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THE WHY, WHO, & WHAT OF HELPING SPIRITS

The right helping spirit can help you navigate any challenges of the hidden realities within both the ordinary, daily living world and the journey realms. I’ll cover how to know if any helping spirit of yours is such an expert guide. Shamans have lots of help from, and live connected to, their many assistants. This help includes the Ancestors and the rest of Nature, such as the land, plants, animals, elements, the seasons and cycles of death and rebirth, and more.

1. Why work with helping spirits? Who and what are they? Where do they come from?
2. How do I connect with them, and how do I communicate and work with them?
3. How do I know which ones to work with and for what purpose?

Why Work with Helping Spirits?

We’ll start with our first question: why work with helping spirits. If we aren’t working with helping spirits, it isn’t shamanism. It’s the helping spirits who do the diagnosis and healing. But beyond that, after our body dies and we cross over, fully releasing this lifetime and this world, we are non-egoic again, just like many helping spirits. We remember that we are Oneness and that this lifetime was just our latest gig.

While we are living in a physical form, we are egoic and lack non-egoic vision. That means it’s harder for us to see the Whole—or anything, really—as it truly is. We are in a body that, while fantastic, has limits. Our ego and thought/emotion filters are necessary for us to function in a form. But they can also interfere with our ability to accurately perceive everyone else’s reality and how it all connects. Even if we think we perceive someone clearly, it’s through our own filters. It helps to have a “buddy” who is not embodied and can see clearly the Whole, the “Big Picture.”

Also, most of our experiences are invisible to our ordinary senses. As shamanic teacher Christina Pratt notes:

> 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, and so on. Shamanism accesses all these invisible realms.... This capacity is important in shamanism because everything begins first in that invisible world, then it manifests in visible/real reality.

That same “buddy” who is not embodied and can help us see the big picture can also help us navigate the invisible spiritual realms. Limitations in our ego and senses are why we work with helping spirits. Let’s look more closely at who and what they are.

Who/What Are Helping Spirits?

1. The Real Teachers and Healers

What are the helping spirits? First and foremost: they are The Real Teachers and Healers. That’s a direct quote from Dr. Michael Harner, founder of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies. By the time we are born, at least one helping spirit comes in with us. We are never alone, never without at least one real teacher and healer. Most shamanic traditions say that each person has one or two
personal helping spirits. I believe this is true for every animal and all other life forms. In the words of Stephan Beyer,

_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._

### 2. Their Forms/Appearance

So, what do these helping spirits look like and what do we call them? They can be …

- **Other Humans:** including Ancestors and Descendants; these can be human and other-than-human, as we do have pre-human ancestors

- **Animals:**
  - Individual or Uber: a bear who crossed over and returned in a non-egoic version would be an individual bear spirit; an Uber or Oversoul or Master Bear (capital B) is not one single individual bear but the overarching spirit or soul of all Bears for all time. Similarly, you could have an individual mouse helping spirit or Oversoul Mouse, and so on with all beings. These uber or oversoul or master spirits, in my view, are the essence of where that species comes from in the spiritual realm before they existed here in the physical world. In shamanism, we call these spiritual realms the “Land” of that Species. For example, we speak of the Land of Bear, the Land of Mouse; these oversoul or uber spirits may appear as an individual spirit, but they represent the whole species.
  - Timeless. Extinct or future species; character from a book or cartoon …
  - Large or small. Size does not equal power! Bigger is not necessarily better. You can be “small and mighty”—just ask any bacteria or virus.
  - “Predators” are not more powerful than other species. Shamanically, it’s understood that each species has its own special gift or power or “medicine.” Also, because everyone eats and is eaten in turn, we’re all both predator and prey anyway.
  - In addition to animal helpers in spirit form, practitioners also watch living, ordinary reality animals for information. It’s important to know how animals behave and what their behaviors mean. For example, one shaman living in the Amazon rainforest could tell the precise location of a leopard hundreds of yards away by the alarm calls of monkeys; crows have a special alarm cry for hawks and airborne dangers, another for cats on the ground, another for cats in a tree, etc. Ravens and others also have a special signal when remains of a predator’s kill are located. Knowing these things is important for human survival. As Stephan Beyer notes,

  _We expect the pink neon buffalo to come on lightning that transforms us, but the spirits have been talking to us all the time, through the bat guano on the cave floor. We already live in the magical forest._

- **Plants:** all plants, but especially sacred plants of a given region, like tobacco, cornmeal, sage, sweetgrass in the USA; lavender in old European traditions, cedar in the Pacific Northwest, etc. Entheogens/hallucinogenics would also be included. As with animals, these can be spirit beings or be living, ordinary reality plants.
• Land: the Oversoul of a Place/Land is also a source of power; think of “power spots”—those places where you feel energized or healed or empowered in some other way. Many of us have a special tree we like to sit next to or hug, or some spot that makes us feel grounded or expansive when we need it.

• Nature spirits: faeries/fey etc. but also the Seasons and the Directions

• Elements: fire burns what needs to be transformed; earth, air, and water wash away toxins or cleanse through smudging or anointing, stones and crystals to heal, and so on.

• Celestial beings: Sun, Moon, Stars ...

Note: the above list is not exhaustive! These are just the shaman’s primary allies.

Common Names/Terminology

The Foundation for Shamanic Studies and many others work with these common categories of helping spirits:

• Animal = “Power Animal”; can include mythological or extinct animals
• Human = “Teacher”; Includes ancestors, some gods and goddesses, could appear as a child
• Faerie = “Guardian Spirit”
• Plant or Element = “Guardian Spirit” or “Ally”

How real are these labels for you—power animal, teacher, guardian, and ally? Some find these distinctions helpful; I find it easier to perceive them all as “helping spirits” and distinguish them instead by whether they have a form (egoic) or are formless (non-egoic). I think of them all as “partners;” we work as a team. We need them, and they need us, too. Even the most powerful helping spirits seem to have limits to what they can do in this reality.

While shamans and shamanic practitioners often work consciously with many of these different beings, the average person today does not need to do so. It’s more important to have a deep relationship with one or a few helping spirits than to have a zoo with whom you can’t get depth and closeness. You want a best friend forever, not 500 social media friends.

If you have a helping spirit that you’re having trouble understanding, you can ask that helping spirit to meet you in a human form or some form that’s easier for you to understand and communicate with.

Let’s talk a bit more about terminology. In general, we speak of

1. “spirits” (plural) not “spirit” (singular); in shamanism, even a reference to Oneness or the sum of all creation is often considered plural (a community of spirits); and when speaking of something one of our known helping spirits said, we would say “my spirit told me” not “spirit told me”;
2. “spirits” means all “helping spirits”
3. “spirits” are not the wandering dead; those are called “ghosts”
Christina Pratt explains:

*When we journey, we step outside space and time, which allows us to see what’s normally invisible and is usually referred to as the spirit world. “Spirit world” can make us think we’re talking to ghosts. English doesn’t have the right words to express this spiritual dimension.*

### 3. Cosmology, Culture, and Tradition Determine Meaning and Protocols

Your cosmology determines how you perceive and interact with helping spirits. You will hear generalizations that are not necessarily true in other traditions. Traditions vary in

1. the number of journey realms—2? 3? 9?

