

COMMON SENTIENCE



ANIMALS

*Personal Tales of Encounters
with Spirit Animals*

Featuring

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PART ONE

Understanding Spirit Animals

*When I look into the eyes of an animal, I do not see an animal.
I see a living being. I see a friend. I feel a soul.*

—ANTHONY DOUGLAS WILLIAMS

OUR INTIMATE CONNECTION TO THE ANIMAL KINGDOM



Animals of countless shapes, colors, sizes, and species are in plain sight all around us, yet have we forgotten something essential? Have we forgotten that we *are* one, as well—the human animal?

We only need to pause for a moment and feel our hearts beating, observe our movements, and consider that we eat, sleep, eliminate, and procreate in the same basic manner as nearly all other animal beings. Like them, we eventually pass from this physical world, with our bodily substances reassimilating into the soil and our timeless souls returning home to the spirit world.

In other words, animals are us; and we are them. For our long-ago ancestors and many indigenous peoples, it's a given that *homo sapiens* are fundamentally related to every living being on this planet—from the smallest pebble and multitude of plants to the largest mammals. In our modern world, too many of us have forgotten this intimate relationship. We may agree with it as a philosophy, but the experience of it as our true reality has been obscured, even as we breathe the same air, share the same land and oceans, and cohabitate on this single spectacular Mother Earth.

In my humble opinion, it is the animals who are faithfully and lovingly working on our behalf—both in the visible and unseen worlds—to help

us reawaken to who we really are and stay on course with our evolution as a humanity. We, in turn, can give deserving reverence to the animals for doing so, and as an honoring to them, stay open to the wisdom of these Animal People, as many Native Americans call them. They have much to teach us, and that is why the personal tales being shared in this book are so much more than mystical animal encounters; they are stories illustrating how our animal brethren impart their perennial lessons to us—and, as a result, we, too, can soar like eagles, run like pumas, and reach new heights like the tallest giraffe.

In my work, I see every day that more and more individuals are returning to this truth and are curious to discover how to tune into and receive guidance from the animal world. This gives me hope for humanity!

It's actually quite wondrous how animals permeate our consciousness, and are omnipresent in our everyday lives. They surround us in physical form, like the geese that fly overhead, the rabbit that scampers across your lawn at dusk, or the dolphins that frolic just outside the ocean's surf when you're at the beach. Our animal friends appear everywhere in symbolic form, as well. I only have to look as far as my computer to see the tiny raccoon, tortoise, owl, and hawk totems sitting on a shelf behind it. The rainbow serpent in the painting behind my desk is observing me right now, and in the corner of the room, the bronze rendition of a raven with his wings spread is intently watching me. Okay, I'm known as the animal spirit guy, but glance around *your* living or work space right now. Do you see animal influences in your environment?

Our intimate connection to the animal kingdom reveals itself in a variety of ways. Even in congested urban settings, birds sing away in the trees, pigeons gather around the man on the park bench feeding them, and squirrels scamper about doing squirrel business. Taking a walk in an urban park or a rural forest, we might catch a glimpse of groundhogs rumbling through the bush, deer quietly darting away, or wild turkeys scratching for grubs. Whether we notice them or not, animals co-exist with us—sometimes to our dismay, like finding a mouse in

the kitchen pantry . . . but what if that rodent, wasp, or opossum is appearing to us for a deeper reason?

Most of us have felt the desire to bring a domesticated animal into our lives as a friend and companion. It's no wonder that the pet industry is valued in the tens of billions of dollars—yes, billions. Our dogs, cats, goldfish, hamsters, and other pets compel us to remember that animals are part of our earthly “family.” And we're captivated by the ones that remain feral. Wild animal parks aren't just fun places to have an outing for the day; they offer us a safe yet thrilling glimpse of the wildness that abounds in nature.

We even have the natural instinct to revere animals by naming our sports teams after them, such as the Philadelphia Eagles and Sydney Roosters, as well as various organizations like the Lion's Club or the Loyal Order of Moose. In both indigenous and contemporary cultures, individuals may be given an animal name, such as Fawn, Robin, Little Bear, Buck, Colt, or Black Tail Swan.

Popular movies, books, plays, and more integrate animals into the story line as important characters. In particular, our enduring mythological and fairy tales portray animals that communicate with each other and with humans. We keep animals close to us by wearing images of them—or their attributes, like leopard print—on our clothing and jewelry, and by incorporating them into our living space décor. Our vehicles are named after cougar and jaguar, and our puma shoes help us run faster.

Even in our everyday language, animal metaphors abound. The stock market is either a bull or a bear market; someone is busy as a beaver, or tries to weasel their way out of things. You may be trying to outfox someone, but because your idea sounds fishy, they probably think you're just horsing around and trying to get their goat. So, once they find you out, you'll have to eat crow.

You get the picture. We're so intertwined with our animal kin that most of the time, we may take for granted their ubiquity in our lives and the bountiful gifts they give us. Yet we're in a time right now when understanding the interrelationship of all sentient beings is more important to our collective survival than ever; and

having a solid connection to the Life Force that animates us all is crucial. The animals can help us trust our own spiritual authority.

