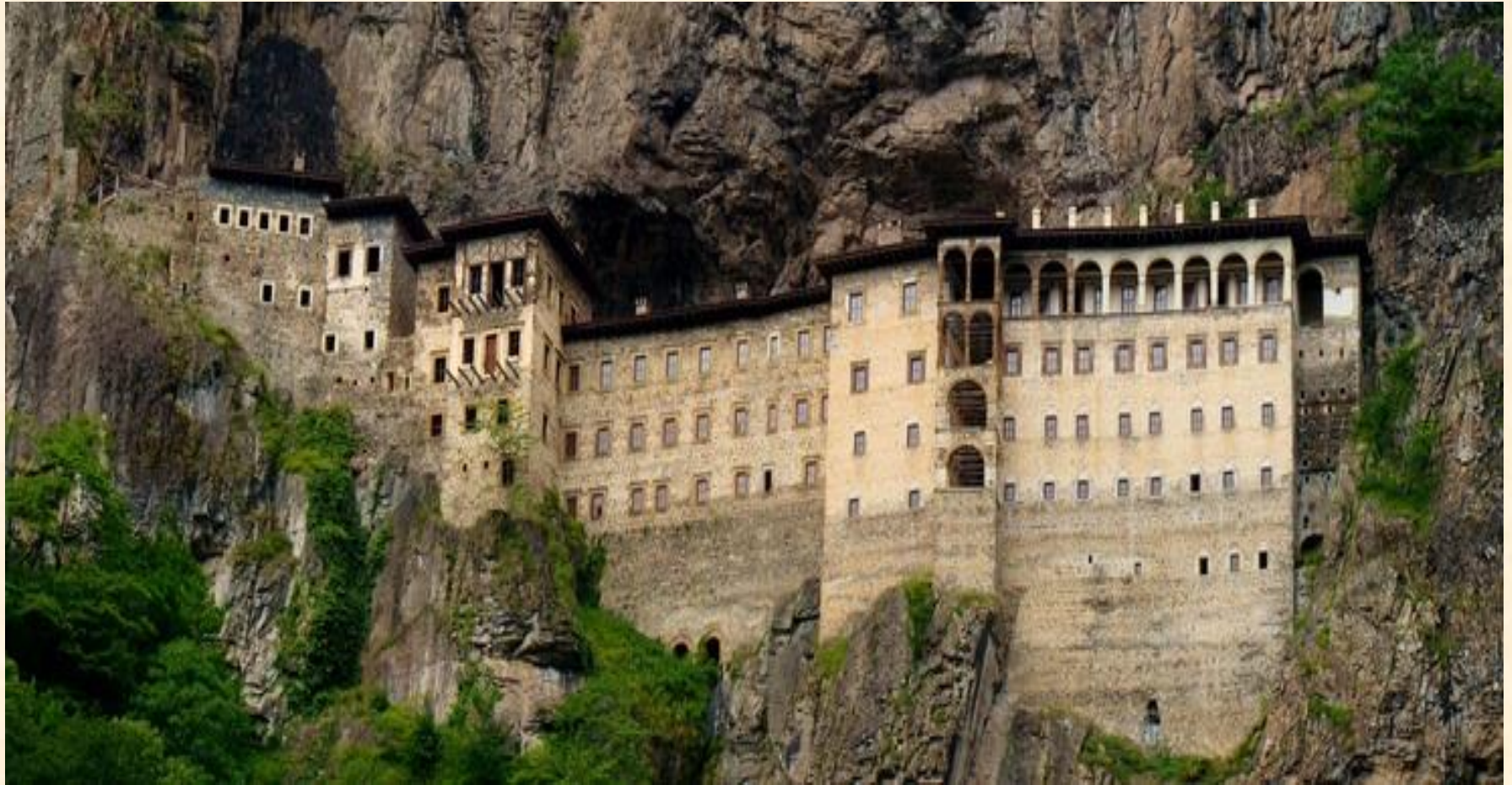


## Monastery Story

Once upon a time, in a far off land there was a monastery renowned for its beauty, singing, scriptures and joyful inhabitants. But, the hermitage had fallen on hard times, the aging monks were no longer drawing the younger, talented and more exuberant monks that came there, the gardens lay fallow and the joyful song was no longer heard echoing across the valley below. The headmaster was concerned and went on foot across the lands to consult with a wise man famous for his learned advice.

After many arduous days of travel he arrived at the home of the old sage, high atop a mountain in the Himalayas, to ask for guidance. He was invited in for tea as the old man listened to the monk pour out his story of woe. After some time the sage held up his hand signaling the monk to stop his story. He looked the old monk in the eye and said, "You are a foolish old man!" Taken aback by the sage's words, the monk stammered, "But, but, why do you say that?" The sage responded, "One who lives amongst you is the Messiah, but he has been keeping it a secret, watching your foolishness and petty arguing." At that the sage raised his hand and dismissed the old monk.

As the headmaster began his long journey home he kept wondering, "Is this true, is the Messiah amongst us, who could it be, the wise man is certainly right, but who could it be...?" Deep in thought he reached the monastery and shared with his brothers what the wise man had told him. Everyone was astounded, wondered who could it be, we are all just poor monks here. But, from that night on they started to treat each other as though each one might be the hidden Messiah. Soon people were once again flocking to the monastery that had become filled with beautiful song, everything was cleaned and painted and the gardens once again flourished. After all, at any time the Messiah might just reveal himself.



## Being in Integrity

***Webster's Dictionary defines integrity as a state or condition of being whole, complete, unbroken, unimpaired, sound, in perfect condition.***

Integrity has nothing to do with right and wrong, good or bad or being morally upstanding or ethical. Morality refers to a society's standards of right and wrong behavior for individuals and groups within that society, while ethics refers to the normative set of values that apply to all members of a group or organization. Thus, both morality and ethics relate to desirable versus undesirable behavior. Integrity as wholeness is about being true to our nature and honoring our word as our self. It means not leaving things undone and having the strength to engage in courageous conversations when they are needed. The world we live in is the one that comes out of our mouth. Speaking into existence the world you want to live into. Being in Integrity means practicing right speaking, thinking and acting based on the values and vision that we hold for our lives and life itself.

***Be Impeccable With Your Word. Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean.  
Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others.  
Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.***

Miguel Angel Ruiz

If you are committed to being a person of integrity, you will think carefully before giving your word to anyone or anything, and you will never give your word to two or more things that are mutually inconsistent. In order to be impeccable with our word we need to slow down and stop the multi-tasking, which leads to sloppy, disassociated and incomplete work and stifled self-

expression. Often we say *Yes*, even though we know that we mean *No*. This is a way we avoid the discomfort of telling the truth for fear of telling someone what they don't want to hear, and facing the repercussions. Being impeccable with our word doesn't mean that we shouldn't set goals that stretch ourselves. It does mean that when we make a commitment that is a stretch and recognize that we are not going to be able to do what we said, that we inform anyone else involved or counting on us as soon as possible to avoid the breach in integrity. Our promise matters!