2. the nature of the journey realms: some say animals are only in the lower world and human or angelic teachers are only in the upper world, but that’s not generally true.

3. which being is Creator—in some, Raven created the world; in others Great Bear or some other being;

4. which is the most powerful:
   a. Size does not determine power: Bear is not more powerful than Squirrel; in some cultures, Mouse is most powerful of all.
   b. Species or “intelligence” does not determine power: a human-form teacher or angel is not the most superior.

5. the meaning or power or “medicine” ascribed to an animal. Turtle can represent “protection” in one tradition, “longevity” or something else in another. This is another good reason why it’s best to ask your helping spirit directly about what their gifts are instead of looking it up in a book or online.

6. protocols: In some cultures, you “should” mimic your helping spirit. Example: if it’s Tiger, you must eat gazelles; if it’s Owl, you have to be nocturnal. In some cultures, you should eat your helping spirit in ceremonies. Example, if it’s Tiger, you must eat tiger meat ceremonially. In other cultures, the body of your helping spirit is the one “meat” you must never eat. With all respect to such cultures, my view is that we are in a human body: we are diurnal, not nocturnal, and are primarily herbivore-insectivore. Plenty of ways exist to connect powerfully and physically with our helping spirits without eating their ordinary reality, physical body and without dishonoring our human anatomy. If you choose to study in a specific tradition that has a strong view on these matters, you’ll need to decide what’s right for you.
**NON-EGOIC HELPING SPIRITS**

The most important distinction is between helping spirits with forms and those without forms. I’d like to share the “Locker Room Bench” story, as it best describes the difference between non-egoic and egoic helping spirits.

**The Locker Room Bench Story**

Sandra Ingerman had us journeying in one of her trainings about the nature of these helping spirits. I thought one of my colleague’s journeys was particularly helpful, and I call it the “Locker Room Bench” story.

His journey took him to Oneness, which appeared as the vastness of space. Before him, within this vastness, was what looked like a long bench that stretched to infinity, went on forever. Levitating on the bench were orbs or balls of light and sparkling energies that were drops of pure Oneness, each “one” representing the entire Whole. They seemed to be chatting with one another, bobbing and nodding in a light-hearted way.

Behind and above them was an equally infinitely long row of hooks, with sacred regalia hanging from each hook. Regalia was there for beings from all the world’s spiritual traditions: Jesus, Moses, Abraham, Muhammad, Mother Mary, Saint Francis, Ganesha, Kali, Isis, Archangel Michael, Eagle, Bear, Mouse, Beaver, Hummingbird, and on and on and on.

And yes, all these beings exist in a middle world, egoic form as well as a non-egoic appearance, which is why it helps to specify that you want the egoless connection that is simply "wearing" the regalia of a life form. The regalia of non-egoic beings isn’t just the garb, it’s also the skin. Non-egoics have no form and are simply putting on a form so we can see them and communicate better.

Anytime a person is born, one of the orbs dons the appropriate regalia and comes in with the baby at birth. In some cultures, the child is discouraged from interacting with this "imaginary friend" and so may lose touch. Their beautiful helping spirit stays with them, but stays in the background providing generic support only, waiting respectfully and patiently until the person gives them permission to interact again. This permission often comes when the person is in a journey group, asking to meet their egoless helping spirit.

The helping spirit will reassess your situation and may show up in your journey wearing the same original regalia from your childhood or may take on a different appearance, whatever is most appropriate for you at this time.

**Where Do Non-Egoic Spirits Originate?**

Different traditions have different theories of where these formless or non-egoic spirits come from. I’ll share the theories I know of that teach where these non-egoic spirits come from.

**Theory #1: Source Energy Balls**

Some speak of these spirits as balls or bundles of “Source” energy that have no form.
Theory #2: Quantum Plenum (Essence/Oneness)

Another way to think of the formless helping spirit is as a condensed version of Oneness/All That Is, a bit of essence, of universal power. A fancy term used these days is “quantum plenum” — the vibrating energy strings that are thought to compose everything. I think of these formless helping spirits as the organizing intelligences of the universe. I often perceive them as a bit of that endless plenum or essence coalescing into the appearance of a form.

Theory #3: Oversoul (“Higher Self”) Theory

Hawaiian shamanism teacher Hank Wesselman calls these formless helping spirits a type of “higher self.” Many shamanic traditions say that part of our soul splits off to become “us” in this lifetime at birth and that part of us does not come into form but rather stays in “Oneness” or spirit form. This part remembers that we are really part of Oneness and that our current lifetime is “just our latest gig.” I think this is the part of us that many call the “higher self.” So if we can have a “higher self,” perhaps these nonegoic helping spirits are the “higher self” of a deceased being that never reincarnated.

Theory #4: Spirit World Origins of All Creation

The Spirit World Origins theory holds that formless or non-egoic spirits arise from the shamanic principle that everything exists first in the spiritual realm before it manifests in a physical form. For example, the idea of “deer” as a concept had to be dreamed by Creator/Source before the first deer walked the earth. This spiritual realm for deer is called “the Land of Deer.” Everything, not just beings, have a spiritual Land from which they emerged. If you have access to middle world Deer as a helping spirit, you also have access to nonegoic Deer as the original Land of Deer.

This means that we can connect with "Deer" as the original formless, spiritual concept or with the spirit of a deer who once existed. Egoic power animals were once living animals who died; they may have crossed over but still have some identification with their previous physical form.

Theory #5: Mystery!

And of course, each of the above theories about how formless spirits arise are not certain. Much of this truly is mystery, even though cultures have all kinds of ways to try to explain it. Some things are just unknowable and best answered with “it’s a mystery.”

My Theory of Helping Spirits

My own theory is that your guide(s) are representatives of endless compassion, or of "Source" by whatever name you call that. And they appear in a form that's perfect for you right now, tailored to work just with you. They have many gifts to offer you and much knowledge to share. They care about your personal, human, everyday troubles and, beyond that, are most interested in your full potential.

In classical shamanism, these spirits are not archetypes, as is sometimes said in New Age or Jungian circles or even by Joseph Campbell. These spirits are classically understood to be living beings that dwell in another dimension. Not everyone teaches or believes that some of these beings are our connection to Source, but that’s what I teach.
You can help clients distinguish between healed spirits from that place of endless compassion and middle world spirits. *Clients who have gotten into the deepest holes are those who did a ceremony or ritual asking for power or whatever and not being specific about who they were inviting in.*

Each person generally has one or two helping spirits from birth on, although some people have many. Practitioners in particular may have quite a few, but having many helping spirits is not mandatory to be an excellent practitioner.

**Differences Between Helping Spirits With and Without Forms**

Most modern Western shamanic teachers and journey group leaders do not distinguish between spirits who are "egoic" (those with forms) and "nonegoic" (those without forms who appear to have a form). They tend to think all helping spirits are nonegoic. It's good and a large part of classical shamanism to work with egoic helping spirits, but many aren’t aware of egoic spirits.

