

Therapeutic Shamanism: OK, I've got a Power Animal. Now what?



In terms of journeying itself, the main thing (as with most things) is to practice! First, if you haven't already, get a CD or MP3 of drumming (you can download or order them from the shop section on the college website). When doing a journey...

1. Decide on a clear intent for the journey and fix it in your mind (there are some ideas for journeys further down on this page). You will often find that without a clear intent, journeys are vague and unfocused.
2. Make sure the door is locked and that you won't be disturbed (this will help you to relax and let go into it, as well as sparing you a nasty shock if you are disturbed).
3. Ideally put headphones on to cut out background noise. Blindfold on.
4. Hollow out (spend some time being aware of your breathing, relaxing your body, and deliberately stepping aside from your middleworld stuff)
5. Then to your axis mundi with your power animal, tell your power animal your intent, and off you go.

Safe, sane shamanic practice needs to be firmly rooted. From a shamanic point of view most westerners have a very poor relationship with mother earth, and are ungrounded, and top-heavy. In terms of what to journey on in terms of developing your practice, there is a natural sequence of things. Plants are great and wise teachers, and show us how to learn shamanism in a grounded strong and healthy way. Think of how a plant grows from seed. First it puts roots down and reaches down into mother earth, and then it draws her energy up into itself. Only once that is done does it reach up to father sky, and draw his energy down into itself. Only once the plant has a strong connection with both the lower and upper worlds does it then expand itself sideways into the middleworld. So, lowerworld first, then upperworld, and only then middleworld.

When people are new to journeying though, there is a really strong tendency for middleworld stuff to bleed into their lowerworld journeys, and for people to drift from the lowerworld into the middleworld without realising it. This because we are used to being in the middleworld, and because most of the stuff that we are preoccupied with are middleworld issues. So, to be able to do real lowerworld journeys, and develop a relationship with real lowerworld transcendent beings, it is simple essential to know which world you are in. Eventually you develop a strong feel for the different realms, but initially you need to learn to look out for the signs. The lowerworld is the realm of pure nature, with no human domestication or taming. Humans are to be found in the lowerworld (as we are part of nature) but living as hunter-gatherers. That is pre-farming. So there are no hedges, fields, fences in the lowerworld. Buildings are scarce, and low-tech – yurts, tipis, benders, long-houses etc. Mostly, the lowerworld is the realm of the Stone, Plant and Animal Peoples. People are few and far between, living in tribes in harmony with nature, using Stone Age technology. There are no metal objects. No modern technology whatsoever. The lowerworld is also a place of love and healing. So there is no fighting, torture, cruelty, warfare, or slavery. So in your journey if you come across telegraph poles, trains, circus performers, people wearing fancy silk clothing like Chinese mandarins, or in denim jeans, telephones, metal chests, violence, warfare etc., then the middleworld and lowerworlds are somehow becoming blurred. This isn't necessarily 'wrong' and eventually you learn how to work with this, but you only get to that point by first learning how to do pure lowerworld journeys.

The other way you can learn to spot that you are in the middleworld it to recognise its fee. It rarely feels anything like as safe as the lowerworld (because it isn't!). There is often a sense of unease, varying from mild to acute. Middleworld journeys can often feel disjointed and confused, and feel too fast paced and/or a bit chaotic or pointless. It can be hard to maintain focus and not be distracted. If you are feeling any of this, then you are no longer purely in the lowerworld.

Whilst you are still in the process of learning to do lowerworld journeys, the thing to do if you realise middleworld stuff is intruding is to go deeper down, until you really get a sense of being in the lowerworld. Another thing you can do is change middleworld imagery into lowerworld ones. So a metal chalice would become a drinking horn for example; metal armour becomes leather or bamboo; cotton clothing becomes leather etc.

By really making sure you are in the lowerworld, you will develop a strong rooted and grounded practice. If you are really in the lowerworld you will also be learning from, and working with, truly transcendent and wise beings. These are not middleworld beings with their own agendas and limitations, but beings who you can really trust. So...

1. Do lots of journeys to strengthen the bond with your power animal. Just hanging out with it, becoming it, asking it for healing, exploring the lowerworld together etc. Really important alongside this is to develop a sense of it being with you in this reality too. This is vital. In this way it becomes constantly with you. Pictures help too, soft toys, reading about it etc.
2. Then do a lowerworld journey to find your human shamanic teacher. This is some kind of tribal, indigenous person from the lowerworld. Unlike your power animal, which is the whole of its species, your lowerworld teacher (known as your ancestral kin) is an individual. Find out their name, what they wear, if they have any tattoos or jewellery, what they like doing, what they can teach you. Once you have found them (or they have found you!), then do lots of journeys with them. Ask them for lots of healings. Like your power animal, this person also needs to become a

constant guide, companion and teacher, in this reality too. Practice sensing them around and talking to them. Having a strong connection with both a power animal and a human guide from the lowerworld is the foundation of the rest of the work. Get in the habit of constantly asking them what to do, or what is happening, until it becomes the default thing you automatically do when puzzled or stuck. Listen to them and learn to trust them and pay attention to them.

