This Wild and Precious Life: a companion guide to the podcast trailer

With Paul Francis and Isabel Wells

This guide goes with the trailer for the podcast. It gathers up what we talked about, lists the episodes we have planned so far, and suggests where to go next if something caught your interest. There is a short list of the words we use at the end.

As in every episode, nothing here asks you to believe anything. It all comes out of direct experience, and you are free to test it against your own.

What we covered

Who we are

Isabel Wells is a shamanic practitioner and teacher, and also a ceramicist, potter and ballet dancer, living in Tennessee in the United States. Paul Francis is a shamanic practitioner, a body-centred psychotherapist and the author of the Therapeutic Shamanism books, and lives in North Wales.

How the podcast came about

We first met when Isabel, then director of another shamanic school, invited Paul onto her podcast to talk about soul retrieval, and about how traditional shamanic methods need updating and bringing together with psychotherapy for modern times. It was one of the best conversations either of us had ever had on a podcast, and we carried on talking afterwards. What surprised us both was how closely our understanding of shamanism and animism matched, which is not something either of us often finds in the wider shamanic world. We spent the best part of a year trying to find something we radically disagreed on. We kept having those conversations instead, and kept saying at the end of them, "We should have recorded that." So now we are.

Our approach

We take a very down-to-earth, embodied and grounded approach to shamanism and animism. Nothing we talk about needs any belief or leap of faith, so it can suit someone who is spiritually sceptical, or spiritually homeless, as much as someone who has already explored other spiritual paths. You don't need to know anything about shamanism or animism to start. And if you are already experienced, we know from teaching that you will find a lot here that is new.

Our approach is not based on any one shamanic or animist culture. It is based on what is found across cultures, all over the world, which is sometimes called core shamanism or core animism. That means it is open to everyone, and is in fact the birthright of all of us. We go into this in Episode 1.

What we mean by animism and shamanism

Animism is the experience (experience, not belief) that everything around us has personhood, that everything around us is alive and conscious. It is about living in respectful and reciprocal relationship, not only with each other as humans, but with our other-than-human kin as well. Shamanism is built on animism. It is a particular way of practising animism, based, amongst other things, on a practice called shamanic journeying. Part of the work is stripping away the cultural layers of the last few thousand years of what we call civilisation, and getting back down to the original core animism and core shamanism, and that is incredibly ancient.

Neither of us was taught this by another living human being. We each arrived at it through our own direct experience, from very different starting points: Paul in his elder years in Wales, Isabel in her youth in the United States. For Isabel, two people from such separate backgrounds arriving at such similar understandings is a profound confirmation of animism being an experience, not a belief.

Two lives, and agreeing to differ

There are about forty-four years between us, so our conversations cross generations as well as cultures. That doesn't mean we always agree. In one recent conversation Isabel was optimistic that anyone can change, given the right circumstances, and Paul, after his years as a psychotherapist, was less sure. Each view suits the stage of life it comes from. Part of what we want to show in the podcast is the non-hierarchical nature of relationship in animism, and part of that is being able to hold our differences with respect and reciprocity, and still talk. Our hope is that this gives you room to step into these practices yourself, find out what your own experience of them is, and reawaken your own wild soul.

The first twelve episodes (provisional)

These are the episodes we have planned for the first block of twelve. **They are provisional and will probably change as the episodes evolve.** We have already moved some topics around since we recorded the trailer, so the list below is not quite the one we read out.

1. What Is Shamanism?
2. What Shamanism Really Is, and How to Practise It Today
3. The Role of the Shaman, Then and Now
4. Non-hierarchy, Not Non-duality
5. The Shamanic Realms and Our Guides
6. The Animal and Plant People
7. The Stone People, Water and the Land
8. What Psychotherapy Can Learn from Shamanism
9. What Shamanism Can Learn from Psychotherapy
10. Who Can Do Shamanism? Neuro-Wild, Not Neurodiverse
11. The Sacred Masculine and the Sacred Feminine: Men, Women and Gender
12. The Original Instructions: How to Live Well

Episode 1 comes out on Friday 20 November 2026, and then there will be a new episode every Friday.