Most traditions who work with both types do not use the phrase "egoic"/"nonegoic." Instead, they usually call nonegoic ones “upper or lower world spirits” or “compassionate spirits” and call egoic spirits "middle world" or "ethnocentric" spirits. Many middle world "egoic" spirits can be quite tender, protective, and loving. Again, think of that tree or power spot you love.

So my current labels are “non-egoic” and “egoic.” It’s important to know whether or not your helping spirit (or spirits, if you have more than one) is egoic. Both egoic and non-egoic are good. Each has different strengths and weaknesses. I recommend that everyone start with a non-egoic helping spirit; these fully "compassionate" helping spirits are essence or power of Oneness. Middle world beings with a life form, just like us, need several things to function properly: an ego, an agenda, and food, shelter, and rest.

Let’s take a look at these two types of spirits, starting with the non-egoics. Formless beings have no form nor the accompanying physical needs, ego, or agenda. They adopt or take the appearance of a form and personality so we can relate to them. This lack of a form has several advantages.

**“Plusses” of Formless (Non-Egoic) Helping Spirits**

1. Better Advice. They have No ego or agenda, other than perhaps your own spiritual growth and the wellbeing of the Whole, means the quality of advice they give tends to be better, especially if you word your question properly. Example, ask “What will I learn if I marry this person?” instead of “Should I marry this person?”

2. Better Vision. No ego or agenda also means they can see through any illusion or deception and can’t be manipulated. You have to have an ego to be fooled.

3. Better Attitude. No ego or agenda also means they will not dominate you, get angry or judgmental, etc., unless they are acting out something for you as a teaching.

4. Easy Relationship. Having No need for food or anything else means the relationship is low-maintenance: they need no offering from you;

5. Always Available. No need for rest means they can work 24/7.

So is there a downside to non-egoic helping spirits? Yes.
Limitations and “Downside” of Non-Egoics

- Will likely view the Whole/Oneness as more important than you as an individual or species
- May view your spiritual growth as more important than your physical well-being and safety
- Are neither perfect nor to be followed blindly
- Will not protect you from life’s lessons
- May help you participate in sorcery IF that’s a part of what you need to learn
- Are not the final word in boundaries or ethics: you can consult them on ethics and boundaries, but you are responsible for the decision

I used to say non-egoic helping spirits will not participate in sorcery but that middle world spirits will. I now understand that even non-egoic ones might do so: “Oh, you want to learn (by harming or feeding the revenge field), ok. Sure, I’ll help you with that.” It’s NOT a good spirits/bad spirits dichotomy. Sandra Ingerman also says that we* are responsible for ethics, not our helping spirits. Don’t think, well, my helping spirit is okay with this, so I can do it with no karma, etc. “I’m a good person” or “I meant well/had good intentions” won’t save you.

The Roles of Non-Egoics

Non-egoic spirits have several main roles.

1. Spiritual Growth Coaches. Will not protect you from life’s lessons, which are part of your spiritual growth.
2. Consultants, Not Dictators. We aren’t required to do what they tell us. Think of them as a consultant you’ve gone to for help. Whatever advice they give, it’s still your call.
3. Companion or Friend

➔ You’re the Decider. It’s your life, not theirs. Even when we defer to their judgment, we do so from a place of conscious choice.

Identifying Your Non-Egoic Helping Spirit

Even if we already know one or more of our helping spirits, I recommend that everyone’s first journey question be “I’d like to meet my egoless connection to Source at this time.” When you see a being in the journey, you can ask them, ”Are you my egoless connection to Source at this time?” Because your intention was clearly stated as such and your intention drives the journey, they most likely are your egoless connection. Still, it’s good to ask for clarity. Sometimes they aren’t the one, but are there to take you to the spirit who is. Clarity is important, so it’s best to get confirmation.

One Quick Way to Tell If They’re Egoic

Shamanic teacher Christina Pratt has a quick way to tell if a spirit is egoic. Pratt recommends asking them “What do you need?” Their ideal response is something like “Huh? I don’t have needs, I’m dead and crossed over.” If they need something, they’re a ghost. Pratt recommends that you tell them, “thanks for clarifying, but I don’t have the skills to do that; step out of my space.” Personally, I would replace “step out of my space” with “please seek help elsewhere.” If they don’t leave, you can work with a skilled practitioner to clear them from your life, but you don’t have to help them. Just because you see ghosts does not mean that it’s your job to do this work.
**MIDDLE WORLD SPIRITS AND SPIRIT GROUPS/COLLECTIVES**

**The Roles of Egoics**

Let’s shift to the important roles of egoic helping spirits. Even if you are sure you have no egoic helping spirits now and never plan to do so, you need to understand them. You will encounter them in clients and even in family and friends. You already work with some of them in the form of candles or a fire, or your favorite places. And we interact with them every time we breath, eat, or take a drink of water. Some of them—like alcohol and tobacco—can lead us into addictions. Though you may not think of these as middle world beings, they are.

Egoic, middle world spirits have a form, a real one, not just one they put on so we can interact. And because they have a form, they have physical needs; they need to eat and sleep. And because they have a form, they need an ego and an agenda to survive.

Because they have a form, it’s common to "feed" them by leaving offerings for them on your altar or on the land. They have a physical body, even if it’s not normally visible to our eyes or in the same dimension we live in. They know what it’s like to survive and live in the physical middle world, so they are often very helpful with daily life.

These middle world, egoic spirits are important to work with. However, they require special handling because they have their own agenda and egos. Training in how to work with them is advisable. Those special handling needs are why I recommend that everyone work with non-egoic spirits first.

With egoic, middle world spirits, their role and your relationship depends on several things:

1. Their degree of power, which varies, depending on how powerful they are in relation to you;
2. Their ego/consciousness, which varies by how enlightened or awakened they are; and
3. Their agenda; what’s their agenda for their own life and how well does that match or align with your own agenda.

Is the above also true of your everyday, ordinary relationships with living people, family members, coworkers? Does their role and your relationship vary by how powerful they are in relation to you, by how enlightened they are, and by how much your agendas align? Of course!

Problems arise when most “neo-shamanic folks”, just like most of us …

- Don’t know about these egoic spirits;
- Tend to think that all helping spirits are non-egoic, perfect angels; and
- Underestimate the potential danger or risk.
Classical shamanism cautions that egoic helping spirits who are more powerful than we are have the ability to harm us and put our life in the service of their life and agenda. I’ve had a number of clients and even some students who were under the sway of an unenlightened middle world (egoic) helping spirit and thought the spirit was wonderful. We have blind spots.

Let’s dive into their forms, names, and characteristics. In the formal, ethnographic literature, these are often called “Ethnocentric” compassionate spirits (ECS). They’re “ethnocentric” because they are usually connected to a particular people or group of people. For example, the Norse god, Thor, protects the Norse people but generally doesn’t recognize non-Norse humans as kin that he should protect or be concerned about. The Middle world version of Thor might also see the human enemies of the Norse as his enemies, too, and might wish them harm. This would not be the case of the non-egoic version of Thor, who would likely help anyone.