***Have the courage to say no. Have the courage to face the truth.  
Do the right thing because it is right. These are the magic keys to  
living your life with integrity.***

W. Clement Stone

Another aspect of keeping our word is with our own selves. When we make a personal commitment and ignore it, we undermine ourselves as persons of integrity. If we don't take this aspect of integrity seriously, it will create unworkability in our life. We will appear inconsistent, unreliable or unpredictable to others who will avoid engaging in any projects or alliances with us. This often leaves us feeling victimized and wondering why no one wants to work with us.

One of the things that affects us deeply when we don't keep our word is the impact on our self-esteem. When we don't keep our word with ourselves we look for reasons and justification for not living up to our own standards and ideal. This leads us to blaming others and holding a victim stance. Most importantly it causes a major loss of power and creates a reinforcing feedback loop that starts a downward spiral of energy, power and possibility. In order to regain our power we need only look at where we have become ineffective, inauthentic and out of integrity with our personal commitments to ourselves.

In addition to being impeccable with our word, other issues that restore us to our natural integrity are cleaning up things that are incomplete in our lives. This includes things that rob us of our energy, the “someday I’ll get to it” items like cleaning your garage, organizing files, closets and drawers, fixing things that are broken in our homes, or anything else we may have been putting off until the time is right. There is a direct relationship between truth, beauty and integrity. When our lives are in order we reduce the energy drain and return to our natural flow. Integrity reveals beauty and beauty is truth expressed into the world. Integrity is the foundation of workability.





## **Exercise #1: Completion/Action List**

Take some time to sit down and make a list of all the things you feel are incomplete in your life. When you are done go through each one and close your eyes. Ask yourself, "Is this incomplete item causing energy leakage in my life?" On a scale of 1-10, ten being the largest drain, make a note and prioritize the way you are going to complete them starting with the biggest energy drains first. Make a plan of action and keep your word.

The important thing in this exercise is to be vigilant with your commitment to action. Power comes from honoring our word as our self. It is good to have a coach or someone that can support you in being accountable for doing what you say. Oftentimes we have things on our list that we are never going to get to. Let them go and focus on the items that will energize and fulfill you.

***Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.***

Viktor E. Frankl

## **Exercise #2: Relationship Maintenance**

Incomplete communications rob us of our energy and keep us from feeling whole and complete in our lives. Broken agreements, undelivered communications and unfulfilled expectations that we have with others reinforce the illusion of separation. Anyone you feel any tension, disharmony or intense emotional feeling about are prime candidates for recovering your sense of wholeness and the energy that has been invested in maintaining disharmony. This has nothing to do with fixing or changing someone else. It is about being responsible for our own energy.

Make a list of the people that you have incomplete communications with and make a note of the level of energy invested in this relationship, on a scale of 1-10, ten being the highest. Take time in stillness to discover what you might do to be complete with that person or group, regardless of anything that they are doing or have done. Whatever you want from them, want to change about them or would like them to do, or requests you have of them, turn that around and give or request that of yourself. Again this is about you finding freedom in being complete. For the other it might mean offering gratitude or appreciation. You would be surprised how they might change when you let go of your position about them.

To experience wholeness and freedom in our lives and be free of suffering is to let go of the ideals and standards we hold for others and ourselves. To operate with integrity is to let go of our attachments to the way things “should be” and be fully present to the way things are moment to moment.

## **Emperor and the Seed Story**

An emperor in the Far East was growing old and knew it was time to choose his successor. Instead of choosing one of his assistants or his children, he decided something different. He called young people in the kingdom together one day. He said, "It is time for me to step down and choose the next emperor. I have decided to choose one of you."

The youth were shocked! But the emperor continued. "I am going to give each one of you a seed today, one very special seed. I want you to plant the seed, water it and come back here after one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed. I will then judge the plants that you bring, and the one I choose will be the next emperor!"

One boy named Ling was there that day and he, like the others, received a seed. He went home and excitedly told his mother the story. She helped him get a pot and planting soil, and he planted the seed and watered it carefully. Every day he would water it and watch to see if it had grown. After about three weeks, some of the other youth began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Ling kept checking his seed, but nothing ever grew. Weeks went by. Still nothing. By now, others were talking about their plants but Ling didn't have a plant, and he felt like a failure. Six months went by, still nothing in Ling's pot. He just knew he had killed his seed.

Everyone else had trees and tall plants, but he had nothing. Ling didn't say anything to his friends, however. He just kept waiting for his seed to grow.

A year finally went by and the youth brought their plants to the emperor for inspection. Ling told his mother that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But his mother told him to be honest about what happened. Ling felt sick to his stomach, but he knew his mother was right. He took his empty pot to the palace. When Ling arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by the others. They were beautiful in all shapes and sizes. Ling put his empty pot on the floor and was laughed at. A few felt sorry for him and remarked, "Nice try."

When the emperor arrived, he surveyed the room and greeted the young people. Ling just tried to hide in the back. "What great plants, trees and flowers you have grown," said the emperor. "Today, one of you will be appointed the next emperor!" All of a sudden, the emperor spotted Ling at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered his guards to bring him to the front. Ling was terrified. "The emperor knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me killed!"

When Ling got to the front, the Emperor asked his name. "My name is Ling," he replied. Everyone else was laughing and making fun of him. The emperor asked for everyone's attention. He looked at Ling, and then announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! His name is Ling!" Ling couldn't believe it. Ling couldn't even grow his seed. How could he be the new emperor? Then the emperor said, "One year ago today, I gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. But I gave you all boiled seeds, which would not grow. All of you, except Ling, have brought me trees and plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Ling was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new emperor!"

## Expressing Gratitude

*Appreciation is the highest form of prayer, for it acknowledges the presence of good wherever you shine the light of your thankful thoughts.*

Alan Cohen

It is so easy in our terminally busy lives to take the miracles that surround us for granted. We worry about our future; will I have enough money, time, love; we get caught up in fear, doubt and anxiety; and we rush around missing the life that is disappearing in the wake of our motion. Shamans always begin and end all ceremonies and every day with expressing gratitude for the ancestors, the elements, the directions, all the nature beings and the life they have been given. What we hold in lack increases, just as what we are grateful for grows.

To truly experience and express gratitude is to interrupt what Martin Heidegger called the *tranquilized obviousness* of our everyday living. We begin by challenging our complacency with the unexamined, everyday interpretations of life and bringing an element of surprise and wonderment to our moment-to-moment meeting with our inner and outer worlds. Surprise, wonder and awe are the foundations of gratefulness. These qualities disrupt our assumptions and deconstruct our expectations, challenging all we take for granted; that the sun will rise today, that we can flip a switch and lights come on, that cold and hot water are available at the turning of a tap, that I can be in San Francisco this morning and London tonight. To make gratefulness a basic attitude towards life is about waking up to the miracle of life itself and recognizing that we can find a gift in everything that comes to us.

