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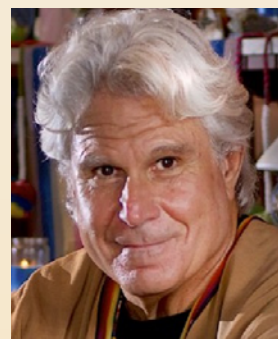
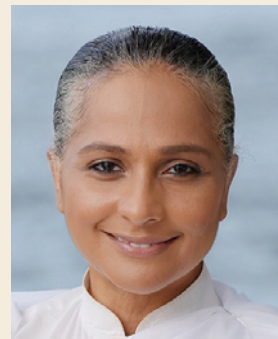
The Making *of Peace*

**CONCERTED, CONNECTED, AND
CONSULTATIVE ACTION AMIDST
CODE RED FOR HUMANITY**

*In the Name
of Myself*

INANNA: AN ICON
Deconstructed

THE HEART OF THE MATTER for
Spiritually Conscious Parents



**UP CLOSE
AND PERSONAL**
*with our Common
Sentience Authors*

WELCOME

Welcome to The Owl!

A collaborative sharing of contemporary ideas, fresh perceptions, art, beauty, Universal wisdom, and modern inspiration across traditional and non-traditional spiritual and religious teachings. We invite everyone to the table to share in the rich feast of Life and Living.

Ariel Patricia



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Come On In & See What's Inside

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Owl
A Sacred Stories Magazine

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A Sacred Story

by Judy Lemon

The late morning sun rises just above the massive chestnut trees and the park grounds sprawl over many acres, but there is something special about its eastern side. I feel blessed to have this nurturing refuge only a few blocks away from my London flat. When I walk through the black iron gates, I can feel something shift inside of me.

Once inside, I step onto a concrete path that encircles the entire site. If I go to the left, I will come upon a recreational area with a children's playground, shuffleboard courts, and picnic tables. However, I always feel drawn to turn to the right, which leads around a large, circular green lawn. Paralleling the path a few yards away is a small stream with soft, sandy banks dotted with polished river stones.

During happier times, my ex-husband and I would walk together holding hands and admiring the beautiful trees. But when I am alone, the part I treasure the most is a particularly secluded spot on the streambank behind some bushes. There, I can sit for hours and not be disturbed. I marvel that in a park full of people, I have never found anyone

else in my spot. It's as if the spirit guardians save it just for me.

I have come to this small city oasis for many years, sitting in silence and just communing with the presence around me. Electric energy fills my body when I connect with it, a sense of being home. Today, I am alone and filled with sadness, for I have come to say goodbye.

My sacred spot is waiting for me, and I carefully lower myself onto the damp sand. The water makes a soothing sound as it dances over rocks.

"Spirits of this place, I have come to tell you that I may never see you again. I'm leaving this area tomorrow. How I wish I could take you with me!"

The nature beings here already know the story of how my husband had deserted me for someone else and that we had to sell our lovely flat. I gaze into the water and allow my heaviness to sink into the earth beneath me. When I sit in this space, the air seems to shimmer, and I feel my consciousness expand.

"There are two ways that you can bring this place with you wherever you are on this earth," spoke the voice of the water. "Gather a number of my stones and carry them with you. When you find your new home, make a new sacred spot and spread my stones there to remember me. Then you will always be connected to this place."

I gather about twenty of the smooth, grey, palm-sized rocks, then return to my seat to await the next instructions.

"Do not be sad, my child, that you are leaving this sacred spot. Let me show you something magical."

As I once again allow my consciousness to expand, I see my little patch of parkland start to spread. The land beneath me is lit by a soft glow that flows outwards in all directions.

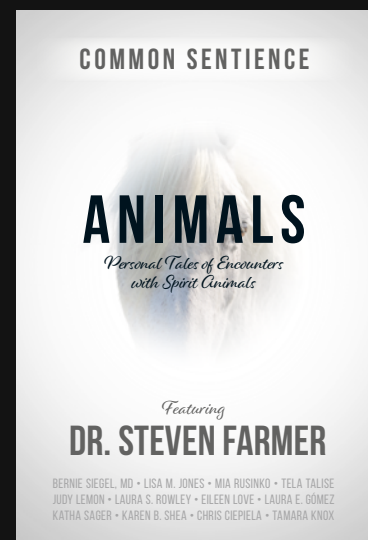
"Don't you see?" the water spirit continued. "This entire earth is sacred. She is a living being that you can connect with whenever you wish. You don't have to go to any particular place to feel her magic: call it in wherever you are!"