These ethnocentrics or ECS exist in many forms: deities, Nature spirits, elementals, animals, plants, hidden folk, angels, ascended masters, celestials, and so on. And I acknowledge and thank my colleague, Mary Courtis in Portland, Oregon, for this next part of the training.

The first thing to know about middle world spirits is that power is not distributed equally. Just as some animals are more powerful than others and some plants are more powerful than others, middle world spirits vary in how much power they have. Some spirits are more powerful than we are; some are our peers; yet others are less powerful than we are.

**Power Is Not Distributed Equally**

The ethnographic literature suggests three main types of ethnocentric compassionate/Middle World spirits (ECS): tutelary spirits, guardian spirits or power animals, and lesser helping spirits.

### #1: Tutelary Spirits

The most formidable and potentially dangerous are the ancestral or *tutelary spirits*. These spirits usually dominate the shaman and cannot be controlled, only placated. For example, a man from the Goldis of Siberia met a female middle world spirit who demanded to be his spirit wife. In exchange, she would give him powerful assistant spirits that would make him a shaman. The man “felt dismayed and tried to resist,” but the spirit would not take no for an answer. She threatened him, so he unwillingly complied.

### #2: Guardian Spirits or Power Animals

Next in power and prominence are the ECS that work in partnership with humans. These spirits usually appear to the shaman in animal form. Often referred to as *guardian spirits or power animals*, these ECS may provide power and protection for an individual throughout their life. In some cases they may also be acquired during a vision quest, usually at puberty. These spirits usually do not dominate the shaman like the more powerful tutelary spirits. However, guardian spirits usually provide protection and guidance only as long as the shaman honors them and abides by their rules. Either the shaman or the spirit may break bargain or sever the relationship. Tribal shamans who convert to Christianity, for example, frequently lose the powers they once enjoyed.

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1. The bulk of this section is an excerpt, with minor edits, from Mary Courtis, *Spirits in the Chest: Ethnocentric Compassionate Spirits and Their Roles in Tribal and Core Shamanism*, January 2008 (unpublished manuscript).
To practitioners of core shamanism, the realization that many indigenous people have ECS as power animals may come as quite a shock. Core shamanic practitioners are used to meeting their power animals in the Lower World. So they may automatically assume that the power animals of indigenous people also come from this realm when they do not. It is also common for core shamanic practitioners to assume that an animal spirit is always compassionate and resides in the Lower World even if they meet the animal in the Middle World. These assumptions can lead to a “conceptual blind spot.” By the same token, indigenous people may be just as quick to assume that a core shamanic practitioner’s power animals must be treated as carefully as they treat their own or disaster will result.

**#3: Lesser Helping Spirits**

The third type of ECS is called a lesser helping spirit. These spirits can be “trapped” and manipulated by human beings directly and wield considerably less power than the other kinds of ECS’s. In some cases, the more powerful types of ECS can be enlisted to keep these spirits in line if they disobey the shaman. You may feed these spirits, but you do not have to feed them in order to maintain power over them. Lesser helping spirits are also the ones used most frequently for sorcery. While it is clear that shamans can use ECS against others, ECS may also compel humans to engage in sorcery. Sorcerers may well be possessed by bad spirits and commit acts under their influence.

So, middle world spirits vary by how powerful they are. They also vary by how compassionate or ego-centered they are. They can have little or no ego, have an ego but be enlightened, or they can have an unenlightened ego like so many people walking around today.

In contrast, the “formless” spirits have no ego and come from the upper and lower world spiritual realms. I call these “non-egoic,” but the standard nomenclature is “upper world spirits” or “lower world spirits.” Another common term is “compassionate spirits.”

And the spirits with forms have an ego, because they have a form. I call these “egoic,” but the standard nomenclature is “ethnocentric” or “middle world” spirits. These spirits with a form and ego can be at two different levels:

1. Compassionate spirits in training, with an awakened or enlightened (more “evolved”) ego;
2. Semi-compassionate spirits, with an unenlightened ego.

The primary home or dwelling or place of origin of both types of middle world spirits is the physical middle world here or the spiritual dimension of the middle world.

Do you know living people in these three categories of ego status? Think about the unenlightened ego people you know. They usually aren’t always reactive and do have times when they shine. Think about the “awakened or enlightened” people you know. Are they always perfect? No. Perfection generally doesn’t happen in ordinary reality. Welcome to the Middle World!
Table 1. Levels of Compassion in Helping Spirits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type &amp; Realm</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Ego Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formless (Upper or Lower)</td>
<td>My Name: Non-Egoic Standard: Upper/Lower World Spirits OR COMPASSIONATE SPIRITS</td>
<td>No ego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms (Middle)</td>
<td>My Name: Egoic Standard: Ethnocentric/Middle World</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. COMPASSIONATE SPIRITS IN TRAINING 1. Awakened or enlightened ego</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. SEMI-COMPASSIONATE SPIRITS</td>
<td>2. Unenlightened ego</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having looked at who and what middle world spirits are, let’s move to how to work with them, should you do so. Also covered are spirit groups, like angelic collectives, ascended masters, and so on. I’ll share lots of tips on how to insert your power and sovereignty in these relationships. I’ll also share how to decide when to give away your power to a helping spirit, including the non-egoic ones, and when not to. So this segment will help even if you don’t plan to work directly with middle world spirits.

**Insert Your Power and Sovereignty in the Relationship**

Some classical shamanic traditions work exclusively with middle world spirits. In these, even the 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 us!

We can mostly avoid the odds of that unpleasant experience if we insert our power and sovereignty in the relationship by being clear about what spirit(s) we are working with and have clear agreements with them.

Do not assume that any spirit that comes to you is compassionate. Teachers, angels, ancestor spirits, and power animals can be both non-egoic compassionate and ethnocentric compassionate spirits.

Tip-offs that your helping spirit has ego/is middle world are that they act in one of the following ways:

- **Needy:** they have needs and so make requests (ask you to sacrifice incense, put out food for them, etc.); this is appropriate—they need to eat just like we do, and we don’t take without giving back; just as you wouldn’t want a friend who was always taking and never giving back, these spirits also rightfully deserve reciprocity.
- **Bossy or pushy:** they tell you that you “should” (versus “could”) take a particular action;
- **Angry:** they get angry or judgmental or whiny with you, or at times make you feel bad or guilty or like you’ve done something wrong.

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; it’s better to add them in later. Luckily, it’s not that hard to avoid serious problems once you know a few simple protocols.
Protocols for Meeting Middle World Helping Spirits

Here are the protocols Mary Courtis recommends.