That is not to say that there are not difficult challenges, hardships and horrible circumstances that will happen to us that we would rather avoid. We are not grateful for war, violence, lies, manipulation, crime and the losses of the lives of our loved ones. But, in the face of even the harshest of times we can find beauty, connection, heart and meaning. Many people who develop terminal diseases or life threatening illnesses will tell you that it was a turning point in their lives, an awakening that taught them what was truly important, real and of value. Often they will share with you that their cancer or whatever terrifying thing they faced was the greatest gift they ever received.

When we recognize that there is a gift available in everything in our lives, we are acknowledging a certain dependency on the giver. The very nature of the idea of dependency disrupts our sense of pride, independence and individuality, the same things that keep us living in the illusion of separation. Gratefulness connotes an obligation or reciprocal connectedness to the giver. Gratefulness always takes us beyond our selves. Self-sufficiency is self-deception. Our true self is not the little individual self struggling to define its identity against all other selves. In the communion of a grateful exchange we go beyond the illusion of separateness and discover our universal self.

When we acknowledge the gifts we have been given it creates a bond between the giver and ourselves. In this manner we move towards oneness or wholeness, recognizing our interconnectedness with the web of life. The giver may be you, another or a spirit in the unseen world. Shamans acknowledge and express gratitude for the Spirit of all things in the universe as an ongoing daily practice.

The greatest gift one can give is thanksgiving. Giving thanks is a gift of the heart and calls for authenticity, vulnerability and recognition of the sacredness of life. Being grateful brings peace to our day and quiets the mind. To express our gratitude brings us into the present moment. Expressing gratitude to another makes them feel seen, honored and appreciated. It makes them happy and this in turn can fill us with joyfulness. It also alters the future by giving us a brighter outlook on what is ahead. Grateful people seem to have charmed lives that flow with whatever arises.

There is a gratitude revolution emerging on this planet. All beings want to be happy. People are recognizing that it is not what we have that makes us happy, but what we are grateful for that brings happiness. Grateful people are happy, connected, and less fearful people. To cultivate a practice of living gratefully we first need to take the time to stop and be still. When we stop rushing we develop a spacious awareness and become more patient, tolerant, respectful and compassionate towards ourselves and others. We open our eyes to the beauty that surrounds us and have a more joyful life. Our senses come alive and we see new possibilities and opportunities that we could not see in our frenetic state of busyness.

***What you appreciate appreciates.***

Lynn Twist

## **Exercise #1: Daily Gratitude Practice**

Each day in your journal write down an area or category of thing that you will express gratitude for whenever you encounter it though your day. It could be an element (earth, air, fire, water) or a color (green, blue, red, yellow) or a thing (electricity, air conditioning, trees). It doesn't matter what it is. Every time you encounter this element, color or thing during your day stop, take a breath and say *Thank you!* You will be astonished how it changes your day. Thank you is the shortest and most powerful prayer on the planet.

## **Exercise #2: Daily Blessing Practice**

Take a walk as you silently bless everyone and everything you encounter. Widen your perception as you engage in this walking meditation. Bless the flowers, trees, lakes, birds, animals, sky, clouds, wind, sun, moon... whatever you encounter on your walk, all the beauty, people and animals. Include the thoughts, feelings and sensations you feel. Know we are blessed by what we bless. This exercise has the power to shift your attitude to one of gratitude and deepen your connection to the Divine. It is a way of saying *Yes* to life.





by e.e. Cummings

i thank You God for most this amazing day  
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,  
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth  
day of life and of love and wings: and of the gay  
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing  
breathing any-lifted from the no  
of all nothing-human merely being  
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and  
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

## Practicing Forgiveness

*Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is an attitude.*

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace to today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. Being ungrateful or unforgiving, holding on to resentment, bitterness, anger, fear, hatred, and hostility has a high cost. It breeds stress, anxiety and fear. It takes enormous energy to suppress these feelings. When we hold on to things that happened to us in the past, it robs us of our energy and vitality. These suppressed emotions cause disharmony in the body and lead to emotional and physical illness. In addition this energy will undoubtedly leak out and affect all your other relationships. It also builds upon itself and is reflected back to us by others, creating more anxiety, blame and bitterness. Anger leads to more anger, fear leads to more fear and hatred leads to more hatred. What is needed to transform these qualities of unforgiveness is to develop a deep compassion for ourselves and others who have felt victimized in life.

We think that by holding onto the past hurts and grievances we are somehow condoning their actions or hurting the ones that have caused us pain, but we are the only ones hurt by withholding our love and gratefulness. Learning to forgive is a doorway to gratitude and rearranges our story into one that is more empowering. We can see that we survived, grew stronger, were led to our spiritual path, and many other strengths and possibilities that opened up as a result of the pain we endured. By seeing our gifts, we reorganize our past, and move into a new story.

A victim archetype is deeply engrained in our culture and the mass consciousness. Our media is constantly reinforcing this sense of victimhood by focusing the news and views on fear, violence, and abuses of power. We cannot truly forgive and still maintain a victim consciousness. Forgiveness challenges us to radically shift our perception of the world and our interpretations of what happens to us in our lives. It requires great courage, commitment and conscious effort to turn back the tide of victim consciousness.

The important thing to recognize is that forgiveness is an opportunity to free ourselves from our suffering and the tyranny of our attachments, beliefs and limited world view. To transform energies we must feel them fully. To transform the energy of victim, we must feel totally victimized. To transform the energy of fear, we need to feel terrorized. To transform the energy of hate, we allow ourselves to be consumed by hatred. This does not mean we should wallow in our negative feelings. We only need to experience our emotion and the corresponding body sensations. It is only when we have fully felt the emotions connected with these energies that we gain the ability to move into full forgiveness of the ones we feel caused them. In this way we take back our power. When we can recognize ourselves in others we enter a place of peace, fulfillment and interconnectedness.

Forgiveness is a practice of moving through and letting go of our victim consciousness. It helps us to grow and evolve. You cannot force it, as it often happens over time. But you can begin to consider the benefits you will receive. Forgiving constitutes a blessing bestowed on another by a gracious heart. It does not make us better, bigger, wiser or somehow more evolved. It removes the blinders from our hardened heart so we can count our blessings. If we could know the secret history of those who have caused us pain, we would find in each person's life agony, torment and suffering enough to disarm all of our hostility. Abuse is a learned behavior, so is forgiveness and

gratitude. Resentments, disagreements and estrangements hurt all parties because they reinforce the feelings of separation that are at the heart of all suffering. Forgiveness calls forth a new human that is fully participating in the journey of personal and global healing.



## **Exercise #1: Forgiveness Practice**

Make a list of people who you feel have hurt, wronged or in any way caused you pain. You might want to also make a list of any one you might have intentionally or unintentionally caused pain or harm to and work with forgiving yourself. In each case explore the possible gifts you might have gotten from the incident. What are your actual feelings, thoughts and sensations around the situation? Pay particular attention to where you might be holding energy in your body around this incident. When you have truly let go, you will experience a release in that area of your body.