After the first twelve we have plenty more planned, including grief (personal, collective and ecological), our inner tribe or parts of self, what it means to become a real adult and an elder, tribe, community and belonging, why we get ill, an animist understanding of healing and personal power, the ancestors and healing the family line, and what happens when we die.

What comes with each episode

Each episode has a free companion guide like this one, summarising what we covered, with a list of the words we use and suggestions for further reading. The link is in the episode's description. We hope to end each episode with some of the questions people send us, so please do email us your questions, comments and ideas for future episodes at podcasts@therapeutic-shamanism.co.uk.

Learning to journey

We describe shamanic journeying in the podcast, but we never teach it there, because a podcast is not a safe way to learn it. If you want to learn, start with Paul's first book, *The Shamanic Journey*, or the college's First-Steps course: www.therapeutic-shamanism.co.uk/learn-shamanism-online

Further exploration

Paul's books

- *The Shamanic Journey* (Book 1): the place to start, and the book to read if you want to learn to journey.
- *Rewilding Yourself* (Book 2): on finding the real Lower-World, and on intrusions and why we get ill.
- *Finding Your Deep Soul* (Book 3): on the myth of human supremacy, the Oversouls, and Spirit and Soul.
- *Soul Roots, Spirit Branches* (Book 4, forthcoming): on the Upper-World, Spirit, and keeping roots and branches in balance.

On the website

- The podcast page, to sign up for episode news and free e-books: www.therapeutic-shamanism.co.uk/podcast
- Courses we offer: www.therapeutic-shamanism.co.uk/shamanic-courses-online
- The college's website: www.therapeutic-shamanism.co.uk

	Keep in touch **Scan to get episode news and free e-books.** We would love to hear from you: podcasts@therapeutic-shamanism.co.uk

Appendix: words we use

Animism: the experience (not the belief) that everything is alive, conscious and kin: animals, plants, stones, rivers, mountains, the wind.

Civilisation: as we use it, the way of life that began with farming and the first cities a few thousand years ago, and cut us off from the rest of the living world. We also call this shift the Fall.

Core shamanism and core animism: the experiences and practices found in shamanic and animist cultures all over the world, under their different ceremonies; core shamanism is Michael Harner's term.

Cultural appropriation: taking the practices, objects or ceremonies of a living culture that is not your own, without permission or understanding.

Hunter-gatherers: people who live by gathering wild plants and hunting, rather than farming, as all humans did for most of our history.

Inner tribe: the community of parts of the self that a human being actually is.

Lower-World, middle-world, Upper-World: the three broad shamanic realms. The Lower-World is the realm of wild nature and of the Animal, Plant and Stone People; the middle-world is everyday reality and the energy behind it; the Upper-World is the realm of Spirit.

Neo-shamanism: Isabel's term for much of the shamanism practised today, which has drifted from what the practices were originally for.

Neuro-Wild: Paul's preferred term for what is usually called neurodiverse; we explore what he means by it in Episode 10.

Non-hierarchical: no being or person ranked above another. In animism all the Peoples, and all of us, sit at a round table.

Original Instructions: the stories and principles for living in right, reciprocal relationship with ourselves, each other and the rest of the living world.

Other-than-human kin: the animals, plants, stones, rivers and other beings we share the world with, and are related to.

Personhood: being a someone, not a something, with an inner life of one's own.

Sacred masculine and sacred feminine: the two great poles of the living world, in animism Father Sky and Mother Earth, held as equal.

Shamanic journeying: the core shamanic practice, a willed shift out of ordinary reality into shamanic reality, usually carried by drumming.

Shamanism: the practical application of animism: the how to animism's what.

Soul and Spirit: Soul is the wild, unique part of us rooted in the Lower-World; Spirit belongs to the Upper-World, where everything is one.

Soul retrieval: finding a part of the self that left after trauma or loss, and inviting it home.

Spiritually homeless: having no spiritual home, often after leaving a religion or finding that no path quite fits.

The Animal, Plant and Stone People: in animism, the other-than-human beings as our elder kin; the Stone People include all physical matter, from mountains to rivers to stars.