1. The first step is to find your non-egoic helping spirit. Make a clear journey intention that you only want to meet a non-egoic spirit (e.g. “I want to meet my ego-less manifestation of Source at this time”). Or, have someone experienced check to make sure it's one with no ego. Note: In many American Indian traditions, no one journeys to find their own helping spirit—this is considered impossible or something that opens you to trickery. A shaman must journey to find your helping spirit. Some traditions add that no one journeys ever unless the shaman goes with them on the journey. I can see why that’s a good idea if the tradition works only with middle world spirits; luckily, we don’t have that situation.

2. Ask your non-egoic one which other helping spirits you already work with, if any, or that you meet are egoic. Egoic ones are usually fine when you know their nature and have clear contracts.

3. Accept no additional helping spirits until they have been approved by your non-egoic helping spirit. Questions to ask your known non-egoic helping spirit include "Are they egoic or not?" "What will I learn if I work with them?" "Will they make a good team player and work well with my other helping spirits?"

4. When you first start working with a new egoic spirit that has been approved by your non-egoic helper, immediately ask the new spirit “why have you come to me and what do you want or need from me?” If they are non-egoic, the answer will be nothing, that they are simply here to support you on your path. Egoic ones will have needs just like we do, as this is legitimate. You simply want to know up front the nature of your contract with them, what they will do for you and what you will do for them.

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, Courtis recommends that you make sure all your journeys are to the realm of compassion in the upper or lower world, not the middle world. Make it part of your intention for the journey, e.g. "I'm going to the realm of compassion to meet with my known, non-egoic helping spirit for guidance on xxx]. Deception is possible even in dreams or ordinary reality omens.

6. Always journey with a clearly stated intention, including that you are asking only your known non-egoic helping spirit and inviting no one else who has not been approved by them. The intention determines the journey, and having no intention often can invite in any spirit anywhere who wants to be with you for whatever reason.

Protocols for Working with Your Known Middle World Helping Spirits

Mary Courtis and I also recommend specific protocols for working with helping spirits once they’ve been approved by your non-egoic spirit and you want to work with them.

1. When working with an egoic spirit, always have your egoless helping spirit with you and vet everything the egoic spirits say through the non-egoic one; check to make sure that your non-egoic helping spirit agrees with the egoic’s guidance. The non-egoic, fully compassionate spirit acts as a mediator to guard against external zinging and your own dips into sorcery unless you need to learn about sorcery.
2. Work only with the most compassionate ("evolved") form of that middle world helping spirit.

3. Bring through your middle world helping spirit’s consciousness, not their form (see below, “Bring Through Your Helping Spirit’s Consciousness, Not Just Their Form”).

4. Have your non-egoic helping spirit tend to your middle world helping spirits (see below, “Protect and Strengthen Egoic Spirits”).

**Bring Through Your Helping Spirit’s Consciousness, Not Just Their Form**

*Gratitude to graduate Mark Seven for raising these points!*

Let’s go back to item 3, “bringing through your middle world helping spirit’s consciousness, not their form. Shamanically, "power" is *not* the mainstream definition but the ability to shift consciousness at will. A middle world spirit’s power is not just their form but their *compassionate consciousness*. When working with spirits, especially middle world ones, bring them through so that their consciousness may be as present in the work as possible. Do not just bring through raw power or “untempered potency” without much of the guiding consciousness connected with it. The best way to do this is to merge only with their consciousness, not their form. I’ll be sharing in a moment more about this approach, known in Nepal as “Infused Consciousness.”

Connecting or merging with the power or energy of a Lion or the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet without really calling on, bringing through, or connecting with the wisdom of Lion or the compassion of non-egoic Sekhmet can manifest a great deal of raw potency but without much benefit of consciousness. Bringing through the helping spirit’s consciousness offers more power when working with formless (non-egoic) helping spirits, too!

Do not get too attached to the form the spirit takes (such as Lion, Sekhmet); focus on the ultimate energy or consciousness being tapped into as well as the consciousness of Lion or Sekhmet. When working with ethnocentric (egoic, middle world) spirits, you can get a better picture of their “consciousness” if you

- know their strengths and weaknesses and
- know what situations they're best at.

**Protect and Strengthen Egoic Spirits**

We already mentioned having your non-egoic spirit mentor “feed” your egoic helpers, taking care of the egoic ones’ energetic needs so that they do not drain you.

You can often also connect with the Middle World spirit's own non-egoic version, their own “true soul-self” or “higher self” for this work. For example, you can connect Middle World Archangel Michael with non-egoic Archangel Michael.

Compassionate spirit helpers can also protect the egoic ones from being killed or injured. For example, in some shamanic traditions, egoic spirits are implanted in a person’s chakras and need to be fed regularly in order to remain strong and healthy. They can also die or be injured trying to protect the person they inhabit. Placing them in the care of a compassionate helping spirit allows them to evolve and flourish much better than doing ceremonies to feed them yourself. Egoic spirits are usually grateful to be mentored and cared for by the stronger compassionate spirits. If any of you have been initiated into the Munay Ki rites, you might want to ask your non-egoic helping
spirit whether the spirits that may have been placed in your chakras are egoic and could benefit from this type of help.

It’s also good to think twice before revealing the identity of your middle world helpers. They are vulnerable, as are you. Anyone who knows their identity and wants to harm you can go to your egoic spirit and make them a better offer or deal to get them to leave you or turn them against you.

**Ensure Cultural Respect & Reciprocity**

To ensure cultural respect and reciprocity, work with middle world spirits in proper context, for example by helping members of their tribe or group. If the helping spirit is a middle world spirit from ancient Egypt, learn about Egypt and see if you can get involved in some way.

If you have an American Indian helping spirit, you can work with their living descendants to support, as culturally appropriate and respectful, the people and their lands.

Establish tribal ties or relationships with the living people of that egoic helping spirit. If one of your helping spirits is a Piscataway spirit from the land here, hook up with the Piscataway nation, see how you can support the work they’re doing. You could work to end cultural appropriation or offensive sports team names and icons. You could also work to help the spirit of the Chesapeake Bay detox itself of human waste and damage. In my opinion, it’s never a good idea to reveal their identity. It would be offensive to most American Indians, and if they’re a non-egoic spirit, they aren’t really American Indian and are just putting on that regalia for your benefit.

Be aware that if you study or work with tribal shamans or indigenous traditions, you are more likely to encounter middle world helping spirits, because that’s usually who they’re working with. Mindful of cultural appropriation, study or work with the indigenous people who have been working with these spirits for generations and have already worked out specific protocols and procedures for conducting rituals and doing healing that are appropriate for that spirit.

**Working Safely with Collectives or Groups of Helping Spirits**

*(Written by Shamanic Practitioner Mary Courtis)*

Finally, some spirits show up and work as a collective or group. Examples you may have heard of are the Ascended Masters, Angelic Collectives, Great White Brotherhood, and so on. Mary Courtis has these 3 tips to share:

1. Before working with a group of beings, be familiar and practiced at working with a non-egoic compassionate spirit.

2. Before working with a group of beings, have them vetted by your non-egoic spirit and your regular helpers. Ask your known helpers “Is the new helper or group an appropriate group for me to work with? What will I learn by working with them?”

