

# JOURNEYING WITH THE SPIRIT WORLD

by Marian Vitali, DC



## Call And Response

I recognized a familiar feeling that I was having inside my body – an inner bubbling. This time it was also accompanied by curiosity and an invisible pull to go to a weekend workshop. With these propelling me, off I went to “The Way of the Shaman” taught by Michael Harner, an anthropologist who brought core shamanism into the modern world, through the classic shamanic journey. My initial experience with shamanic journeying began fourteen years ago when I attended that workshop.

The workshop description read that the “... participants would be introduced to the classic shamanic journey, which awakens dormant spiritual abilities and connections to nature, through achieving the shamanic state of consciousness.” This sounded very exciting and much like the next step I needed in my development. It also went on to say that we would learn how the journey is used in ordinary life to restore spiritual power and health. Well, that peaked my interest, a practical application to ordinary life derived from the world of spirit. By the way, I really had no idea what shamanic journeying meant nor how it would gently usher light into my wounded places. My bones were hollowing and the winds were singing me into life.

Direct shamanic experience, reflection, weaving the perception of separateness into a whole, is how I found the courage to continue over the years to navigate and integrate what was being awakened. It was after a decade of studying with various shamanic teachers, receiving initiations, going to Peru, and opening up my own perceptions, that I finally heeded the call to start publicly to practice this body of medicine. This call told me: “Go into the community; create ceremony; mentor; offer healing sessions; and teach classes. Create pathways to awaken awareness to spirit. Bring it to life with light, love, and joy.”

## So What Is Shamanic Journeying?

Let’s start easy with a brief orientation synthesized from the fruits of many classes, teachers (spirit form and human), my experiences, and fellow journeyers. Some essential components are: the journeyer’s consciousness; the intention for your travels; the routes of going and returning; your spirit helpers who assist you in the spirit world; and the integration of the journey experience into daily life.

Journeying or shamanic journeying is an accessible experiential practice and method for accessing spiritual guidance. The person who consciously embarks upon this journey is referred to as a journeyer. Sometimes the person who journeys is also a shamanic practitioner or a shaman depending on the culture or the journeyer’s practice. You don’t have to be a shaman or a shamanic practitioner to learn how to journey.

The journeyer “travels” or “takes flight” between physical reality and spirit reality. Most people begin with practices to develop their relationship with the otherworld terrain and with their helping spirits. The journeyer practices sending their spirit (or consciousness) through a specific entry place or portal into the other world for lower, middle, or upper world journeys. Usually a repetitive beat from a drum, rattle, or bells accompanies the journeyer into a receptive yet alert state of mind and consciousness.

One embarks upon a journey with an intention, a purpose for engaging the world of spirit. This intention is on behalf of oneself, another individual, animal, place (home or land), or community. In the spirit world, one forms a relationship or co-joins with benevolent spirit helpers such as power animals, spirit teachers, and spirit guardians. They are in spirit form. The intention for entering the otherworld consciousness is usually for some form of guidance, awareness, or healing. It can take an open form, for example, “Spirit helper, what is best for my spiritual growth at this time?” It can also be very specific, “Power animal, what quality do I need for this particular undertaking?”

Spirit helpers assist us as a source of healing, wisdom, and power. This begins through experiencing their lessons, skills, guidance, wonder, and information related to our intention, during our journey. Your helping spirits, as part of the web of life, have an inherent wisdom. They share their spiritual power and medicine, which at times unfolds in surprising ways. This co-creating awakens and restores spirit in our lives – a wholeness with all of creation.

### **Let's Hear From Fellow Journeyers**

What I have found, through teaching and with private clients, is that most people also have a curiosity or impetus to learn how to access the spirit world for guidance about personal problems, health issues, and life direction. That does seem like a basic drive, sensing or knowing that there is more to reality than what meets the usual eye.

#### **Lisa B.**

"I find the method of journeying to have both structure and openness. It's more accessible and easier for me than other styles of meditation. One of my spirit teachers is a family member who has passed on, and now is a wisdom figure who offers guidance that makes a lot of sense. I had a touching and acceptable solution when my cat from home showed up in a journey oversized in order to give me a ride."