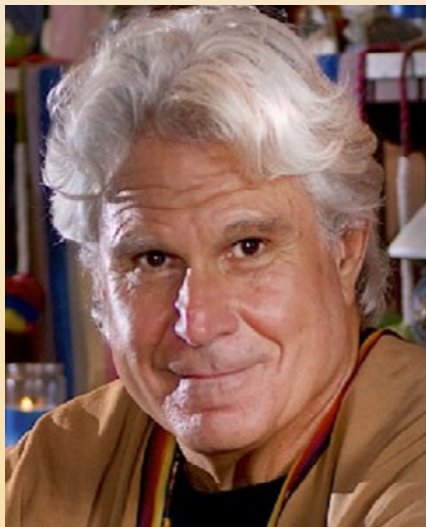
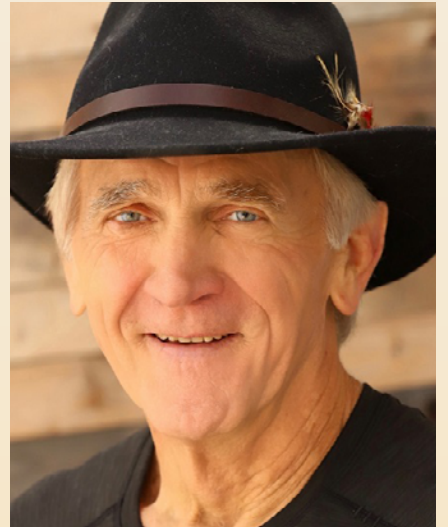
I sit silently and watch the light spread over the surface of the planet, and understanding fills me. I'm not losing my little spot on the sand; I'm gaining an

entire world. After some time, I gather up my things and bow, thanking the spirits for their gift.

After a year of turbulence, I finally found my home and settled in to begin my new life. I am now thousands of miles from my creekside spot. While I may never see that special place again in this life, I have indeed taken its magic with me. The gathered stones rest in a special corner of my yard, and when I hold them, I can connect to that sacred spot near the stream.

***Judy Lemon** is a contributing author to **ANIMALS: Personal Tales of Encounters with Spirit Animals**, a shamanic practitioner, spiritual teacher, writer, and Somatic Experiencing trauma therapist (SEP). She draws upon her extensive experience with multiple modalities such as energy healing, ceremonial work, and trauma therapy to create individual plans for her clients. www.judylemon.com*





UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

with our Common Sentience Authors

We've all had them . . . those mystical glimpses into the consciousness beyond our five senses. In a sacred moment, a flash of truth or taste of grace moves through us. Our world expands and something is revealed, illumined, felt.

Many of us are inquisitive or left with unanswered questions. How do we connect with the angels and why do we have spirit guides? What do practices like meditation do for us beyond the

mental and physical benefits? How can we spiritually connect with our ancestors and the natural realm? And exactly what is this phenomenon called ascension?

To help us answer these questions, we've rounded up the featured authors from our Common Sentience book series and invited them to share a bit of their wisdom about the transcendent experiences we are having.

Ariel Patricia: *How are shamanic practices the medicine that our world needs right now?*

Oscar Miro-Quesada: The practice of shamanism involves deep caring and compassionate presence in service to the wellbeing of all our relations. All heartfelt shamanic endeavors are a labor of love, a path of

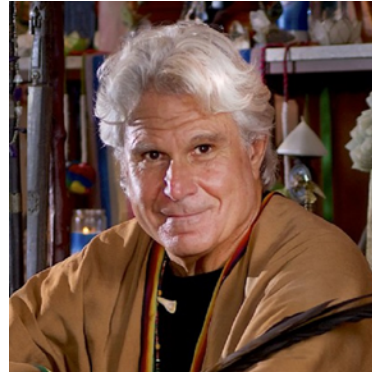
healing beauty where our most noble human qualities shine brightly, dispelling fear, hatred, and selfishness from humankind's collective soul.

Shamanism requires us to show up, be fully present, and speak our truth unencumbered by fear, doubt, or insecurity. The time is now, and now is the time. We are

amid a perfect storm, a planetary maelstrom designed to elicit a soul-inspired vision of what is possible for humanity. It is calling us to freely soar upon the wings of the condor and eagle, united in reverence for all our relations.