3. Before working with a group of beings, you should have a clear idea about why the group experience is necessary. For example, Courtis calls in a group of Hindu spirits only when she has a Hindu ghost to cross over or who otherwise needs their assistance. Do not call them just because you think it would be cool to do so or because everyone you know is doing it or you read it in a book.
WORKING WITH HELPING SPIRITS: CONNECTING, MERGING, COMMUNICATING

Let’s look at how to connect, communicate, and merge with both egoic and non-egoic helping spirits.

Who/What Part of You Connects with the Helping Spirit?

What part of us connects with our helping spirits? Our ego? Our thinking, intellectual mind? Our emotional self? Well, sometimes. But ideally, all these recede from your primary awareness when you journey or work with a client. Ideally, you’re embodying your soul or true soul-self when you journey. It’s safest to take your body with you when you journey—these are called “embodied journeys.” To do them, you act out or mime your journey as you journey.

We’ve talked a lot about the level of ego and enlightenment in the helping spirit; let’s take a closer look at the level of ego, true soul-self awareness, and enlightenment in us as the practitioner. I developed a level of consciousness table for practitioners who do healing work for other people or beings, but it also applies to everyone, including those who are not practitioners. When journeying or working for yourself, you are both the practitioner and the client. These concepts also apply to daily waking life!

Table 2. Mediumship & Your Level of Consciousness
(*Indicates Safest Modes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Safety/Power</th>
<th>Your Status, Level of Presence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary Waking State or “Embodied Ego”</td>
<td>Your Safety=None</td>
<td>Your wounds, ego, thoughts, or emotions are in charge; your true self is locked away or is unable to control your conscious awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(non-embodied soul)</td>
<td>Client Safety=None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power=Varies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Out-of-Body or Non-Embodied Soul</td>
<td>Your Safety=Varies</td>
<td>Aka “out of body experience” or “astral projection;”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(body not ensouled)</td>
<td>Client Safety=High</td>
<td>The &quot;real&quot; you, your true soul-self, mostly leaves your body to do the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power=Strong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Embodied Soul</td>
<td>Your Safety=High</td>
<td>Your wounds, ego, thoughts, or emotions are present but in service to your soul or True Self, who occupies your body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(body and soul united; soul in charge)</td>
<td>Client Safety=High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power=Strong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I divided conscious awareness into three categories: (1) Ordinary Waking or Embodied Ego Level, (2) Out-of-Body or Non-Embodied Soul Level, and (3) Embodied Soul Level of consciousness. Each state affects the safety level and the power of the journey or healing ceremony.

Ordinary Waking State/Embodied Ego Consciousness

The “Embodied Ego” mode is just like the usual, waking state of consciousness in daily life. The ego is usually fairly engaged. Unlike astral projection, we’re at least mostly in our bodies. Our wounds, ego, thoughts, and emotions are in charge. The soul or true soul-self is not in charge and so is unable to control our conscious awareness, and not available to connect with our helping spirits. So no real safety exists either for us or the client for whom we’re journeying or doing healing work. And the quality of the journey or healing is not likely to bring through a lot of true power, because we’re in an egoic state.
**Out-of-Body State/Non-Embodied Soul Consciousness**

The second level, “Out of Body” or “Non-Embodied Soul” mode, is what we often call “astral projection.” It’s when you leave your body to journey. Your body may be at some risk of other energy moving into your body because your physical body is temporarily unoccupied by your soul and nature abhors a vacuum. Most who journey this way have a “tool” or one of their helping spirits stay with their body to protect it. Both the power or quality of the work and your client’s safety are usually pretty strong, because the one doing the journey and healing work is your soul, not your ego, thoughts, or emotions.

**Embodied Soul Consciousness**

The third mode, the “Embodied Soul”, is usually the most powerful and provides the highest safety for both you and your client. Your ego, thoughts, or emotions are present but non-reactive and in service to your soul or true soul-self, who is the one in control of your experience.

When journeying for myself or others or doing healing work, I aim for the third mode, “Embodied Soul,” before I connect with my helping spirit(s).

**How Do We Work with Helping Spirits? – Merge Levels**

In addition to our level or state of consciousness, the work is affected by how merged our embodied soul is with our helping spirits during the journey or the healing ceremony. The degree of merge also varies by tradition.

**Table 3. Mediumship & Your Level of Merge with Helping Spirit**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Safety/Power</th>
<th>What Happens, Degree of Merge</th>
<th>Your Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Non-Merged Interaction     | Your Safety=High  
Client Safety=High  
Power=Varies           | Two of you are present— you and the being with whom you are interacting; you interact as two fully separate beings | You remain fully present as yourself, separate from the other being with whom you’re interacting |
| *Infused Consciousness (Nepalese) | Your Safety=High  
Client Safety=High  
Power=Strong          | Your psychic veins/channels open and become infused with the consciousness and power of your helping spirit but not their form | You remain fully present. You get the light but don’t become the bulb. You don’t “channel” the spirits, they empower you. |
| Merged or Shared Forms      | Your Safety=Varies  
Client Safety=Varies  
Power=Varies          | You and the helping spirit become one; the percentages vary, but both you and the being/energy being mediumed are present | You do NOT disappear, though you may “recede” |
| Shapeshift or Full Trance (Morphed) | Your Safety=None  
Client Safety=Varies  
Power=Varies          | There was only ever one and there is just one – the animal/other being’s form | You disappear; when you return, you have no memory of the trance time |

The range of merges is from no merge at all to full trance mediumship where you disappear temporarily. The degree of merge affects how much healing power you bring through and how safe you and the client are during the work.
Non-Merged Interaction

In the first level, “Non-Merged Interaction,” both you and your helping spirit are present, but you remain fully present as yourself. The two of you interact as two fully separate beings. Safety levels are high, but the power brought through varies. It may lack “oomph” because the helping spirit may not have enough physical, middle world presence to transmit the power.

Infused Consciousness

In the second level, “Infused Consciousness,” your being becomes infused with your helping spirit’s consciousness and power but not their form. This practice, from Nepal, is the one I mentioned earlier to enhance your sovereignty. It is often spoken of as you “get the light but don’t become the bulb.” You don’t “channel” the spirits, they empower you. This usually brings through much power and is safe for both you and your client, because little egoic energy, from either you or your helping spirit, is present to dilute the power.

Merged or Shared Forms

The third level is “Merged or Shared Forms.” Your helping spirit’s form merges with your own as the practitioner, but the degree of merge can range from a little to a lot. You share your body with the helping spirit temporarily. This is a form of voluntary possession. I engage this mode often, and it feels much like a shared awareness. I’m fully present to see and hear what my helping spirit is doing; I also have control over my body even if the spirit is the one primarily directing my body. The degree of safety for both practitioner and client varies depending on how enlightened the helping spirit is.