3. Eventually you will meet other lowerworld human teachers too, and even a whole tribe. Again, with everyone you meet who feels significant, find out about them; their name, appearance, skills, relationships, etc. Fill in the backstory. Start to map out the area where they live, and get to know places in it. The thing to do is to pay attention to the detail (as if writing a good descriptive novel, with well fleshed out characters and well-described places).
4. Ask for lots of healings, from your power animal and lowerworld helpers. Sometimes what they are doing will make sense, and sometimes not, but just keep asking them to work on you. The key thing is to watch and learn. If a plant or crystal is used say, pay attention to what it is, and then research it in this reality. A tip on researching plants on google: you can google the plant as (a) a flower essence, e.g. 'dandelion flower essence' (b) magical uses or lore (c) herbal uses (d) homeopathic properties (you need its Latin name for this, so dandelion would be 'taraxacum homeopathy' for example). For crystals I really recommend 'The Crystal Bible' by Judith Hall, both volumes one and two. With animals you come across, google them as a totem ('bear totem' for example. 'Animal Speak' by Ted Andrews is also good, plus you can look at www.animal-essences.co.uk. This way you start to build up your 'medicine bundle' of helper stone, plant and animal spirits that you can draw on in journeys when needed. Another good thing to do is to go to the lowerworld with the intent of learning more about an animal, plant or crystal. With animals, do a bit of research first, and then just go to the lowerworld to meet the animal, and experience being Bear, Mammoth, Lynx, etc. Ask them for healing too. With Plants, go to the lowerworld and find the plant, experience being it. Ask the oversoul of the plant (the spirit of all of its type) to come forward, and then teach you its healing medicine and how to use it. This way we develop strong bonds with Snowdrop, Daffodil etc. Same with crystals - go to the lowerworld then underground to a cavern of the crystal, and ask it's oversoul to step forward and heal/teach you.
5. Do lots of burial journeys to connect to mother earth. Allow yourself to be buried, rot away, and be dug up reformed. You may also, when you allow your body and even yourself to disintegrate back into the earth, sink deep into the earth and meet mother earth herself, and dissolve back into her, and then come back reborn from her. This is powerful healing, and to be done as often as possible.
6. Become a Tree. Learn and experience the healing medicine of specific tree species, but also of Tree itself; how rooted it is, how slow and calm; how it gets the balance between mother earth and father sun just right. Trees are a great antidote to the madness of being human.
7. Gradually then, alongside all this, and never losing connection with it, you start to explore the upperworld. Again, find a specific upperworld guide and teacher, and then communities you get to know and make real (people and places to go to for upperworld healing, advice on ethics, alchemists, healers etc.). It is also a place of no modern technology). Think of anything up to mediaeval' or fairy-tale. Remember, that the upperworld is also a place of love, wisdom and healing. So there are buildings such as temples, monasteries, libraries, hospitals, cathedrals, gardens, fountains etc., but no slums, poverty or injustice. There is glass and metal work, fabrics and books, but no modern technology like cars, computers aeroplanes, or anything electrical etc. If the middleworld intrudes, go higher up. 'Cave and Cosmos' by Michael Harner is worth a read.
8. Only then do you start exploring the middleworld. Remember the middleworld is this physical world and the energy of it, and so is not necessarily benign or friendly. So (just as you do in real life) be sensible about safety and protection ('Psychic Protection' by William Bloom is an excellent book). Have your wits about you and don't take everything at face value. Remember, just as there are people in this physical reality who manipulate or outright tell lies for their own ends, so there are beings in the shamanic middleworld who do the same. So always be wary of anyone offering themselves as a middleworld 'guide'). Always, always have your power animal and lower/upper world guides with you, and ask them for advice. Start off with places that feel safe. Do a journey around your home, going into each room and looking at it with your shamanic eyes and do a shamanic spring clean and 'feng shui'. Then explore other areas you know and like (some woods you know, a favourite tree or waterfall or rock etc.). Stay away from stuff that doesn't feel safe, until you feel ready, and if in doubt always ask your guides and listen to them. Then gradually branch out and explore your street, your town, etc. Build up your confidence slowly in this way.

As well as doing your own journeys, practicing doing healing journeys for other people (but always with their express permission, of course!) is a great way to build confidence in the process. This is because you start to see that what happens in the journeys make sense and is relevant to the person you did it for. That way you realise that you are not just 'making this up'!

Whilst there is a huge amount you can do in working alone, it is hard to build up confidence this way, plus most people find it hard to maintain momentum. What really helps with this is balancing doing solitary work with doing group work. Learning new stuff keeps us interested and engaged, and the experience of working with like-minded people, sharing ideas and experiences, and giving and receiving healings, usually really helps with enthusiasm and confidence. Shamanism is, after all, about re-connecting.