



# Journey Checklist

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*The spirits are not simply another resource in this exquisite world to be used, consumed, or squandered. They are not here to do our bidding, but to teach us who we are, why we are here, and what it means to be truly and fully human. The art of shamanism is the art of relationship with all things, physical and non-physical.*

Dr. Stephan Beyer

*The trance state is key to shamanism. Where shamans travel to is outside space and time, which allows us to see what's normally invisible and is usually referred to as the spirit world, which makes us think we're talking to ghosts. English doesn't have the right words to express this spiritual dimension. Shamanism develops and enhances our 5 senses and develops the capacity to use them on purpose. Three-fourths of who we are—the emotional, mental, and spiritual—is invisible to our 5 senses but affecting us constantly. From a shamanic perspective, everything has invisible energy—rocks, weather, trees, etc. Shamanism accesses all these invisible realms, not just the human ones. This capacity is important in shamanism because everything begins first in that invisible world, then it manifests in reality.*

Christina Pratt

## Framing Your Question

### Basic Phrasing Tips

1. Ask only one question at a time; otherwise, you may not know which one is being answered.
2. "What do I most need to know about ... (my role in this issue, this issue in general ...)"
3. "What will I learn if I ... (form a close relationship with this person; take this job/workshop; study with this teacher...)"
4. "Where is my power in [this situation/relationship/issue]?" This question can help you see how you've given away your power and show you how to come from a place of true power (compassion) rather than a place of either "victim" or "perpetrator." You may be shown, for example, how to heal/resolve the "button" in you that got pushed.

### What, Where, When, Why

- Avoid When questions: prophecies can be off by centuries
- Do add in a time context: "What do I most need to know about ... *at this time?*"
- Avoid Why questions: Some whys are too big; we are just to live our lives as adventure and let go of need to know.
- Use caution with Yes or No questions. Spirits see life as an adventure and may say "yes," even though you'll be "hurt" by a lesson; the spirits protect you from harm but not from "lessons"; "lessons" are "good." Bones and other tools can be used for yes/no questions, but be careful not to give your authority away to the spirits.
- For Where questions, try the Sunbeam journey (Labrador Naskapi shamans). Visualize the places in question and look to see where the sunbeam in your journey is shining down. Look for a beam, not just sunshine.

### Journeying for/about Others

- If you're journeying about a relationship issue:  
Don't ask "What does this person need to change?"/"How can I get this person to change?"  
Ask "How can I heal my end of my relationship with this person?"
- Never journey or do any shamanic work with the intention to harm another or yourself.
- Always make sure you have consent/permission if journeying for another (if they are in a coma, meet their soul first thing in your journey and ask permission to journey for them).

- *Asking for help* is part of the healing process.
- People are entitled to their illnesses, addictions, etc.
- Do not assume that you know what's best for another person; we can't know their life lessons.

## Controlling Mind Chatter

- See thoughts as clouds passing; gently repeat your intention over and over until your journey resumes; you can pick up where you left off or start over
- sing, dance, drum (many traditional shamans sing, dance, and drum for 3 days, then do a short journey)
- prep work helps: be mindful of food (not being too full or hungry), be rested, etc.
- connect with your infinite soul-self and leave your ego behind
- pull your awareness out of your head and into your heart, breathe into your heart
- start by shaking out what's on your mind
- be here and now, forget traffic to get here, errands or evening plans
- for some, being too comfy means you fall asleep; others need to be comfortable
- drum or rattle for yourself (live drumming or rattling)
- sing your journey aloud as you go
- set the intention that any sounds in the room during the journey will take you deeper into the journey; tell yourself that with any cough or sound you'll go deeper

**Structure and Tools May Help.** Having structures or unique signals tell your brain this is not anything else but Journey Time. Special journey tools include a blanket you only use for journeying, singing a special journey song, or wearing an eye curtain or special regalia or ritual items. Ritual and structure cultivate a Pavlovian response; they entrain the brain to a powerful “good” habit.

**Try “Zero Point Exercise” Before You Journey.** Go to the space between things, invoke the state of nothingness, no gravity, the space between the beats of a drum.

**Try Earth Merger Exercise Before You Journey.** Merge with the Earth. As you become one with Earth, connect your heartbeat so your heartbeats are one. Once you are in this connective state, embrace the Earth energies with the understanding that you and the Earth are one — one organism, one heartbeat. From this place of connection, ask your questions, do your healing work, or meditate.