Go through the list and pick one person you feel you are ready to forgive. Write a practice letter to this person to assess if you are really ready to let go of your grievance. If they are still alive contact them and express your forgiveness and let them know what you have learned from what happened. If they are deceased create a ritual or ceremony to express your forgiveness. You might use one of the elements like fire and write down what you want to express and burn it. If you are not willing to let go, forgive yourself and express your willingness to at least have considered the possibility. Forgiveness is a process of letting go and raising your consciousness to a loving vibration.

***When you hold resentment toward another, you are bound to that person or condition by an emotional link that is stronger than steel. Forgiveness is the only way to dissolve that link and get free.***

Catherine Ponder

## Buddhist Monk Story

Two Buddhist Monks were on a journey, one was an elder monk, the other a younger monk. During their journey they approached a raging river and on the riverbank stood a young lady. She was clearly concerned about how she would get to the other side of the river without drowning.

The younger monk walked straight past her without giving it a thought as he crossed the river. The older monk picked up the woman and carried her across the river. He placed her down, they parted ways and on they went with their journey.

As the journey went on, the older monk could see some concern on the younger monk's mind and asked what was wrong. The younger monk replied, "How could you carry her like that? You know we can't touch women, it's against our way of life." The older monk answered, "I left the woman at the river's edge a long way back, why are you still carrying her?"



## Tending Your Inner Garden

*When the inner garden is under cultivation and Spirit is present, harvests are regular events.  
The fruits? Things like courage, hope, love, endurance, joy, and lots of peace.*

Gordon MacDonald

A wonderful metaphor for our inner life is to imagine it as a fertile garden. Whatever we plant there grows. If we sow seeds of fear, anger, separation and suffering our garden will resemble a garbage strewn abandoned inner city lot. But if we sow seeds of love, gratitude, joy, light and possibility we will reap a rich golden harvest of beauty, connection, abundance, health and prosperity.

Assess the current state of your own inner garden by using your imagination and traveling inward. Set your intention to experience yourself as a garden. Check the soil. Is it rich and fertile, does it have adequate water and nutrients, are the roots strong, are the things you wanted to plant in your life's garden healthy, beautiful and bearing fruit? Is your garden receiving the light of inspiration, the love of self-caring and the protection from predators that it needs? Don't judge it; just make an honest assessment of the current health of your inner garden. Now imagine what the garden would look like if it truly represented the passion, play and meaning that you long for in your life.

Our environmental and cultural conditioning can become deeply rooted in our inner garden. These deep roots come from our social conditioning, cultural beliefs, the views we have taken on from the incessant media bombardment we are exposed to on a daily basis, and own life experiences. When we truthfully explore and examine these beliefs we can begin to see how

deeply they are shaping our actions and ways of being in the world. When we see the costly energy drain these beliefs have on the soil of our inner garden, we will want to begin to weed our garden and to plant new of seeds that better represent our soul's longing.

By examining what is growing in our garden on a regular basis we can continue to weed out those beliefs, opinions, judgments and assumptions that are not serving our highest good. Beliefs such as self-doubt, shame, fear, unworthiness, anger and despair make good compost. Imagine yourself pulling these up by the roots and clearing your garden. What are the seeds that you really, in your heart of hearts, want to plant? How about love, compassion, joy, interconnection, peace, prosperity, health, happiness and fulfillment for starters?





## **Exercise #1: Journey to Cultivate Your Inner Garden**

Find a comfortable place to lie down and focus your attention on your breath, feeling the expansion in your heart. Imagine yourself in a beautiful place in nature. Sink into the earth and travel in your mind to your inner garden and experience the inner beauty that is already there. It is moist and fertile with beautiful fruits. See yourself in the garden and pulling out any of the plants that you are ready to remove. Throw them on the compost pile. Look at the beauty of your garden and give thanks to the spirit caretakers of your garden. Connect with the heartbeat of the earth, remembering that we are nature and the impulse of the earth is to grow and thrive. Give thanks to the elements and the earth for the beautiful garden of your heart and bring yourself back from your meditation.



*Easter Morning in Wales*

David Whyte

A garden inside me, unknown, secret  
neglected for years  
the layers of its soil deep and thick  
trees in the corners with branching arms  
and the tangled briars like broken nets...  
Sunrise through the misted orchard  
morning sun turns silver on the pointed twigs.

I have awoken from the sleep of ages and  
I am not sure if I am really seeing,  
or dreaming, or simply astonished!

Walking towards Sunrise  
To have stumbled into the garden  
Where the stone was rolled  
From the tomb of longing!

## Engaging in a Daily Practice

*The goal of practice is always to keep our beginner's mind.*

Shunryu Suzuki

Practice is a discipline. You don't need to get it right all the time, you just need to do it. To live a shamanic way of life means that you practice every day. You find ways to remind yourself to engage in the rituals, ceremonies and activities of your path. One of the most important ways to keep going when you are distracted or don't want to (the most important time to engage in practice) is to surround yourself with friends that remind you of who you are when you forget. You are the Divine, trying to remember your true nature.

Shamanism is a way of life. It is a practice. It is not about getting somewhere, but being fully where you are and experiencing the fullness of your Divine nature. It is a practice of being wholly present and listening deeply to the wisdom of the natural world of which we are an integral part. Shamanism is about learning to live a life filled with joy and light. It teaches us how to uncover and radiate our true essence out into the world. Shamanic journeying is a process of accessing the deeper inner wisdom and guidance of our spirit guides who have always been there to support, inform, inspire and guide us through our journey through life. *(See the Appendix on learning how to do shamanic journeying.)*

Practicing Shamanism is not about becoming a shaman. A shaman is one who has been designated as such by their tribe. Practicing shamanism is learning to be guided by Spirit as a way of being in the world. It is a way of improving the quality of our lives, a way of living a spiritual life. A shamanic practitioner is one who travels outside of time and enters into a spiritual state of

consciousness into the hidden realms many call Non-Ordinary Reality or dreamtime. In these realms we find spirit guides and power animals or helping spirits that can provide healing, advise us on issues and help us to reach a deeper way of knowing.

***Three things to remember in any discipline: Practice, Practice and Practice!***

### **Exercise #1: Journey to Meet a Spirit Guide**

Read the section on shamanic journeying in the *Appendix*. Journey to the upper world to meet an Ancestor, Spirit guide or Spirit helper. Ask them what medicine and healing they are bringing you today. Ask them for a healing and how to best work with them.

### **Exercise #2: Spirit Guidance for Discovering Best Practices**

Again journey to the upper world to meet with an Ancestor, Spirit Guide or Spirit helper. Ask them to show you practices that would support living a shamanic way of life. Express your gratitude to your spirit guide and come back to Ordinary Reality. Write down the guidance you received and put the practices into action.