So, come fly with me into the magic and mystery of spirit animals!

WHAT ARE SPIRIT ANIMALS?



The spirit world is not some place up in the sky far removed from us. It's another dimension that exists alongside our material reality. It is present and accessible at all times, requiring only the willingness, intention, and openness to make contact with the beings that reside there—including spirit animals. Our awareness and consciousness are the vehicles that allow us to accomplish this connection.

Spirit animals are extensions of God, Great Spirit, Source, or whatever name you give to All That Is, just as we and everything else in the material world are. They are part of a broader realm, most often referred to as spirit guides, helping spirits, or guardian spirits.

These three terms are used interchangeably to mean any of the spiritual beings that help us in a life-affirming way, such as ancestors, archangels, nature spirits—or animals. They may be ordinarily non-visible or show up in visible form, and will often indicate their presence through signs and omens. We can also call on them for guidance, protection, encouragement, and inspiration.

Some spirit guides have been with us since childhood, while others appear at various periods in our life, perhaps to help us through difficult transitions. We may see them, hear them, feel them, or just know they're with us. The important

thing to remember is that they want to help us experience more peaceful, harmonious, and happier lives, yet will not interfere with our free will. They are happy to serve and willingly do so whenever called upon.

ANIMAL SPIRIT GUIDES AND SPIRIT ANIMALS

How do animals fit into the spirit world? The concept of spirit animals is found in most indigenous cultures. Their relationships with animals are the result of tens of thousands of years of ancestral connection to their environments, landscapes, and eco-systems, which they regard as sacred.

The particular meanings of different animals vary broadly across world cultures, but the commonality is that civilizations have worshipped, mythologized, and revered animals as guardians, messengers, spirits, and even gods since time immemorial. From the Buddhist belief that animals are souls that reincarnate; the Hindi depiction of monkey and elephant gods like Ganesha and Hanuman; and Egyptian deities that meld human with sphinx, ibis, falcon, snake, dog, and more; to the Greeks, Druids, other Europeans and Asians who listen for wisdom from the animals, the spiritual ties between mankind and animals is evident everywhere.

A few more terms for clarification: Spirit guides or helping spirits in the form of an animal—generally called animal spirit guides or spirit animals—appear when Spirit is attempting to get our attention. A spirit animal can show up physically, such as a crow that lands outside your window and glares at you; or symbolically, as when you see images of a sea horse everywhere you turn. They can also reveal themselves in a dream vision, or through sound, like a blue jay screeching nearby. A spirit animal can cross your path then leave as quickly as it arrived, or reveal itself repetitively over a span of time. Regardless of the duration of its presence, if it shows up in an unusual way, it's doing so as a messenger from Spirit.

I am delighted to share my perspective and personal experiences with spirit animals, as I know first-hand how profound of a supporting role they can play in helping navigate life's challenges. I have learned so much about myself through the eyes of hawk, bear, and many other spirit animal friends.

The more you enter into partnership with them, you too will experience spirit animals as exceptional teachers about the natural world, the spiritual realm, and about life overall. Working with spirit animals as part of your daily routine will not only enhance your ordinary experiences but will immensely expand your spiritual capacities, as well. Once in relationship with these animal brothers and sisters, you will come to trust their keen perception, sage advice, and the simple ways in which they appear just when you most need guidance.

TOTEM ANIMALS

Spirit animals are sometimes referred to as totem animals, although this is a more specific type of spirit animal that has a couple of different meanings. A totem animal can be one that is shared by a clan, family lineage, or like-minded group, or adopted by any type of group for a particular reason. For example, an addiction support group may decide to use a lion in symbolic form to reinforce qualities of endurance and strength of will. An intentional community might embrace the totem of a meadowlark or dove to instill qualities of relationship harmony among the members. Or a group of neighbors could choose to honor the native species in the vicinity by naming their local park Raccoon Trail or Deer Run.

Another meaning of totem animal is a favorite spirit animal that can be represented symbolically, such as with a talisman, emblem, crest, statue, or piece of jewelry. In the Pacific Northwest, totem poles have representations of the spirit animals that are shared by the various clans that exist within the tribe, often with the totem animal for the entire community being at the top of the totem pole. Even in contemporary society, you'll find representations of animals that can

rightfully be called totems, such as the teddy bears or stuffed bunny rabbits we give to small children to give them comfort.

I've discovered that a more useful term for what has been called a personal totem is a *power animal*, the meaning of which stems from shamanism, as described in the following section. The ancient practice of shamanism that is seeing a revival in the contemporary world provides a different perspective on these spirit animals that work with us throughout our lifetimes. As you'll see, a power animal is a spirit animal that is much more than a symbol; it is a guardian spirit that can provide protection, guidance, and healing.

POWER ANIMALS

Spirit animals can also grace our lives in the form of power animals. This is a highly personal and specialized relationship with an animal spirit guide. It's not one you choose in the usual sense of the word; it's more of a soul-to-soul connection, in which your soul bonds with the soul—or, more accurately, the oversoul—of the animal. The power animal relationship is one to be nurtured and attended to on a regular basis, and usually lasts for a number of years.