Shapeshift or Full Trance

The fourth level is a full trance state, also called “Shapeshifting” or “morphing” into the helping spirit. Another name for this is full possession. You disappear, leave your body fully, while the helping spirit possesses and uses your body as their own. Your body may even change in some ways due to their presence. Your eye color may change, for example, or your body may look even more like the other being. When you return, you usually have no memory of what happened and feel that you passed out or “lost time.” Your safety is non-existent, and depends on your ability to both come back into your body and to get the occupying spirit to leave.

Notice that the level of true healing power brought through varies and is only consistently strong in the second level, “Infused Consciousness,” in which you merge with the consciousness or power of your helping spirit but not their form. Strong results certainly occur with the other levels also, but the power varies. “Infused Consciousness” is also one of only two merge modes that provide a consistently high level of safety for both you and the client.

All of these merge levels presume that, before merging, the practitioner’s true soul-self is in control and the thoughts, emotions, and ego are non-reactive. Shamans and practitioners engage all of these levels of merge, depending on the tradition. Of practitioners I know, full trance or shapeshifting is the least commonly used. The average shamanic journeyer engages mostly with non-merged interaction and perhaps infused consciousness.

For healing work, I usually work in the second and third modes in the table, “infused consciousness” and “merged or shared forms.” The percentage of merge varies depending on the work I’m doing, with a me-to-helping spirit ratio of about 60:40% to 5:95%. The latter range of me at 5% with helping spirit at 95% is rare. When I do shamanic work these days, my experience is
more embodied. My body, ego, thoughts, emotions, etc. all become attuned to my true soul-self or spiritual body. I don't leave behind my body, ego, etc., but they are fully aligned with and vibrating to my true soul-self.

Whichever merge mode you choose, being your true soul-self is the ideal state to be in before journeying or doing healing work. Some shamanic traditions do not merge with their helping spirits but work alongside them doing healing work. Many do the healing in the merged or shared consciousness. A few, like John of God in Brazil, do the full trance morphing or shapeshifting.

**Communicating with Helping Spirits**

**How Do the Spirits Communicate?**

So how do the spirits communicate with us?

1. Metaphors, parables, stories, songs
2. Soul to soul, heart to heart
3. The thinking part of the brain is generally not involved

**What Kind of Communication Glitches Can Occur With Helping Spirits?**

Let’s consider some common communication glitches, things that get in the way of hearing our helping spirits accurately and interpreting their guidance properly.

- We may be projecting our stuff onto our helping spirit.
- We may not want to hear what our helping spirit is showing or telling us.
- We may simply misunderstand what our helping spirit is showing or telling us.
- We may be interpreting what our helping spirit is saying literally instead of figuratively (remember: the spirits usually speak in metaphors).
- We may be getting poor advice; Egoic spirits can sometimes give poor guidance or make mistakes, just like we can. Poor advice can come from non-egoics if we fail to properly word our question.

Which of the above is about us? Which about the spirit? That’s right—most glitches arise from our own unhealed wounds, whether from cultural insanity or personal experiences.

**How to Increase Your Power with Your Helping Spirits: Increase Your Sovereignty**

Whether working with an egoic or nonegoic helping spirit, it’s ideal to increase our own power and sovereignty.

1. In daily life: Deepen your own awakening and compassion. Connect more with your own true soul-self, have the true soul-self be the one driving the bus. Practice being in observer mode and heal reactive states. Heal your wounds. You will have more power and you will also hear your helping spirits more clearly and interpret their guidance better.
a. Can also routinely attune your own human tools (ego, emotions, thoughts, body) to your true soul-self.
b. Work with a body empowering spirit and auric filter gatekeeper.
c. Strengthen your true soul-self with special journeys recommended after shamanic healing sessions. You have a handout of these, and I especially recommend the Soul Renewal (“Spa Special”) Journey suggested by Mary Courtis.
d. Increase your level of focus and discipline and commitment to your shamanic practice. (That tip is from Sandra Ingerman). Bring your shamanism more fully into your daily life.

2. When journeying: Take your body with you (“embodied” journeying) and mime your journeys as they’re happening.

3. When doing healing work: Decrease the degree of merge with your helping spirit or don’t merge at all; instead, work side by side.

4. As Sandra Ingerman says, these “ancient spiritual teachers have been around for thousands of years and want to bring guidance into your life.” Create sacred space before meeting these ancient spirits. Take time and care in setting up your journey or healing space and the energetic container with good invocations, preferably using an invocation you received in journey. We’ll talk more about how to set a strong container in an upcoming class.

5. Carefully vet each helping spirit. Distinguish between a one-time visiting helping spirit versus your regular helpers. Just as some people give us a wonderful gift even though it was a brief and chance encounter on a bus, some helping spirits only show up for one journey.

6. Work and merge more with your non-egoic helping spirit(s) to grow your own compassion and true soul-self. Their power infuses our bodies and strengthens us.

7. Have your non-egoic work with any egoics to meet their energetic needs (“feed” them for you) and work to increase the egoics’ compassion. Have you noticed that your own compassion grows the more you work with and merge with a non-egoic helping spirit? The same can happen for egoics. Buddhist monks invite demons to energetically eat the monks own true soul-self so the monks’ compassion can “get into” the demon.

When to Give Away Most or All of Your Power

There may be times when it’s appropriate to give away our power temporarily to a non-egoic helping spirit. “Giving away our power” sounds like a bad thing, but it isn’t always so. When I’m journeying for myself, I rarely give away my power to my helping spirits. But when I’m doing healing work for someone, I give away a good deal of my power and let my trusted helping spirits do the diagnosis and the healing. I just watch and learn.

We can start by looking at what it means to give away our power (or not) in our every day, waking relationships with living people. Are you usually the one in charge? The one who caves in? Healthy relationships usually have some give and take, without either party sacrificing their sovereignty.
This healthful ideal also applies to our relationships with our helping spirits. Sometimes it’s appropriate to let the helping spirit lead. Even then, we can do some from a place of choice.

- Our goal is to have a healthy relationship with healthy boundaries.
- Apply healthy dynamics with your helping spirits as with your daily relationships.
- We want to be coming from a place of choice, not feeling forced to obey.

The use of force and obedience are common in a number of classical shamanic traditions that work with powerful middle world spirits. However, having these special middle world protocols and a non-egoic helping spirit mean that we usually don’t have to feel forced to comply or obey as they do in some classical shamanic traditions.

**Examples:**

Journey question that *keeps* your power: “How do I use my creative energy after the healing? What would bring passion and meaning back into my life?”

Journey question that *gives away* your power: “What should I do to bring passion and meaning back into my life?”

What examples have you experienced? Not giving away your power is working with them as a friend to help you brainstorm. Even if you do give away your power, you can reject or modify their guidance rather than follow it without question. Giving away your power is allowing them to largely dictate an answer or exercise their judgment in doing the work, esp. as in doing healing work for a client.

When I’m doing healing work, how much I give away my power depends on whether the helping spirit is egoic or not and on the nature of the question or issue. I commonly do give away most or all of my power in these situations, though I would not hesitate to question the helping spirit if I thought they were about to do something questionable.