## Helpful Tips

Dance and chant before you begin journeying to help you open and connect to Source. Explore rattling or drumming for yourself. Try a journey cd with or without headphones; see which works better for you.

If you don't think your journey was “successful,” don't get discouraged. Shamanism is about establishing a deep relationship with yourself and Source. It's not instantaneous; be patient with yourself and with your process. Try saying or singing your journeys into a recorder. Try longer journeys; try shorter journeys. Try rattling or drumming for yourself.

Remember that you have choice and control over what you say and do in the journey; you can approach or ignore any form or situation. You do not control what your power animal or teacher says or does. The spirits need your permission even to bring you healing. If you're unsure of something or feel confused or frustrated, try one or more of the following tips:

- ask your guide for help;
- ask another guide for a “second opinion” on your question or for a “translation” or different metaphor to help you understand what the spirits are trying to show you;
- try re-phrasing your question; wording is important;
- remember that some things it's not our destiny to know; and
- the spirits are *not* stubborn and don't act out, so don't think you're being punished or abandoned. They have *only* the deepest compassion for you. *Always*.

Honor those seasonal “dry spells” when you can't journey; usually can still journey for others, just not yourself. These are silent “gestation” times. Use this time to meditate or walk in woods. You can always ask someone to journey for you.

## Additional Practices

Remember that you can call your guide to you in ordinary reality any time, even when you're not journeying.

Consider chanting or dancing (or both!) each morning. Even two minutes a day will make a difference in your life and well-being.

## Writing Your Journey Notes

Tip from Tom Cowan: Instead of writing your journey notes from your left brain as narrative, let three or four core, essential images of the experience arise in a kind of haiku-like poem that condense the experience in three or four brief lines. This will not describe the journey in its totality, but it is not meant to. The journey or dream was not a left-brain event so why should describing it be so?

## Interpreting Your Journey

Remember: the spirits speak in metaphors and symbols

- Did the journey feel easy or difficult?
- What was the weather, time of day/ year?
- What was the mood? Any colors or smells?
- How was the tunnel: dark or bright, damp or dry, warm or cold, jagged or smooth?
- What spirits or messages came through during dancing?
- If this had been a movie, what would the background music have been?

**Filters.** Your helping spirits will present the “answer” or “healing” using metaphors that make sense to you, that are tailored to you. So don't interpret another's journey, and don't ask anyone else to interpret your journeys for you. The filter works both ways:

1. the spirits are tailoring the image or words or symbols, etc. to you, and
2. we tailor the image, words, symbols, etc. to fit into our boxes, our reality.

It's also possible that you're distorting the answer (in a less helpful way) because it's coming through your filters. For example, someone occasionally perceives their ego-less power animal or teacher as being upset with them; this is rare, and only occurs if they are acting out a scene to show you something. The compassionate, ego-less helping spirits are not stubborn and don't act out, so don't ever think you're being punished or abandoned or whatever; the spirits have only the deepest compassion for you—always.

## *Expanding Your Journeys from the Basics*

1. Learn to ask the spirits for help.
2. Be the one experiencing the journey, not just "watching tv."
3. Shapeshift into your power animal while dancing or journeying.
4. Explore other openings, entryways, or starting points (enter through a picture or mandala; Celtic openings include fog, mist).
5. Explore other "horses"—rattle, didgeridoo, song, waterfall (Celtic), and droning sounds.
6. Explore other positions: lying down, sitting, standing, dancing, walking.  
(Caution: you can't polish/habituate/entrain if you keep distracting yourself with changes.)
7. Explore to find which opening, horse, position works best for you; stick with it. Once your practice is solid, try other entryways again.
8. Experiment with longer journeys ... and with shorter journeys!
9. Explore all three (upper, lower, and middle) worlds, if that's part of your cosmology.
10. Explore the "levels" of the upper and lower worlds (caution: these levels aren't "real," just mental constructs that some find helpful).
11. Be able to journey alone (using a cd, drum, rattle, didj ...), at home or anywhere!
12. Be able to call your power animals or teachers to you when you're not journeying.
13. Practice "checking in" with your helping spirit(s) when you're not in trance to be able to get answers without journeying.

## *Deepening Your Connection to Source*

1. Transfigure (become one with Source, All That Is).
2. Journey to your power animal or teacher and ask them what would deepen your connection to them or to Source at this time.
3. "Honor" and connect with your Self before journeying by moving or singing a special song to call yourself here and now ("calling up your song").
4. "Honor" and connect with your power animal/teacher before journeying by dancing with them or singing a special song to them.
5. We've lost a lot of power by giving up singing, dancing, and drumming. We can reclaim that power by vocalization and movement. Merge with your egoless helping spirit during dancing before journeying. Let egoic, Middle World helpers dance along with you.
6. Journey to ancestors and descendants.
7. Connect with the land when you travel; introduce yourself and say why you're there.
8. Have one or more vacation spots in the journey realms.
9. Consider building a house for yourself in the upper and lower worlds.