## *The Journey*

Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew  
what you had to do, and began,  
though the voices around you  
kept shouting  
their bad advice --  
though the whole house  
began to tremble  
and you felt the old tug  
at your ankles.  
"Mend my life!"  
each voice cried.  
But you didn't stop.

You knew what you had to do,  
though the wind pried  
with its stiff fingers  
at the very foundations,  
though their melancholy  
was terrible.

It was already late  
enough, and a wild night,  
and the road full of fallen  
branches and stones.

But little by little,  
as you left their voices behind,  
the stars began to burn  
through the sheets of clouds,  
and there was a new voice  
which you slowly  
recognized as your own,  
that kept you company  
as you strode deeper and deeper  
into the world,  
determined to do  
the only thing you could do --  
determined to save  
the only life you could save.

## **Practicing Humility**

***It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels.***

Saint Augustine

We have an epidemic of loneliness in our culture. One in four people in the U.S. have no one to call in case of an emergency. It is our ego that keeps us separate and is constantly measuring our sense of self-worth against the perceived feedback from the outer world. When we begin to see the numinous beauty in others we experience it in ourselves and thereby elevate the level of love and goodness in the world. A shamanic practitioner knows that the work they do is coming through them as Spirit. They are merely messengers, a hollow bone or conduit for the Divine to flow through. Humility is about getting over ourselves.

Humility is an antidote to pride, which could be confused with self-love. Self-love honors whatever is arising within and without us with compassion. When we practice humility we soften and open, we are spacious and receptive to the world and let go of the need to be seen or special. A humble person is someone who meets life with a beginner's mind and admits his mistakes and shortcomings with grace and ease. A self-centered person does not admit his faults easily. He is fearful and prone to blaming others for his own mistakes. A proud person is often stubborn and angry. He does not value another person's suggestions and ideas.

***The key to catching the rapidly rising wave of evolving consciousness  
and riding it to the shore of awakened awareness is humility.***

Daniel Reid

To be humble is to simplify and step back from the complexity of the illusory world we call reality. Physics is proving what the great masters have been saying all along, that consciousness is not only the foundation of Creation, it is the fabric of the entire universe. If we wish to change the world, we must change the consciousness within ourselves, not the external forms of the outside world. To overcome the arrogance of ego and cultivate the virtues of humility, which allow us to evolve spiritually, we can develop compassion towards our inner terrain and the suffering of the external world. When we take responsibility for the projections of our inner world we act in harmony with the natural order of the universe.

The practice of humility teaches us compassion, gentleness and kindness. A humble person can be approached easily and shows interest in the wellbeing of others. Humility extends beyond human interaction and includes our relationship with the elements of nature, the seasons and the unseen spirits. In fact seeing nature and the universe as a larger system of which we are but a small part naturally breeds humility.

A humble person avoids attracting the attention of others. He is thoughtful because he is not self-centered. He has consideration for others' views and is even tempered. He consults others and seeks their advice. He is not over-ridden by others' views, but draws his own conclusions. A humble person is not a puppet in the hands of others. He is considerate for others and attempts to not hurt anybody's feelings. He is gentle, gracious and giving. A humble person tends to be optimistic and sees the brighter side of things.

## **Exercise #1: Developing Humility**

- Begin with honestly assessing and accepting your limitations. Competition breeds separation, work towards co-creation. Be grateful for the skills and talents you do have and learn from others with greater skills than you.
- Recognize your faults, limitations and the strategies that limit your full self-expression. Love them and learn from them. Know that nothing is fixed and that you are always in Divine perfection. Growth and improvement is a lifelong process that never stops happening, even when you're very skilled at something.
- Be grateful for what you have. Acknowledge all the people who helped and guided you along the way. Take the time to thank them for their contributions. Don't take all the credit for your accomplishments.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes, it's how we learn and grow. Admit them openly, honestly and with humility. Your authenticity will inspire others.
- Avoid tooting your own horn and look for opportunities to recognize those who contributed to your success. It's okay to have a healthy self-esteem and to feel proud of your accomplishments, but nobody likes it when someone constantly tries to bring attention to themselves and their own achievements.
- Listen and be considerate in conversations. God gave you two ears and one mouth. Use them accordingly. Recognize that everyone, including you, has their own goals and dreams and they may want to talk about their achievements and their opinions on things.



## **Story of Pride and Humility**

Ferdinand de Lesseps was a famous engineer. He planned and executed the construction of the Suez Canal. His plan was successful and the execution of the canal was successfully completed. He was very proud of his engineering competence and skill. He boasted about it and showed it to others.

Next he was asked to plan and execute the construction of the Panama Canal. He was so proud of his ability and engineering competence that he ignored the suggestions of the young engineers. He would laugh away their valuable suggestions. The young engineers suggested to him to use the system of locks and gates, which were necessary keeping in view the inclination of the terrain, but Ferdinand was haughty and proud. He was not at all humble and meek. He considered his knowledge and experience superior to those of the others. He followed his own plan in the construction of the canal. His plan was a failure. It had to be abandoned resulting in a colossal loss of labor and money in the execution of his plan.

Later the suggestion of the young engineers was implemented. It was a great success. Ferdinand de Lesseps had to eat his humble pie, because he did not accept the advice of the young engineers and local people with humility.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first Rashtrapati of free India was a fine example of humility. He was a member of the Constitution Making Committee, which was responsible for framing the constitution of free India, yet he was not proud. Whenever there was a convention of the Indian National Congress, he did not seek an important post. He often joined the volunteers. He was so humble that he served water and looked for other ways to be helpful to the delegates. This was

very striking for the visitors. He was a very senior leader and could claim any important post, but in extreme humility he did not hesitate to accept being an ordinary volunteer there to serve.  
(From an article by Swati Gupta)



## ***Being of Service***

***The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.***  
Mahatma Gandhi

The happiest people on the planet are those who have learned how to serve. To give ourselves to a path of service is not particularly good or noble, it probably won't make a lot of money, but it will make you happy and bring greater meaning into your life. Being of service teaches us humility and compassion — it dissolves the barriers of separation at the heart of all conflict in the world. A shaman lives in service to the whole of the community and the web of life.

When we begin to love and honor our own heart and are practicing humility, the natural calling is to be of service. Being of service to something — a person, a group, a community, a cause or a belief — means that we've chosen to engage without expectation of reciprocation. To be of service to something aligns us with what truly matters and is consistent with our values. It's this alignment that allows us to give simply because it matters.

One caution to be aware of in living a life of service: you are not being of service if you are not taking care of your own basic needs of health, happiness, self-expression and love. Being a martyr is not being of service. One who serves does it because it matters. We serve because we care and caring comes from a connected heart, from our humanity, and working for the love and goodness of being an offering to the world.