The concept of power animal has its origins in shamanism, and the term “shaman” originates from the Tungus people of Siberia and means “one who knows.” It is believed that the advent of shamans occurred after agriculture was discovered. In various indigenous cultures up to the present day, you will find shamans who are an essential part of these communities.

The fundamental skill of the shaman is the shamanic journey—that is, an altered state of awareness in which the shaman transports his soul into non-ordinary reality to align with helping spirits and receive teachings, guidance, and healings. This is done by reconnecting the conscious human life with the natural and spirit worlds through animal spirits.

For this reason, during shamanic journeys, power animals are critical allies for the shaman. In essence, the power animal aids the shaman in transcending the earthly plane and attuning to the ethereal. A shaman's particular power animal is typically acquired early in their initiation into their practice. From then on, the power animal travels with the shaman whenever he goes on a journey, for himself or on behalf of others.

These days, many more people are becoming familiar with shamanism, and some feel called to work as a shamanic practitioner. I am honored to serve in this role in my work. Whenever I do a shamanic journey, I always call on two of my four power animals: Wolf and Raven. Wolf has proven to be a supreme protector and guardian, as well as a guide; and Raven has proven to be an excellent manifester, guide, and consultant.

In these sessions, I serve as the bridge for my clients to meet their own power animals. It is always a profound and magical experience for myself and the individual, as no two journeys are alike. Sharon, for example, met her power animal in a journey and was surprised that Dolphin came to her. As we worked together in her sessions, it became evident that this was the perfect power animal for her, as Dolphin provided the powers of communication, playfulness, breathwork, and a greater fluidity in her physical movements. Sharon eventually realized that Dolphin's characteristics were subtly helping her modify habits in her life that needed greater balance and flow.

You don't need to be a shaman, have an interest in shamanism, or be associated with an indigenous culture to experience the tremendous value of working with power animals. You can learn to access this same energy by opening to the possibility of these intelligent beings guiding you. In response, the animals will answer your heart's calling. It may come to you in a meditation, vision, or dream to impart spiritual wisdom or guidance.

Power animals can stay with you for extended periods of time and for specific reasons. I've observed that they enter into our lives at a time when we most need their particular expression of spiritual power. For instance, if you're a manager

or leader who is dealing with hostile team members, Crab can step in sideways to assist you in making quick decisions, turning things around, and tactfully deal with confrontation. If you're going through a major life transition like a divorce or career change, you may find Albatross flying in to help lift your burdens, or Camel replenishing your faith when you feel discouraged or lost.

Your power animal may leave you at some point, which usually means that the relationship has served its purpose, and another one is or will be coming into your life.

Because a spirit animal's power is drawn from its instinctual and wild nature, domesticated animals cannot be power animals; they've lost much of their wildness and are removed from the natural world. Likewise, some traditions believe that insects are excluded from being power animals because of their size and nature, as are mythological animals such as dragons and unicorns, which I will speak more about later. I found it fascinating that when I was writing my book on power animals, Dragonfly, Butterfly, and other insects argued vehemently about being included, so I included them. I now see the wisdom of that, as insects offer unique types of power.

THE ESSENCE OF THE SPIRIT ANIMAL

Depending on how and in what way they show up in the material world—whether in the flesh or as a symbol—the appearance of animal spirit guides can be as a representative of the consciousness of that animal. For instance, if your power animal is a crane, the traits of longevity and honor that you glean from it are coming not just from a single bird, but from the entire species of cranes.

Throughout these pages, you will notice that I am either referring to animal spirit guides as particular beings, such as badgers and chameleons, or as the essence of these beings—hence, Badger or Chameleon. The hummingbird that flits about and then hovers for several seconds directly in front of you isn't just

a hummingbird but is carrying with her the essence of *all* hummingbirds, and is therefore Hummingbird with a capital “H.” That’s also why when speaking of animal spirits, it is appropriate to leave out the “a” or “an”; the hawk that visits you isn’t only a hawk, but in some instances, also represents the consciousness of all hawks . . . and is, therefore, Hawk.

Why is this distinction important? Viewing your animal spirit guides in this expansive way will most likely inspire you to have a greater and deeper appreciation for all cranes, all badgers, all hummingbirds, and to extend that care and respect to the animal kingdom as a whole. If Shark is your power animal, for example, the love and appreciation you feel for Shark will naturally span out to encompass all creatures of the sea, then those of the land and the air. Eventually, this will translate into a desire to walk more gently on Mother Earth, and feel compassion for her as a living being.

This is why I feel strongly that co-creating our earthly existence with spiritual guidance from our animal brethren can truly change all of our lives for the better. Now let’s delve into the specifics of how spirit animals fulfill this grand purpose.

END OF EXCERPT OF PART ONE



PART TWO

*Personal Tales of Encounters
with Spirit Animals*

*Maybe it's animalness that will make the world right again:
the wisdom of elephants, the enthusiasm of canines,
the grace of snakes, the mildness of anteaters.*

—CAROL EMSHWILLER

GRASSHOPPER SPIRIT AND THE JOY OF SONG

It was my dream guitar: a Martin D35 acoustic. The \$700 price tag was a lot of dough for a 16-year-old (my age at the time). So, I worked a job and saved my pennies. Finally, the day came when I got to take this instrument home with me. It became my baby.