Our partnership with the sacred spiral imprint of evolution is vital to gracefully align in consciousness with life's wonderfully unpredictable nature, and with the intrinsic regenerative power of transformation, flow, change, discovery, and growth. With playful, childlike wonderment and awe, curiosity, inventiveness, and dreaming, we are being called to sing and dance our seven-generation service vision as evolutionary medicine for the world.

In truth, our remembering as a life-affirming human presence on Gaia-Pachamama requires a radical surrender of all egoic craving for approval and control. Only then shall we be able to wisely harness and orient Creation's wisdom ways as our healing light on the earth.



Oscar Miro-Quesada author of the upcoming book *SHAMANISM: Personal Quests of Communion with Nature and Creation*. He is an earth-honoring ceremonialist, author, and respected *kamasqa curandero* and *altomisayoq* adept from Peru, founder of *The Heart of the Healer (THOTH) Shamanic Mystery School*, originator of *Pachakuti Mesa Tradition* cross-cultural shamanism.

Ariel Patricia: *How can we open our connection with the angelic realm?*

Tricia McCannon: The key to connecting to the angelic realm is through the heart. Through the power of love, heart-centered prayers go straight to heaven. It is the authenticity and purity of your heart, and your intent, that reaches these Divine messengers. Angels are vast beings of light who serve the Divine plan at all levels

of creation. They serve not only in the higher worlds that we call heaven, but also in the lower worlds of time and space. They are not encumbered by the difficulties of the human emotions, or the confusion caused by the dualistic monkey mind.

Angels are directly connected to Spirit through the music of the spheres or the music of heaven. This is the voice of God heard throughout all universes for those who listen in stillness. It is not with the mind that we perceive this music. It is rather through the authenticity of the soul's desire to seek, know, and embrace a higher truth. When we go into the heart of who we really are, then we can connect to everything and everyone in any sphere. We are heard by the angels and answered in return.



***Tricia McCannon** is author of the upcoming book **ANGELS: Personal Encounters with Divine Beings of Light**. She is an American mystic, [Sacred U](#) instructor, and bestselling author of four books, including her latest, *The Angelic Origins of the Soul: Discovering Your Divine Purpose*.*

Ariel Patricia: *Who are our soul guides and how do they help us?*

Marilyn Alauria: Soul guides reflect your deepest truth, infinite wisdom, and magical abilities. They help you unwrap the beautiful gifts lying dormant deep in your soul, and they offer answers to questions that may have been alluding you: Which path to take, what choice to make, and what destiny to follow. It all lives deep inside of you.

Developing a relationship with your soul guides helps you to access all of these answers so you can live a life from your heart and soul. No question is too big or small for them. They know whether you should take that job, start a new career, move, leave a relationship, and even what to have for dinner tonight. Sounds funny, right? But think how easy it

would be to live life when you are in an intimate relationship with your soul guide.

Close your eyes and imagine your soul guide standing next to you as a trusted friend who loves you unconditionally. Your guide doesn't care if you had that third glass of wine last night or got mad at your sibling. They love you for you! Feel them next to you, guiding you to live the life imprinted on your soul.

Your soul guides know your deepest desires and want to support you every step of the way. When you go through trials and tribulations, they help you to understand why you are having the experience and how to pivot so you can make powerful decisions. Reach out your hand, feel them, and walk this amazing journey called life with your very own soul guide.



***Marilyn Alauria** is author of the upcoming book **GUIDES: Mystical Connections with Soul Guides and Divine Teachers**. She is a well-known psychic medium, founder of Soul Finder Academy and Membership for Your Soul, Sacred U instructor, and host of the popular podcast “Who Can It Be Now?”*

Ariel Patricia: *Why is it important for humanity to understand our interrelationship with the natural world?*

Ana Maria Vasquez: Our ancient ancestors understood the concept of unity consciousness and the profound power of nature to help us remember our connection and sharpen our intuition, as well as receive spiritual wisdom and insight. From them, we can learn to change our perspective of the natural world from being simply a backdrop to being in the forefront as a co-collaborator on our spiritual journey.

Cultivating a relationship and connection with the natural world also helps us create a gap, a pause, before responding to situations in our everyday lives. This allows us to tap into our intuitive channels, even

when we're not out in nature. It's a way to take the rhythm and flow of nature wherever we go.