*I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.*

Albert Schweitzer

### **Exercise #1: Where Will I Serve?**

Some people have a hard time finding where to best invest their time and resources in service. A good way to get started is to look at your complaints and what really upsets you in life. It might be cruelty to animals, war making, child abuse, environmental destruction. There are no shortages of causes to become involved in. To find your own unique place to serve take the one that most enrages you. Then let go of the rage, look at your vision of how it could be and get to work on that. A powerful vision is not about what we are against, but what we are for, so work to bring that about.

## **Heaven and Hell: Parable of the Long Spoons**

One day a man said to God, "God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like."

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled delicious and made the man's mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, "You have seen Hell."

Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man's mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The man said, "I don't understand."

God smiled. "It is simple," he said. "Love only requires one skill. These people learned early on to share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves."

Sometimes, thinking of our personal gratification, we forget our interdependence with everyone and everything around us. Not to help our fellow human beings simply means harming our very selves, since we are all connected on a very deep level.

***If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.  
If you want to be happy, practice compassion.***  
Dalai Lama



## Being in a Spiritual Community

Spiritual communities provide benefits we can't find in other social circles. Throughout history, people have sought out such communities for personal and spiritual development in their lives. With our society moving at a faster and more detached manner due to technology, busy schedules and the frequency at which we change jobs, homes and locations, it makes it harder and harder to feel any sense of community. Shamanic practitioners belong to the web of life and the earth community, but still need to connect with other humans in our natural role as protectors and caretakers of the earth. Yet, statistics show a startling decrease in connectedness in the past decade with Americans having a third fewer close friends and confidants than just two decades ago — a sign that people may be living lonelier, more isolated lives than in the past.

*USA Today* reports that one in four people in the U.S. have no one to call and confide in for support or in an emergency. What a sad and shocking statistic, especially in light of the increasing need for us to work and live more connected, supportive and interactive lives. Isolation tends to beget a sense of loneliness and depression not to mention the breakdown that can occur in communities due to a detachment from others — increased violence, substance abuse, mental illness and so forth. The paradox is that we are already completely connected with all other people and life on this planet. So how do we find a community that supports our values and challenges, and nourishes our soul?

When we visit communities that we are drawn to, we need to open all our senses and trust our heart. Is there an atmosphere of warmth and love that is honest, authentic and open hearted? Is this group connected and do they have responsible communications skills? Are they inclusive or exclusive? Do they teach how to develop a deeper relationship with Spirit? It's important to

know yourself enough to know what you are looking for. If you want an in-depth spiritual training program, you will need to find a place that offers that. If you mostly want a social spiritual group, then look for that. Take your time, trust your heart, and treat yourself to a spiritual community that will help you grow and deepen your connection with Spirit. You might also want to start your own community, by holding visioning circles, having pot lucks or just getting together to discuss a book, video or program you like. It is important to have regular times to meet so that you build trust and authenticity over time.

***It is possible that the next Buddha will not take the form of an individual.  
The next Buddha may take the form of a community - a community practicing  
understanding and loving kindness, a community practicing  
mindful living. This may be the most important thing  
we can do for the survival of the earth.***

Thích Nhất Hạnh

Belonging to a community of people committed to spiritual growth and learning how to be more loving, compassionate and peaceful in our lives will accelerate the path of living a shamanic way of life, even if it isn't a shamanic community. Where love is concerned, all roads lead to the heart. The work of shamans has traditionally focused on the health and wellness of the community and the entire population generally participates in the restorative rituals and ceremonies. Individual healing and guidance takes place within the larger context of journeying for wisdom, guidance and healing for the good the entire tribe. Living a shamanic way of life means being of service to the community.



## **Exercise #1: Finding My Community**

Take the time to journal about what you want in a community. Of course we are all already part of many communities, and you may just want to look and see what part you want to play in serving your larger community. What part of your community nourishes you spiritually?

Write down the values, actions and ways of being in a community you would want to join. Are these ways of being consistent with the way you are currently living your life? If not begin to find ways to integrate these actions and ways of being into your daily interactions with others and towards yourself. Find people with common spiritual goals in an already existing community or begin to invite others to join you in building a community. The importance of community is to move from an “I-me” mentality to a “We-us” sense of kinship. A powerful spiritual community is one where we can drop the pretense of our identity and open to our interconnectedness with each other and all life.

*A Community of the Spirit*

Rumi

There is a community of the spirit.

Join it, and feel the delight  
of walking in the noisy street  
and being the noise.

Drink all your passion,  
and be a disgrace.  
Close both eyes  
to see with the other eye.

Open your hands,  
if you want to be held.

Quit acting like a wolf, and feel  
the shepherd's love filling you.

Sit down in the circle.

At night, your beloved wanders.

Don't accept consolations.  
Close your mouth against food.  
Taste the lover's mouth in yours.  
You moan, "She left me." "He left me."  
Twenty more will come.

Be empty of worrying.  
Think of who created thought!

Why do you stay in prison  
when the door is so wide open?

Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking.  
Live in silence.  
Flow down and down in always  
widening rings of being.

## Epilogue

If we would just integrate these 14 practices of living a shamanic way of life we could transform the state of the planet into one of beauty, love, compassion and peace in a very short time. I invite you to join me in bringing these practices into our daily lives. We live in exciting times of change. While our ancestors have been around for about six million years, the modern form of humans, *Homo sapiens*, only evolved from about 200,000 years ago. Barbara Marx Hubbard and other evolutionary thinkers are calling the currently emerging stage of social evolution the universal human.

Hubbard asserts that “this new type of human began to appear about 5,000 years ago in Israel, India, Persia, Greece, China, the Middle East. We identify some of these humans as Isaiah, Buddha, Zoroaster, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Lao-tzu, Confucius, Jesus, Mohammed and others, advanced human beings who gave fuller expression to the Great Creating Process in themselves. In these people the Consciousness Force Itself broke through into human awareness. These advanced beings founded the religions and the ethical systems of the world, calling all of us to evolve to a higher state of freedom through creative unions of love.” There is great evidence that this “Christ consciousness” is currently being awakened in all of us at this time. The biggest obstacle is to move beyond the illusion of being a separate identity and towards what evolution is pulling for, a species that is intimately and integrally connected with the web of life itself.

Shamanism has been on the leading edge of this evolutionary transition and carried the earth wisdom for at least 50,000 years. It has continued to evolve to meet the changing times and conditions. Every major change that has happened in the evolution of the earth and our species has happened in a very short time. As we move into this new epoch it is important that we

accelerate our own inner transformation so that we can be co-creators of the new world that is emerging, with or without us.

The many planetary crises that are currently taking place, the breaking down of our institutions, corporations, social and economic systems are totally appropriate as they are no longer viable in the new emerging world order. We are expanding in consciousness and re-creating the world in new ways. As Bob Dylan said, "Your old road is rapidly aging, Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand, for the times they are a-changing!" The age of awakening the Spirit within is here. There is arising in our midst, for the first time, a more universal humanity. This is the time we have been waiting for and it is you that makes all the difference. May we make the transition with grace, ease and peace in our hearts.