For the next couple of years, I had so much fun teaching myself various chords and fancy finger picking. Soon, I knew enough to play a few folk songs and some of my favorite rock anthems like Neil Young's "Cinnamon Girl" and Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone."

Singing is something I've always had an affinity for, as well. I've got a decent voice but was always so shy about singing around others. In private, I had no problem belting out "Hotel California" or humming James Taylor tunes, but when it came time to sing anywhere outside of my bedroom, I'd get very nervous. I had to force myself to overcome my shyness.

When I was 23, me and a friend, Bill, who I often jammed with, decided to co-write some songs. We had become friends with a fellow who owned a recording studio, and he was supportive of us and our music. So off to the studio we went to lay down some tracks. This experience helped Bill and me feel a lot

more confident and relaxed in our talent. From there, we started performing at small venues around town. It was a blast.

We had no particular goal, though I did secretly fantasize about becoming a famous rock star. What teenager doesn't? In all honesty, I didn't think I had the ambition or talent to pursue music as a career. It was mainly for fun, an avocation.

We kept a band together for a short while, but my rock-and-roll dream faded with age and the distractions inherent in trying to be a responsible adult. Music continued to be an important part of my life, though. I stopped performing, writing, and recording, but I never completely stopped playing.

Then a few years ago, something took hold of me. Four years had passed since I'd picked up my instrument. I dusted off the Martin D35 and started strumming a bit. Soon I felt inspired to dig out and rewrite a couple of those older songs that Bill and I had created, and to compose some new ones.

For a few weeks, I was increasingly swept up in a delightful fever of lyrical and musical creativity. My passion returned with a joyful fury. I had forgotten about the sheer fun of simply playing and singing, let alone the thrill of writing some original songs. I followed the inspiration, excitedly picking up my guitar every day, and ended up writing quite a few new melodies and lyrics.

Before long, I had several tunes in final form and was excited to share them. Now that I was older, I was creating something that wasn't just for myself. I wanted these new songs to express something meaningful and hopefully stir something in the listener. I had an intuition that what was coming through me was that powerful. As I composed each one, it felt more like I was transcribing them from some other source or dimension. Clearly, they were guided by some higher force, as music often is, and I was the willing vehicle through which the songs showed up. In essence, I let the songs find me and come through me.

After playing them for my wife and friends, they encouraged me to share my new playlist with others. Over the next couple of months, I performed in a couple of coffee houses and received very positive responses. Before I knew it, others were encouraging me to record my compositions.

I attempted some home recording but realized that I needed to go to a professional studio to get the high-quality sound that I wanted. Since I hadn't been in a studio for years, I was nervous about it on many levels, but in spite of my trepidation, I set up a recording date for the following day.

The minute I made that appointment, fear started to creep in. I began questioning, *Are my songs good enough? Is there a real purpose in recording them?* Paradoxically, my gut was telling me that recording and producing them was important, and some inner muse was the driving force to do so in spite of my trepidation.

You have something to say through the music, it encouraged. Have no fear.

And yet, being only human, I did.

Later that day, I was sitting in my office, enjoying the balmy weather and light breeze wafting in from the open sliding glass doors. In anticipation of my studio appointment, I organized the songs I wanted to work on, feeling both nervousness and excitement.

The critical voice of the ego kept popping in and out, saying things like, *What do you think you're doing? Who do you think you are?* Yes, my internal critic was cautioning me to not take a chance, stay safe, not put myself out there. It's interesting how when we stretch our comfort zone, there's typically a part of us that doesn't want us to take risks, yet always opting for safety and comfort leads to a sort of death, doesn't it? The death of one's creative soul, at the very least.

As I was contemplating all this, a huge grasshopper jumped from the outside and landed squarely in front of my computer. I hadn't seen a grasshopper for years, and now here was one plopping down right by me. Staring at this tiny being for a few moments, I thought, *Okay, Mr. Spirit Animal guy, what does grasshopper mean?* I did what I first advise others to do when having an animal encounter: I asked for a direct revelation from Grasshopper Spirit, which I perceived through my inner voice.

Grasshopper's immediate message was: *Take the leap!*

This made a lot of sense, of course, and alleviated some of my nervousness about going into the recording studio. Closing my eyes, I reached out with my mind and heart to Grasshopper Spirit and asked, *Is there anything else I need to know?*

Immediately, I was overcome with an endearing memory of sitting in my backyard on a summer's eve years ago, the sound of grasshoppers singing all around me as I gazed peacefully into the starry, moonlit sky. I can hear their sweet, lilting refrain even as I write this. The memory touched me very deeply, and I understood in my heart that Grasshopper Spirit was offering to align with me as a powerful ally and support for my very soul, and for what my soul was urging me to do, through music.

For outer-world confirmation of Grasshopper's message, and just for fun, I did a bit of online research about the meaning of grasshopper as a spirit animal. I learned that there are about 10,000 species and each has its own unique song. With a few exceptions, only the males can sing. During courtship, male grasshoppers take turns singing songs, competing to outdo each other for the attention of the females.