As we expand our awareness, we come into a new relationship with the natural realm that brings with it depth and respect. The more we give reverence and honor to the natural world, the deeper the understanding we receive from it. Embracing all life force energy on this planet is crucial to our expansion. We're not meant to take this journey alone, and the natural world, through the trees, plants, stones, and landscapes, provide powerful allies in sourcing us.



***Ana Maria Vasquez** is author of the upcoming book **NATURE: Divine Experiences with Trees, Plants, Stones and Landscapes**. She is a well-known Multi-Sensory Animal and Nature Intuitive, founder of Intention Training, master teacher, and [Sacred U](#) instructor.*

Ariel Patricia: *Who are our ancestors and why is our remembrance of them important?*

Mindhahi Bastida: Ancestors are the Divine remembrance of lineages in this dimension of Mother Earth. When we honor the lineage we belong to, we realize that, like a newborn, we are the reflection of the first father and mother. The original principles and responsibilities they convened back then can be transmitted to us through our umbilical cord, so we can put them into practice in the present.

Ancestry helps us to understand the connection with tangible and intangible worlds. In the material world, there is a collective sense that we are interrelated to all beings and that we share a common origin. As a human species, we know that we are among the last to have emerged into being. We are mammals within the animal world, but in interrelation with the mineral, fungus, and plant beings. Our sense of ancestral connection even expands to manifestations throughout the cosmos, like stars and asteroids.

Another set of our ancestry lineages—those in the intangible world—is even more complex and mystical. These ancestors are related to phenomena of nature and the supernatural, like the thunder and the rainbow, and even to some entities such as feathered serpents, mermaids, or manifestations of spiritual beings.

These sacred manifestations of our ancestors within the material and spiritual worlds inform us about our place in the matrix of life and of time-space. This is crucial because when we acknowledge and come back to our rightful place in this continuum, we can take root. From this sacred moment, we can burst into fruition and cultivate our responsibilities.



Mindahi Bastida is author of the upcoming book *ANCESTORS: Divine Remembrances of Lineage, Relations and*

Sacred Sites. He is a caretaker of the philosophy and traditions of the Otomi-Toltec peoples, an Otomi-Toltec Ritual Ceremony Officer, Director of the Original Nations Program of the Fountain, and a UNESCO consultant on sacred sites and biocultural issues.

Ariel Patricia: *Why is the concept of reciprocity important as it relates to spirit animals?*

Dr. Steven Farmer: Expressing your gratitude in thought and through actions for the sources of spiritual guidance readily available to you is critically important during these challenging times. We are gradually awakening to the importance of giving back generously to the natural world, as well as receiving with gratitude what Earth Mother provides for us freely, continuously, and in countless ways. In doing so, we begin to appreciate more deeply the flow of life's choreography and how we are immersed in this energetic field of reciprocities.

All beings are physical manifestations of Great Spirit. These ordinarily non-visible beings

provide guidance, protection, and reassurance. In exchange, we return our appreciation through prayers of thanks and acts of kindness, love, and compassion to all beings.

Some of the most accessible spiritual allies are spirit animals, since they have counterparts in the physical world. When an animal shows up to you in either the physical realm or symbolically in an unusual or repetitious way, that animal is serving to bring you a message that will aid you in some way.

When you first receive a message, offer a prayer of thanks. Thank you, Hummingbird Spirit, for your message to be more flexible and to enjoy the sweetness of life. Thank you, Tortoise Spirit, for reminding me to move a little slower and pull in as needed. Thank you, Fox Spirit, for showing up in my dreams to remind me to beware of deceit in my life.

Actively embracing the principle of reciprocity honors the spirit animals that have come to you offering their guidance. Reciprocity is not just a philosophy but a way of life.



Dr. Steven Farmer is author of *ANIMALS: Personal Tales of Encounters with Spirit Animals*. He is a bestselling author, licensed psychotherapist and somatic therapist, shamanic healer, ordained minister, [Sacred U](#) instructor, and former college professor.

Ariel Patricia: Does sound play a role in the future of medicine and healing?