With love and gratitude,  
michael

*For Belonging*

John O'Donohue

May you listen to your longing to be free.  
May the frames of your belonging be generous enough for your dreams.  
May you arise each day with a voice of blessing whispering in your heart.  
May you find a harmony between your soul and your life.  
May the sanctuary of your soul never become haunted.  
May you know the eternal longing that lives at the heart of time.  
May there be kindness in your gaze when you look within.  
May you never place walls between the light and yourself.  
May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world to gather you,  
mind you, and embrace you in belonging.

## **Appendix: The Shamanic Journey**

One of the most important tools of shamanism is called a journey. Journeying is an invaluable tool for accessing the deep inner wisdom of our ancestors and the Spirit that lives in all things. It allows one to access intuitive and instinctual information that is often blocked by ego and the entrenched and unexamined beliefs and assumptions of our prevailing culture. By tapping into the larger field of Non-Ordinary Reality, the practitioner can find new ways to understand any situation, resolve seemingly unresolvable inner and external conflicts, and access information that the linear, belief bound mind could never resolve.

Shamanic journeying has been a common practice in indigenous cultures throughout history. A shamanic practitioner's ability to retrieve vital information is achieved by going into an altered state of consciousness, beyond time and space, to travel into other realms of reality. It is a process that can empower us to find wholeness, balance and harmony in our work and personal lives. This process of direct revelation allows us to retrieve helpful information and guidance from what shamans call helping spirits.

There are many different ways to journey. It takes practice, but everyone has the capacity to enter this state of awareness and use these techniques. Shamans enter other realms, generally referred to as the Lower, Middle, and Upper worlds to access information. Typically, practitioners use some sort of percussion instrument like a drum or rattle to move from our normal beta state of consciousness, into an alpha or relaxed state and then into a theta state. This theta state is what allows practitioners to enter the invisible realms where we can connect with our spirit guides and power animals. With practice, focus and intention you can learn to access these states without using percussion instruments. They are used to assist us in entering these

meditative states of consciousness. In these states, which Carlos Castaneda called Non-Ordinary Reality, we can bypass the limited worldview of our contemporary culture and our restrictive belief systems. (*You can download a shamanic journeying soundtrack at [www.CenterforShamanicStudies.com](http://www.CenterforShamanicStudies.com).*)

## **Non-Ordinary Reality**

In these invisible realms of Non-Ordinary Reality there are a variety of helping spirits that can assist the practitioner with healing, problem solving, and removing blocks to creativity, clarity and productivity. The most common forms that we can work with and receive guidance from in this altered state are power animals and spirit guides and teachers. Shamanic cultures believe that we are born with one or more power animals that are our protectors and guardians. Spirit guides can take the form of ancestors, gods and goddesses, religious figures or even super heroes.

There are many ways that practitioners can receive information from spirit guides and power animals. You might hear a voice communicating with you (clairaudient), or you might see a scene or image (clairvoyant), or you might experience a feeling (clairsentient). The important thing is to open up all of your senses and relax and take exactly what comes to you. It could be a smell or a felt sense or just a knowing. The biggest deterrent to shamanic journeying is effort. You can only reach these states by relaxing, letting go of preconceived notions and releasing the need to do something.

## **Lower World**

The Lower World is often seen as earthy, with dense colors, and usually appears as a quiet place in nature looking almost pre-human. It is filled with forests, deserts, jungles, mountains, rivers and grasslands. Every practitioner will have his or her own unique view of the different realms. Power animals are the primary guides in this world, but different spirit guides may also appear. The shamanic Lower World is absolutely *not* associated with anything dark, 'bad' or evil. That idea belongs to a completely different cosmology, often a Christian religious belief system or spiritual landscape.

There are many ways to access the Lower World. You might imagine a place in nature where there is a lake or body of water and dive in, go down the roots of a tree, into a tunnel, volcano, cave or some crevice in the earth. Once you find a way in, you transition down a tunnel or path that takes you to the Lower World. When you enter this world, coming out into the light, it might appear much like this one, except more earthy and elemental.

## **Upper World**

When people go to the Upper World they often experience it as more ethereal, airy and bright with a range of colors from light pastels to dark cloud-like forms. The landscapes in the Upper World can be vague and cloudlike, with crystal castles, opaque scenery and whimsical environments. People have varied experiences like a feeling of standing on clouds or floating on air. Seasoned shamans experience numerous levels or strata in both Upper and Lower World journeys.



There are many ways to enter into the Upper World. You might climb a tree, a rope or a rainbow, fly on a magic carpet or get a ride with a giant bird or flying creature. You can also ask your power animal to take you there. Some people use the wind or a tornado to simply lift them up. It is useful to start from a place in nature that you know and love and travel upwards from there. The process has at its heart the feeling of rising upward through the cosmos into a transition stage that might appear as a fog or a cloud layer that acts as a portal to the Upper Worlds.

## **Middle World**

The Middle World represents the spiritual dimensions of our physical world. In this world we can communicate with the spirits that live in all things, which exist in present reality. It is a place to go and get advice and understanding about what is happening in our personal, relational and work lives. In this realm practitioners can connect with the spirits of nature for advice, find lost objects, send healing prayers and energy, or clear the energy in a specific location. You can also connect with someone in another location without using a telephone or computer to offer support or receive guidance. The Middle World is a place to connect with the deeper cycles and phases of the natural world in order to get a better sense of how they impact our physical, emotional and mental functioning in the constantly changing seasons of time. This allows us to make changes in our lives and communities that are consistent and aligned with nature rather than working in opposition to the web of life.

Traveling in the Middle World, you are in present time, invisibly moving through the physical world of forms, objects and nature. You can pass through the veil of Ordinary Reality to diagnose a situation or assess what is the best way to proceed. You can communicate with trees, rivers and the stars and obtain guidance, travel to distant lands to observe what is happening in another

location, or bring healing to someone who has gone through a trauma. Middle World journeying is not a substitute to spending real time in nature. We have an innate need to visit natural places to restore our sense of balance, harmony, and to remember our interconnectedness with the web of life. It is here that we find peace, solitude, and clarity while receiving healing from the elements and nature beings. It is our connection with nature that is the ultimate source of our personal power.

When we journey we have complete control of where we go, who and what we communicate with and when we want to come back. While it is amazing how similar many people's journeys are there is no set form or rules for traveling in Non-Ordinary Reality. What is important is to have a clear intention of what you want to know and be open to what you receive and experience. One of the most challenging issues for people when they first start to journey is to trust the process and get out of the way.

## **Power Animals and Teachers**

The two primary types of helping spirits that we encounter on a shamanic journey are power animals or guardian spirits, and teachers in human form. Once you meet your guardians and teachers it is important to take time to get to know them. In this way you can receive their gifts and find out why they are in your life. You will likely have primary teachers and power animals that stay with you as you deepen your relationship over time and others who will come and go based on need at the time of their appearance. Over time you will build trust and begin to rely on their guidance, inspiration and healing powers.