But what really jumped out at me (no pun intended) was this message: *One of the gifts these insects hold is the power of song and sound. Song is an ancient way to alter consciousness and communicate with our animal and spirit relations. Some Native American songs date back at least 20,000 years.*

Okay, okay! I got chills up and down my spine as I read this, as the message was so obvious. I couldn't back out of this music recording appointment even if I wanted to!

The next day, I recorded five basic tracks (guitar and vocals) of my songs. I'm pleased with the results and have since shared these recordings with the world.

To this day, when I take a walk through the park and hear grasshoppers singing in unison, I am reminded of how music is so vitally important to me personally, to us collectively, and I often feel inspired to go home and immediately pick up my guitar. Recently, I did just that and was working on another new song,

struggling to find the right music for the lyrics that had flowed out of my pen. I played it one way, then another, but couldn't find the perfect tune.

Instead of getting frustrated, as I typically would have in the past, I simply called on Grasshopper Spirit. When I did, he reminded me of something I innately knew since that day when I dusted off my guitar and picked up writing and composing again. I heard very clearly, *Let the song find you . . .* and it did.

Dr. Steven Farmer

SHAMAN HORSE

My ears throbbed strangely as I entered the horse's stall. The atmosphere there reminded me of the sensation I'd felt when learning to scuba dive in my teens. The heavy vibration of being under 10 feet of ocean was like floating into a different dimension.

Bracing myself emotionally, I walked toward Jester's hung head. He suddenly awakened from his stupor and gingerly moved to meet me. The voice of his owner, Joyce, drifted toward us.

"It's funny, Jester hasn't been able to stand for days, and he got up just as you arrived at the farm," she commented.

Joyce's love and concern, coupled with her anxiety to do the right thing, rang out as if from a greater distance than the one I had just traversed.

Jester exhaled a velvety breath onto my outstretched hands. It awakened a stream of energy that instantly created a sharp tingling in my palms. As Joyce's voice receded from my awareness, I felt Jester's consciousness growing. I exhaled and said a silent prayer: *Please help me get this right.*

Jester sent me a strong wave of reassurance through my hands, which were now starting to swell and heat up. How strange it was to have an extremely ill horse sending me warm feelings of encouragement, when I was the one who had

been hired as an animal communicator to help *him*. I decided to let Jester lead me.

Letting go of my illusion of control as a professional, I ignored Joyce's ongoing monologue about the veterinarian arriving soon, and refocused on the connection between Jester's nose and my hands. I asked it to expand so I could understand with my mind what my hands were feeling. It was as if I'd been standing in a pond and suddenly found myself caught up in a heavy surf. The energy shot up my arms and my heart flooded with Jester's feelings.

He radiated love with such purity that I felt I might cry. Jester reassured me that he was joyful to have my help and wanted me to stay calm. Oddly, despite my amazement, his deep calmness affected me. *I am meant to be here, to play my role*, I thought. *I am blessed to be in Jester's presence*. I waited for more from Jester, resisting the urge to pry and prod.

He sent me more love and suddenly an image flitted across my mind's eye: a young girl riding a much younger Jester. His sway back and grey hair were replaced by a proud stride and rich mahogany coat. The vision continued with a series of scenes: Jester jumping a fence with the girl astride, the two of them sharing an evening while he grazed in his field as, nearby, she watched from atop the pasture fence, legs swinging in the gangly manner of a preteen. His adoration for this girl included feeling protective of her safety while she rode. Like a devoted uncle, he saw her huge loving soul for the wonder that it was.

His sense of guardianship was something I could feel in my heart. *You are in the presence of a powerful being*, I thought. Jester was fueled by love and participated unabashedly in his relationship with this girl. The relationship was profound for them both.

The transmission of information continued to occur spontaneously, layering across my consciousness to form a story. *Would I be able to remember all of what I felt from him?* I reciprocated to Jester how pleased I was to be his messenger, and that I understood he wanted me to comfort those he was leaving behind. His

life was complete, having embraced and been embraced by this family, especially the young girl.

Yes, thank you for coming to help them, he conveyed. They are so afraid. I am dying.

A wave of sadness hit me, immediately lightened by his next thought. *It's now my time since horses don't live as long as girls.*

Choked up with admiration for his noble love, I nodded and vaguely responded to Joyce's repeated questions.

"Is he in pain?" she asked. "Have we done all we can for him?"

"It's all wonderful and he's preparing himself to cross over." I responded.

"I should have the vet come then?"

In my heightened state, Joyce's questions hit me like battering rams. Afraid to break the intense connection with Jester, I was all too aware that doing so could end our session prematurely. Besides, his vibration evoked love—while hers, anxiety.

Bravely, I asked Jester the question on everyone's mind: "Do you want help crossing over? The vet is on his way, and all are hoping to speed you through the painful phase of crossing over. Jester, is that what you desire?"

He became very still and continued to breathe love into my hands, sending a wave up my arms that cascaded over my head and down my spine. His response shocked me.

He simply said: *I took it for the girl.*

I heard these words while seeing a vision of a girl in a hospital bed, her head wrapped in what looked like a turban. Though I couldn't recognize her face, I knew it was the preteen I'd been shown moments earlier. I stood in admiration, flowing love back to Jester.