#### **Laura D.**

"Journeying works for me and I feel safe. I like exploring these other realms, setting the intention, and connecting with my power animal and spirit teachers. I was delighted when I retrieved my power animal. It happened to be the same animal that I connect to and gives me signs in everyday life. I feel that I could create a deeper understanding of my Native American heritage with shamanic journeying."

#### **Carmella S.**

"I had no idea how beneficial journeying would be to my life. It was key for me to let the process unfold and direct me to what lessons I could learn. The greatest insight I have received is the knowledge of my own power and that I'm supported by my surroundings to live a more joyful, nurtured life. While journeying, my mind is calm and I'm in a relaxed state. I'm less defensive and able to look at issues from a more pure view. A recent journey was of a playful otter racing through the water. It didn't have a care and approached new surroundings without fear or suspicion. I learned that a lighter touch and a sense of fun was a far better approach to situations than anger, resentment, or inaction."

#### **Len K.**

"Inquiry and evidence are my usual *modus operandi* and with shamanic journeying, I didn't have to put these aside. This practice has been a bridge to what had otherwise been unavailable. It's been a slow process building a deeper relationship with what I also help shape; ultimately I had experiences of the presence of something extraordinary. Here is something that happened to me in ordinary reality. Last year I was being prepared for surgery and I felt my power animal drape herself over me and speak to me saying that she would protect me during surgery. I did not consciously call her to come, she just showed up. I feel my power animal's presence almost daily. It's been exciting to have an opportunity to directly connect to and put into practice what is shared by the indigenous global family."

#### **Noreen R.**

"The messages from journeying give me insights for my life. Some of the experiences are so vivid with imagery, similar to seeing a movie playing non-stop, but in my mind. I'll share part of a journey that was a profound experience...jaguar turned into lion and I embraced lion. Lion was sad and I felt this. I expected lion to be powerful and action oriented, moving. Instead, lion was in a cave resting and renewing. I was told, shown, felt that lion was okay. My tears fell during the journey. I understood the message which lion guided me to. It's okay to be sad, still, and take time to lick the wounds. I'm usually an action-oriented person. At the end of the journey, I embraced lion. I was also embracing myself, all of me, including sad parts that didn't want to move."

#### **Ray H.**

"Keep the door open. To do deep spirit work, I find it mandatory to develop a relationship with spirit guides. Start with one guide; you'll feel safe and supported by knowing your guide is there. I honor and work with them in daily life, for example, with an altar and/or a dream bundle. There is a commitment and trusting in the process of spirit time. What is revealed to me now may prepare me for something down the road. What now? What do

you need me to understand? It unfolds when spirit thinks that I'm ready, instead of pushing the envelope. In Viet Nam, I had a turning point when I drew a picture of an animal, a buck, and kept it with me. I became conscious that somehow it gave me strength. Something was going on. I was receiving its medicine and healing. Whether through vision questing, journeying, or dreamwork, it's an on going process of developing relationships with your spirit guides."

**Martha M.**

"Marian teaches in a way that has made shamanic journeying possible to talk to my very soul. I've found an expansion of wisdom coming through my spirit helpers. This experience fills me with inner peace. I would like to share an amazing journey with the intention for healing a particular part of my body ... that part of my body turned black and I saw that area down to the bones. I felt a release of dense energy. I was relieved that the pain was gone. Then that area started to be rebuilt. I felt light and anew. It was an experience that set this area of my body in a new direction of health."

**Dancing Between The Worlds**

One way to think of shamanic journeying is to compare it to dance. Let's begin with a circle dance – there is a letting go and being in the group process; then a partnered dance – there is a receptive and active part; and in a solo dance – there is a free creative element.

This dance is a shift within my consciousness so that I can take flight to otherworld places. This shift, which is a core practice of shamanic journeying, has been shared, observed, experienced, and written about within historical and contemporary cultures.

More than anything, it's a dance of connection, linking us to our fuller selves, the wider web of life, which sustains our co-creativity. There is an awe-inspiring mystery quite alive in this dance. **May you join the dance and enjoy the journey.**

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