**Ways to Avoid Giving Away Your Power Inappropriately**

It’s good to avoid giving away your power when it’s inappropriate to do so. Here are 6 tips:

1. Word your question or intention carefully.
2. Avoid “should I” and yes/no questions.
3. Cultivate your own deep inner wisdom.
4. Trust yourself and your process. Learn to check in with your inner truth cord.
5. Heal your wounds.
6. Approach your helping spirits as a peer or partner whenever possible, not as a boss.

**Honoring Your Non-Egoic Helping Spirits**

Finally, you can honor your helping spirits in lots of ways, but here are my top two:

1. *Dance with them!* The Foundation for Shamanic Studies teaches that the compassionate spirits love it when we merge with them because it gives them a chance to experience form
again, to be able to sing (or caw) and to dance (or fly, or at least to have some of the
sensation of flying around the room). Perhaps our souls before this earth walk were no
different and just wanted to experience form again.

*My add-on:* But if they really want to experience form in a full-time way, they can
incarnate into a body and lifetime of their own. They know this and don’t want to claim
your body as their own. Any “walk-in” is almost certainly a ghost, not a helping spirit.

2. *Keep their identity private.* It’s best to ask why you want to share their identity and to ask
that helping spirit how they feel about your revealing their identity. The answer varies by
tradition. It’s generally kept confidential but is technically okay to reveal the identity of
your helping spirit unless you are boasting or they are a middle world spirit and thus
vulnerable to being harmed, tricked, or overpowered.

**Will I Always Have the Same Helping Spirit?**

Remember that at least one ego-less helping spirit is with you from birth to death. This spirit may
change form as you change, but they often remain at heart that same original condensed bit of
Oneness, which is their true nature. Spirits with egos (middle world spirits) may leave you if they
feel their work with you is done, if they feel you have not properly honored them or not met their
needs. They’re a lot like living people in that sense. A spirit might also leave you, according to Dr.
Michael Harner, if you don't interact with them. Sandra Ingerman teaches that they can leave if
you've learned what they have to teach you; ideally, another helping spirit comes in. Helping
spirits may come and go as a natural recycling.

**Key Points**

Let’s close with a quick review of the key points.

1. All helping spirits, "allies," and "tools" are not objects or resources but living beings in
   their own right. They are fellow-Earthlings and teachers.

2. True shamans partner with allies for the benefit of the greater good. It's not about what's
   best for me or you or all humans but what's best for all beings, including other animals,
   plants, elements, etc. and not even about what's best for Planet Earth but for the whole
   cosmos. To the extent that it’s about me/you, it’s about power for bringing through our
gifts to be of service to the whole, to the greater good.

3. Helping spirits will not protect you from life’s lessons, which are part of your spiritual
growth.

4. Helping spirits are not the final word in boundaries or ethics, even non-egoic ones. It’s
good to consult them on ethics and boundaries, but you are responsible for the decision.

5. Helping spirits are not responsible for your life. Don’t say “Well, I did it because my
   helping spirit told me to.”

6. The most important distinction is not the form of the helping spirit but whether the spirit
   has a form (“egoic”) or is simply taking on a form (“non-egoic”). Most practitioners I know
   erroneously think all helping spirits are non-egoic. They also don’t understand that middle
world spirits deserve reciprocity and can often be powerful allies if simple protocols are engaged. Some middle world spirits are indeed best avoided, but not all.

7. Remember how spirits communicate:
   a. Metaphors, parables, stories, songs
   b. Soul to soul, heart to heart
   c. Left brain is generally not involved

8. Your “true soul-self” is the best partner for your helping spirits!

9. Connecting and working with helping spirits varies by how deeply you merge and whether you merge with the spirit’s consciousness instead of their form.

**APPENDIX—FAQs: Short Answers**

**What are formless (non-egoic) helping spirits?**
These beings are formless energy that has no ego; we call them into form to more readily relate to Source. They don’t just represent Source/Oneness; they are Source/Oneness, packaged in a way we can digest and access. Be open: they can take the form of a child, someone from the future, a “mythical,” cartoon, or extinct species. They may represent the whole species (Uber Turtle, with a capital T). If they represent one specific, individual animal or person, they are usually an egoic, Middle World spirit.

**What are egoic spirits?**
These spirits have a specific form that is theirs, not just a garment per se that they wear so we can see and relate to them better. Their form may be physical (as in a tree, wolf, lake, etc.) or etheric (as in a fairy or a ghost). Because they have a form, they need an ego and an agenda to survive.

**Are helping spirits all-powerful?**
According to classical shamanism, they are infinite beings, thought to be all powerful in the Upper and Lower Worlds. Their only limitations are here in the Middle World, where they may need to work through us to make things happen.

**Are some helping spirits better than others?**
Spirits with and without forms have different strengths and weaknesses. Some egoic spirits are more powerful than we are, some are equal, others are less powerful. Each has a special value and purpose. Size doesn’t matter: Mouse is more powerful than Bear in some traditions.

**Why do you recommend that our first helping spirit be “ego-less”?**
Transcendent, non-egoic beings are usually unconditionally compassionate. This means that they

- have no ego or agenda, so the quality of advice they give tends to be better, especially if you word your question properly;
- can see through any illusion or deception;
- will not dominate you, get angry or judgmental, etc., unless they are acting out something for you; and
- need no offering from you and so need neither food nor rest and can work 24/7.

Middle World (egoic or ethnocentric) spirits are important to work with, but they have their own agenda and egos and require special handling; training in how to work with them is advisable.
**Can I run into the wrong kinds of spirits when I journey?**

My answer: It does happen, but I don’t think it’s routine. Still, it’s best to ensure that you work with at least one primary helping spirit that you are sure is non-egoic.

Ingerman notes: Most of us have so many seeds of fear planted within us that people starting to journey are fearful. If you hold the intention to meet up with compassionate spirits, you’ll meet beings of that compassionate, transcendent realm. Shamanism is about the discipline of purposely holding a specific, clear intention and knowing that you’re being held and loved.

**How many helping spirits or power animals should one have?**

No one right answer exists. Some people have only one their entire life. Most folks have a few; practitioners who regularly do healing work may have helping spirits who do healing work for other people in addition to ones who support them personally. In shamanism, we generally work only with our own known, familiar helping spirits; we do not open to all spirits or to strangers.

**Must I have a helping spirit with me when I journey?**

Sandra Ingerman teaches that you can journey through the spirit world without a helping spirit and that you only need a helping spirit for doing healing work. Being accompanied by a helping spirit is also helpful when you’re journeying in the Middle World. I agree and add that the guidance of helping spirits is a key component of classical shamanism, so some would say that journeys are not shamanic practice if no helping spirit is involved.

**Why not journey solo, why work with helping spirits?**

While we are living a lifetime in a form (human or other than human), we are egoic and lack the non-egoic vision. It's also harder for us to see the Whole (or anything, really) as it truly is because we are in a body. Our filters, necessary for us to function in a form, interfere with our ability to accurately perceive reality. It helps to have a "buddy" who is not embodied and can see clearly the Whole. After the body dies and we cross over, we are non-egoic again.