Just then I heard the tires crunching on the driveway. Jester knew the time for a decision was upon him as the vet conversed with Joyce in the barn aisle.

"I hope he's been comfortable enough . . . We have exhausted all possible avenues . . . Remember, we have never seen a tumor of this type on the outside

of a horse before . . . I wish I were here to help the old guy recover . . . I just don't know what it is we are even treating."

When Joyce explained my presence, the vet politely raised an eyebrow and asked me what Jester had communicated.

"He told me that he took it for the girl."

Behind me, Joyce gasped and cried out. Shivers shot down my back. Jester suddenly retreated his energy, and I knew he was tired from transmitting. Joyce leaned into his neck, sobbing her thanks. Between tears, she confirmed the meaning of the vision Jester had shown me.

Her daughter, Lana, had developed an inoperable brain tumor two years prior. She took a swift decline and stopped being able to speak. Hospice was employed to keep her comfortable. Then suddenly one day, Lana started to talk again. The doctors had never seen such a reversal. The tumor simply disappeared without treatment. Hospice was sent away and she eventually recovered.

The realization dawned on Joyce as we all stood in wonder, each of us trying to process what this meant.

"It was shortly after that when this tumor appeared on Jester's leg," she explained through tears. "It became the shape of a cantaloupe, eventually morphing into something that looked very much like a brain."

Wow! You don't mess around! I joked with Jester. *You give the girl a lifetime lesson on love, save her life, then restore faith to a mother and a man of science!*

Jester whinnied and seemed pleased with himself. By now, my emotions were all over the scale—a mix of bubbling amazement and joy chirping through my heart.

Then Jester prodded my consciousness with the idea that he would now like the man of science to help him leave his body. He needed to relay this message to his family so they would know that Spirit had graced them. Jester yearned to rejoin with the Life Force and leave his tired body behind. I, too, wished to join him as he flashed to me a vision of the peaceful love awaiting him on the other

side. Warmth flooded through me, knowing that I'd been graced by this amazing being and marveling that Spirit had included me in this profound experience.

Laura S. Rowley

END OF EXCERPT OF PART TWO



PART THREE

*Deepening Your Connection
with Spirit Animals*

*For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more
complete than ours, they are more finished and complete, gifted
with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by
voices we shall never hear.*

*They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they
are other Nations, caught with ourselves in the
net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the
splendour and travail of the earth.*

—HENRY BESTON

PRACTICES TO DEEPEN YOUR SPIRIT ANIMAL EXPERIENCES



Connecting with spirit animals is an ever-deepening process, as the bounty of the natural world is boundless in its innate intelligence and superpowers. The more you align with these sentient beings and allow them to work their magic in your life, you will begin to feel increasingly supported by these wild and wise allies, accompanied by a comforting knowing that you are never alone, and never have to go it alone. Support is all around.

When you encounter an animal that offers himself as a Divine channel for providing messages that guide you along your soul's journey, you will not only enhance your relationship with the animal world but also discover that you have more trust in the reality of Great Spirit. Realizing that there is another dimension to these amazing animal beings is life changing, as it affirms how intertwined we are with not only the animals but with *all* other life forms. You will recognize that Spirit can supply messages from other beings in the natural world as well, and that all the other spirits of nature are in abundant supply.

As your consciousness expands to incorporate these ways of receiving guidance, you will come to understand that, at any time, you can tune in and receive helpful information to support your purpose in being here on this amazing planet. During these dramatically changing times, it's critical that we do

whatever we can to sustain a conscious relationship with Spirit. This chapter is dedicated to the ways in which you can commence your relationship with animal spirit guides and subsequently deepen it over time to encompass all of Life.

When it comes to solidifying your interrelationship with animal spirit guides, practice is key. Like most skills, it can best be honed through regular devotion and continued willingness to discover for yourself the power and magic of working with animals in this way.

PRACTICE DIRECT REVELATION

I recommend doing this as a very first step whenever you encounter a spirit animal in physical or etheric form. Direct revelation is another way of saying that you are engaging your inner senses. It simply means that there is no intermediary between you and the animal spirit guide. This is the purest and most immediate way to establish a connection and decipher what messages spirit animals are offering.

When an opportunity for learning about yourself is presented in the form of an animal spirit guide showing up—for example, you have a vivid dream about an octopus—close your eyes, take a deep breath, and review the dream or event. Tune in and telepathically ask Octopus Spirit, *Octopus, what's your message?* You can, of course, do this with any other being in the natural world—trees, clouds, mountains, and more; however, what I find is that information from animal spirit guides is the most accessible. You may find that you can relate more instinctually to animals than, say, Tree or Mountain Spirit. Experiment and observe yourself as you do.

Immediately after you've asked the spirit animal for its message, pay close attention to everything you receive and perceive. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you sense in your body? These perceptions could come in some or all of the ways outlined in Part One; for instance, you may hear with your inner

voice and see images in your mind's eye, or your attention may be directed to look at or hear something in the external environment.