## *Deepening Your Connection to Your Helping Spirit(s)*

Study, dance, sing, write about, draw pictures of your power animal/teacher.

If your power animal is a common one who lives in your area, take them food or other offerings.

Ask your power animal or teacher to show you their home(s) in the upper and lower worlds.

Be able to call your helping spirit(s) to help you in Ordinary Reality/Middle World, everyday walking around, such as when you are lost and need to know which way to turn.

Do special journeys now and then to thank your power animal/teacher (take them food, have a picnic ... no question or request or work).

Make regalia or masks or eye curtains of your power animal or teacher. Journey first to ask them for a symbol or other information about how to make it.

## *Deepening Your Connection to Your Self*

Have a power song/dance to call up your power.

Work on your issues, heal yourself

- care for your body: rest, exercise, diet ...
- care for your emotional well-being
- care for your mental state
- maintain your spiritual health

Regular practice is needed to maintain and care for your self.

Work for other people, animals, environment, non-violence, peace ... (journeying or praying or ritual, just be mindful of permission/ethical issues).

Work solo and in community.

## *Deepening Your Connection to the Rest of Nature, the Land*

Connect with and communicate with all beings (rocks, mountains, rivers, trees, plants, animals, rattles, drums, etc....) as you would a person you respect.

Explain who you are and what you're doing on the land wherever you are.

Connect with a special power place in your home or outdoors; understand that a room, home, office, place has a soul of its own.

Connect with nature through walking meditations/journeys, sitting in a stream, birdwatching....

## *Meeting & Working with Other "Middle World" Helping Spirits*

If you study indigenous shamanic traditions, you will likely work exclusively with Middle World spirits. It is wonderful to work with other Middle World spirits, because we live in the Middle World, and most Middle World spirits are delightful.

They are different from ego-less helping spirits though, and knowing the difference is important. Even a shaman can be taken over and placed into servitude by powerful Middle World helping spirits. If it can happen to them, it can certainly happen to you!

Working with any Middle World spirit safely requires that certain protocols be followed, often fairly precisely, so they are not ideal helping spirits to start off with. Luckily, it's not that hard to avoid these traps once you know a few simple secrets.

### *Tips for Working With Egoic Spirits*

*Special thanks to my colleague, Mary Courtis, for this section!*

1. Start with just one helping spirit and have someone experienced check to make sure it's one with no ego (not a Middle World spirit).
2. Accept no additional helping spirits unless they have been thoroughly approved by helping spirit #1, who has no ego and is not a Middle World spirit.
3. Tip-offs that your helping spirit has ego are
  - they ask things of you (sacrifice incense or a chicken, put out food for them, etc.)
  - they get angry of judgmental or pushy or whiny or whatever with you, say or do anything that makes you feel bad or guilty or like you've done something wrong
4. When you first meet a new helping spirit that has been approved by #1, immediately ask them "why have you come to me and what do you want or need from me?" The answer should be nothing, that they are simply here to support you on your path. And be suspicious if they start expecting something of you in a later journey.
5. Until you have a solid working relationship with at least one compassionate (ego-free) helping spirit and are able to interpret what they are telling you and understand their metaphors, it's best to make all your journeys are to the realm of compassion (by having that as part of your intention for the journey, e.g. "I'm going to the realm of compassion to meet with [my known, ego-free helping spirit] for [guidance on xxx]. Do not journey in the Middle World or follow guidance from dreams or ordinary reality omens, where deception is possible.
6. Once you start working with Middle World spirits, always have your ego-free helping spirit with you and vet everything the Middle World spirits say through them; check to make sure their guidance is okay and that your ego-free helping spirit agrees.
7. Always, always, always journey with a clearly stated intention, one that includes that you are asking only your own known ego-free helping spirit and inviting no one else who has not been approved by that helping spirit. Otherwise, you're just "out there." The intention determines the journey, and having none often means that any spirit anywhere who wants to be with you for whatever reason is being invited in.

***WITH DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO MY TEACHER, SANDRA INGERMAN***

***I HIGHLY RECOMMEND HER BOOK-CD, SHAMANIC JOURNEYING: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE***

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