Shamans believe that we are all born with at least one power animal whose purpose is to guide and protect us whether we are aware of them or not. When we have a power animal it is not a singular personality, although it may have its own peculiar look and attributes. Our power animal represents the entire species of that animal, not just a single entity. It is also possible that you might receive a mythological creature such as a unicorn or dragon or an extinct animal. The gifts of that species are the gifts that they bring to you. One species is not more powerful than another. They each have important lessons to teach us. It is important that you learn the qualities you are receiving from your power animal and not rely on books or other people's interpretations. This is a system of direct revelation and what your power animal has to tell you is personal and unique to your life situation.

In addition to power animals, shamanic practitioners rely on teachers in human form. These often take the form of historical and religious figures, ancestral spirits, and gods and goddesses. What is important is to stay open to what figures emerge and not to censor or change what you get with your rational mind.

Helping spirits communicate through metaphor and symbols. Everything that happens in a journey can have meaning and significance. Pay attention to details. Open all the senses to receive the answers to your questions. One experience can have multiple meanings and interpretations. Our helping spirits come to us to serve us in times of need. They are there to answer questions, heal illness, guide our journey and support the expression of our most essential and authentic selves. It is important to learn to trust them and accept their guidance. You must learn to treat them with respect, to thank them for their service and ask them what they need from you. By honoring them we build a powerful relationship built on trust, gratitude and mutual respect.

## Preparing to Journey

A shamanic journey is always intentional, deliberate and focused. To journey, one needs clarity, presence, and a sense of purpose. It is important to clear our mind through meditation, movement or singing before embarking on a journey. Your power comes from your helping spirits, not from your ego, knowledge or cleverness. A shaman becomes what they call a “hollow bone,” an instrument through which the power of the universe can flow.

A journey begins with a clear sense of purpose and intention. We first formulate a question we would like to ask our power animal or spirit guide. Make your question simple and concise. The best questions are singular and begin with where, what, how and who. Answers to multiple questions can be confusing. You are trying to get as much information as possible from your spirit guide, so avoid yes/no types of dualistic questions.

As you begin to drum or listen to drumming, you concentrate on and repeat the question several times as you enter into Non-Ordinary Reality. Let go of the monkey mind and concerns of the day and focus on the drumming and intention of the journey. Find a time of day to journey when your mind isn't cluttered with work and details. You might want to do a journey to ask your spirit helper the best and most productive way to prepare for a journey.

Find a quiet, comfortable place to lie down or sit where you are comfortable but won't fall asleep. Be sure to turn off your phones and shut down any electronic devices that might interfere with your journey. Some people prefer to use a blindfold or darken the room. Begin by taking some deep breaths and releasing any tension or chatter on the out breath. Open your heart, relax the mind and bring your focus to breathing, imagining it going right into the center of your heart.

Shamans “see with their hearts.” If you lose your concentration during your journey, simply come back to this heart breath and repeat your intention. Visualize your starting place in nature, which will launch your journey to the Upper, Lower or Middle World and leave your everyday world behind.

It is important to clearly define when you are entering into and leaving Non-Ordinary Reality. Your journey needs to be focused and deliberate, a sacred time to work with your spirit guides. If you find that a noise or intrusion interrupts you or brings you out of the journey, simply refocus on the drumming and heart breathing, allowing yourself to return to where you were in the journey. To signal a time to come back from the journey it is common to use a return beat, which commonly consists of 4 sets of 7 short beats followed by rapid drumming and another set of 4 sets of seven beats. Be sure to thank your spirit guides and say goodbye before beginning to journey back the same way you entered your journey.

Treat your journey time as if you were entering a church or sacred sanctuary, because you are! People have been traveling to these other worlds for tens of thousands of years. You are stepping into what biochemist and philosopher Rupert Sheldrake calls a field of morphic resonance, a collective memory that is inherent in nature and natural systems. We are accessing the wisdom of the ages.

After quietly reflecting on your journey you might want to take notes about key points and pertinent information.

## **Your First Journey: Lower World to Meet a Power Animal**

I suggest you make your first journey to the Lower World to connect with and establish a relationship with a power animal. Put on the journeying soundtrack you can download from [www.CenterforShamanicStudies.com](http://www.CenterforShamanicStudies.com).

Take time to center and ground yourself through meditation, dance or singing. When you are ready turn on your drumming and imagine yourself in a beautiful place in nature. It is good to choose a place you love and know well. Close your eyes and take some deep breaths. Look around with your mind's eye and find a place to enter the earth. Use the suggestions we spoke of earlier in this chapter. You could also see yourself going down in an elevator. Go through this transitions tunnel and you will see yourself moving towards a light.

Step out into the light of the Lower World and notice your surroundings. You are in a place of beauty. Look around and notice the trees, sky, plants and any animals that are in your vicinity. When you see an animal ask it, "Are you my power animal?" If it says "No", move on. If the animal says "Yes," start by building a relationship with him or her. Open all your senses to its responses. You may get a symbol, be taken to see something. You could get a direct answer, image or feeling. Stay open! Find out what teachings, powers, wisdom or skills the power animal has brought you today.

Stay in the journey until you hear the return drum beat. Then ask your power animal if there is anything else it would like to convey to you. Be sure to thank him for his service and go back to your place in nature the same way you came to the Lower World. When doing any journey follow

your instinct and intuition. You do not have to conform to the model I am presenting here, although this is a very common way of visiting the Lower World.

## **Pitfalls to Success**

One of the most common pitfalls in doing a shamanic journey is trying to make it happen. You cannot force the outcome. That comes from the ego and the need to be in control. Surrender is an essential component in this work. Relax the mind, focus on the breath and see what emerges from your heart mind. Pay attention to all the details and open all your senses to the experience.

Another pitfall is dealing with our monkey minds. We are constantly being bombarded with input and stimulation in our culture. It is useful to have a meditation or mindfulness practice to enhance your ability to focus and concentrate. The more deeply you can let go, the more fully you will be able to enter into these hidden realms. Use your breath to help you come back to presence when you find yourself wandering off. Take yourself right back into the journey experience as soon as you notice you have lost focus or concentration. It is good to take time to get in a relaxed state before beginning a journey.

It is important when doing this work to not add anything to what you receive. If you get a red car with a flat tire, don't make it a Ferrari. Take what you get! Every image, sense, feeling, impression and experience needs to be taken in as it comes to you. Don't be impatient. Just wait until an image, symbol or felt sense comes to you. If you can't remember something, just take what you do remember because that is what is important. You can always go back to the scene in another journey and gather more information.

It is important to be very clear about your intention and how you formulate your questions to your spirit guides. Make them simple, concise and open-ended so you get the greatest possible amount of information from your guide. If you begin to get lost during your journey, simply restate your intention over and over as you notice your breath. Most of all enjoy yourself as you deepen your proficiency to access this Non-Ordinary Reality. And please, don't take yourself too seriously. There is a direct correlation between learning and play!