Perhaps when I encounter Elephant and ask him for the message, what I see is an image of an elephant raising his trunk. I may notice that he's standing in front of a wall then charging into it, the wall falling apart, and Elephant making his way through it.

So, I pause and contemplate what is just revealed to me. *Well, he's charging through a wall and the wall crumbles.* These visual metaphors convey a partial answer to the question. Then I hear with my inner voice, *You need to be less rigid with your beliefs and actions . . .* followed by, *You need to clean things up,* which I immediately realize is referring to "tidying up" a conflict I've just had with someone. The wall? Well, Elephant is encouraging me to not allow myself to be blocked in any way to achieving my goals, to break through my preconceived barriers, and even resolve any unfinished business that is standing in the way of my being able to forge ahead in life.

Of course, if you were to experience the same visual from Elephant, your interpretation might mean something slightly or completely different. If you're confused or uncertain about what the message means, go back and ask Elephant to clarify. Once again, close your eyes, take a couple of deep breaths, see the animal in your mind's eye, silently ask about the message, then pay attention to whatever shows up next, whether through images, words, sensations, thoughts, or some combination of these. The communication may be very clear or somewhat cryptic and dream-like, but however it shows up, this is your answer. Most importantly, trust what you get, even if it doesn't make immediate sense.

As another example of this concept of direct revelation, I'll offer a story of my encounter with a tortoise. I had journeyed across the country from Los Angeles to upstate New York to present a workshop at the Omega Institute about connecting with the spirit world. As I was driving along a somewhat twisty road on this unseasonably hot and humid day, suddenly I caught a glimpse of something on the pavement—a small, indistinct movement just ahead. As I approached, I could

see that it was a tortoise. He had just crossed the dividing line and was moving from left to right, moseying along—naturally—at a tortoise pace, to the other side of the road. In the blink of an eye, I swerved and gratefully avoided running over this beautiful creature.

Once I had gotten over the initial shock, I realized that this little guy was still in danger, so I did a U-turn and tracked back to the scene of the crossing. I got out of the car and escorted him safely off the road. Standing there watching him amble into the forest, I closed my eyes and asked Tortoise Spirit what he was trying to tell me. His wisdom consisted of some simple messages that proved valuable not only for the class I was about to teach, but in other areas of my life at the time. In summary:

Slow down! You've got all the time in the world. Be willing to stick your neck out, take some risks. You are protected and cared for, and you can always retreat, if necessary. Know that help is always nearby when you need it—just put the word out. It will often show up in unexpected and surprising ways.

This was really helpful for me, since around that time I had just started offering random spirit animal readings, essentially tuning into individuals' animal spirit guides and relaying to them what was being communicated. Tortoise encouraged me to go for it, not hold back, trust the information I was getting, and pass it along confidently to the individuals for whom I was doing the readings. That weekend at Omega, I went on to teach the class and throughout, Tortoise's message continued to play itself out in various ways. My readings were sharp and detailed, thanks to the willingness on the part of the animal spirits to clearly show themselves to me. As I worked and saw a vision of Tortoise's shell in my mind's eye, he reminded me that I'm safe at all times, in spite of life whizzing by us, just like the cars whizzing by our friend on the road that weekend.

Direct revelation can come through physical sensations as well, such as muscle tension, spontaneous body reactions, tastes, or smells. I sometimes notice that my "fur" will stand up when I am in communication with spirit animals. One day as I was driving along and noticed a bull in a nearby pasture, I tuned into

Bull Spirit and asked for a message. Immediately, I took a deep breath and felt my chest expand. The sensation translated into my inner voice saying, *You can be proud of what you have achieved, so stand tall with your head up.*

In another instance, although I didn't see a skunk, I caught the distinct smell of one that had recently passed by. Skunk conveyed to me, *Pay close attention to anything right now that smells funny and keep your distance.* I recognized right away that he was referring to a couple of people at that time who were attempting to manipulate and take advantage of me. I thanked Skunk for his odorous reminder.

RESEARCH THE ANIMAL'S SPIRITUAL MEANING

Only after you've experimented inwardly with direct revelation do I advise taking the next step, which is to search outwardly for interpretations of spirit animals. Learn about your spirit animal as much as you can by reading material from reputable sources. There are a variety of books and oracle cards on the market that can be useful when you're starting to explore this path. For this reason, I've written my books, *Animal Spirit Guides*, *Pocket Guide to Spirit Animals*, and *Earth Magic*, as well as my oracle cards, *Power Animal Oracle Cards*, *Messages from Your Animal Spirit Guides*, *Earth Magic Oracle Cards*, and *Messages from the Spirits of Nature Oracle Cards*.

We live in a virtual world so of course there is plenty of information online. You can type phrases into the search bar such as "otter spirit animal", "buffalo animal spirit guide", "lizard spirit", or "eagle power animal", and you'll find an abundance of possible meanings and messages. As you peruse this information, stay in touch with your intuition and let it guide you to the resources that are the best ones for you at that time. As you read, notice the qualities and attributes of the animals that you feel drawn to.

Ponder how the animal's traits relate to you and how their characteristics might relate to what is happening in your life. Let's say you are guided to Lobster but you don't know why. Upon learning more about Lobster Spirit, you immediately resonate with its description as a solitary creature that has amazing powers of concentration. *Hmmm, you think, I also get snappy when I'm around others for too long, and I'm at my best when I'm submerging myself in my work for a length of time. I never thought about it but yeah, I have a natural affinity for that. Thanks, Lobster!*

As you research and learn about the meanings of each spirit animal, you can begin to understand that animal communication is a two-way street. Yes, animals will show up in your everyday life, and you can also proactively call on particular ones for help with specific needs. Suppose, for example, that you are faced with a challenging task and would like to have a greater sense of confidence to accomplish it. There are several animal spirit guides that you can engage with. Ask Cougar Spirit to give you the courage to stand up for yourself, and to take chances and risks. Invoke Peacock for help in overcoming your shyness and being willing to show your colors. Call in Chimpanzee's strength to help you access your intuitive problem-solving genius.

For a detailed list of Spirit Animals for Specific Purposes, see the Appendix at the end of this book.

OBSERVE THE ANIMAL AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

If an animal comes into your environment in any way, pay close attention. It may be there for its own purpose, or it may have arrived just for you. Of course, most animals you encounter will be in a natural setting, such as in your back yard, the streets in your neighborhood, in your local park or in the woods where you hike. I encourage you to spend as much time as you can in the animals' habitat, as the wisdom they impart often sharpens and magnifies in nature.

When you encounter an animal in the wild or in your imagination during dreams or meditation, reflect on how you feel in the animal's presence. Are you in awe or scared? Are you happy to see the animal or do you feel threatened? Use all of your senses to intuit the roots of the emotional charge. Is someone in your life intimating you?

Notice what the animal is doing when you come into contact with it. Are the rabbits playing and chasing each other, or are the rams snorting and butting heads? Again, try to tie this back to what is occurring in your relationships. Observe if any new emotions or associations emerge, as they may have been outside of your awareness until now. The spirit animal could represent your feelings, but also a person, an event, or a situation from your past or present life.

Ask the animal to speak directly to you and deliver its message. A few years ago, while working in my office, I noticed the persistent chirping of a bird beyond my picture window. After a while of hearing its insistent cadence, I walked outside and saw a mockingbird at the top of an arbutus tree in my backyard. A second one flew to the top of the tree just as I was greeting the first one. They continued their raspy bellowing for some time.

The next day, each of the birds dive-bombed me in the backyard, and I realized that they must be protecting their babies. Deciding to investigate, I placed a ladder against the tree, climbed up a few steps and saw two baby mockingbirds tucked into a nest among the branches. Mama bird swooped at me to tell me she meant business and would fiercely protect her offspring. Telepathically, I assured mama mockingbird that I would not harm her babies. As I did, I got a sense that Mockingbird Spirit also had something that she wanted to communicate to me on a personal level.

Tuning in further, I received several messages that related back to the medicine that Mockingbird Spirit represents—that of helping you overcome struggles with self-expression, and finding your voice in a playful and inventive way. First, she conveyed how important it was for me to fight for what I believed was right by speaking my truth through my writings and teachings. Leading up

to that day, I had been feeling shy about sharing my thoughts on some topics that may have been construed as controversial.

In those moments standing near the tree, Mockingbird emboldened me to carry on with what I knew in my heart I should do, including creating some products that help children develop their spiritual consciousness. She also reiterated a message that I get quite often from various spirit animals: *Sing, Steven, sing!* I had been neglecting playing my guitar and singing, so it was a reminder to return to my music for at least a few minutes every day.

I thanked Mockingbird for her wisdom that day and, before parting ways, sent her a message of my own: *Bless you! May you and your babies thrive!*

If your spirit animal shows up in a meditation or dream, employ the same principle here of observing the animal and being attentive to the messages it is delivering.

JOURNALING OR AUTOMATIC WRITING

Now that you've had a close encounter with the animal spirit guide through direct revelation, by researching its meaning, and by observing it in your dreams or waking state, the next step for delving into its wisdom is to write about it in the form of journaling or automatic writing. You may choose to work with one animal at a time.

With a blank piece of paper before you and a pen in hand, close your eyes, breathe slowly and deeply, and allow yourself to relax as much as possible.

Pose your question to any animal spirit guide that has called to you or gotten your attention. Begin to record your thoughts or allow your hand to start writing whatever words come through. Usually, your hand will feel somewhat disconnected from you. Don't force the writing; just be patient. Keep breathing slowly and comfortably.

END OF EXCERPT OF PART THREE

MEET OUR FEATURED AUTHOR



DR. STEVEN FARMER is a licensed psychotherapist, shamanic practitioner, and author of several best-selling books and oracle cards, including *Animal Spirit Guides*, *Pocket Guide to Spirit Animals*, *Sacred Ceremony*, *Healing Ancestral Karma*, *Earth Magic*, *Earth Magic Oracle Cards*, and *Children's Spirit Animal Cards*.

Dr. Farmer offers individual consultations in person or remotely by Zoom. He draws from a wealth of training and experience as a psychotherapist, shamanic healer, and trauma recovery specialist. Dr. Farmer offers a popular private mentoring program and serves on the board of the Society of Shamanic Practice.

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