Neil Gaur: Sound and frequency are not just about our ancient past and the awareness that we've had of vibration since antiquity. Yes, it is equally important for our future. All things are vibration. Everything is frequency. As we begin to understand this on a more conscious level, we can start to utilize frequencies in a more intentional way. This includes music consciously created to cultivate empowering experiences,

as well as technology that emanates frequencies to assist with psychological issues and traumas.

Sound and frequency can assist in the balancing of our physical and emotional body; thereby, potentially helping to cure us from all forms of disease without the use of invasive chemicals. Imagine what would happen if we could use sound to pull energy out of space-time, and tap into an infinite supply of energy that does not pollute the planet?

The future of sound could possibly bring peace and abundance to the entire planet, so that we can truly live in unity consciousness.



Neil Gaur is author of the upcoming book *SOUND: Profound Experiences with Chanting, Toning, Music and Healing*

Frequencies. He is a researcher on the ancient wisdom and future science of sound, vibration, and frequency. Neil facilitates sound and vibrational events utilizing instruments from around the world creating interactive, harmonizing, and meditative experiences.

Ariel Patricia: *Why is the topic of ascension important to the evolution of humanity today?*

William Henry: In western civilization, ever since the fall of the archetypal first couple, Adam and Eve, humans have sought a return or ascension to a higher, finer realm. Yet throughout history, access to the knowledge of how to do this has been hidden from the masses. A belief that humans can transform into higher beings, even angels, has been occulted, and hence, doubted by most. Many of us remain unaware of the astounding spiritual potentials within our bodies, minds, and souls.

Today, this is changing.

Millions around the world are meditating, and doing yoga and other practices aimed at conscious self-transformation into a higher

state of existence. This has never happened before. Ascension is here.

Why now? One reason most certainly has to do with the fact that, other than each other, humans have never had a predator. We do now.

Many are becoming acutely aware that artificial intelligence and incomprehensibly advanced technology are rapidly overtaking civilization, and its proprietors may not have humanity's best interest at heart.

In order to survive, say AI's advocates, we have to merge with this alien technology. This means a total loss of our humanity—in other words, another fall.

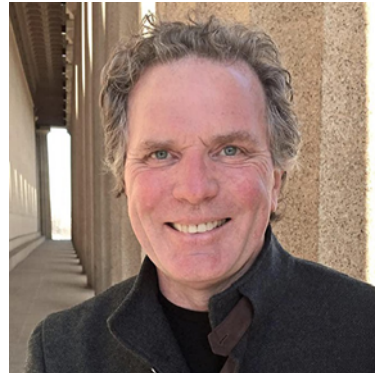
A long-propheesied bifurcation or splitting of human civilization is upon us.

Will we remain natural, organic humans and ascend to higher spiritual realms?

Or, will we forfeit our spiritual lives, further merge with AI, augment

ourselves with smart technology and software, and become trans-humans or part-human/part-AI beings?

The choice is here. The call to ascension will be answered by all.



***William Henry** is author of the upcoming book **ASCENSION: Divine Stories of Awakening the Whole and Holy Being Within**. He is an author, investigative mythologist, art historian, TV presenter, and [Sacred U](#) instructor. He is an internationally recognized authority on human spiritual potential, transformation and ascension.*

Ariel Patricia: *How can meditation support us in our spiritual evolution?*

Sister Dr. Jenna: With the consistent integration of meditation and contemplation into our lives, the qualities of patience, cooperation, empathy, and forgiveness come

forth, and it changes humanity in the most Divine ways. The ultimate benefit of these practices is that we get a more mature society. We begin to actually *live*, instead of keeping the soul trapped in societal, health, financial, political, and other problems that drain our strongest internal resource.

Although the way things are evolving in the world may appear to look tragic, these times are an invitation to all of humanity to claim back our Spirit. The ultimate reason why we are here—in these bodies, on this earth—is to reveal the Divinity of God's beauty through our individual choices, actions, behaviors, and relationships.

We can create a beautiful future in which we don't just exist and survive, but rather thrive and *fully live* beyond our wildest imaginings, and help others thrive, as well. Building our internal spiritual strength through mastering the concepts of self-reflection and contemplation will deepen our foundational attribute

of hearing the Divine inside. Everything we need is inside of us.



Sister Dr. Jenna is author of *MEDITATION: Intimate Experiences with the Divine through Contemplative Practices*. She is an acclaimed, trusted spiritual mentor, Founder and Director of the Brahma Kumaris Meditation Museums, and host of the America Meditating Radio Show.

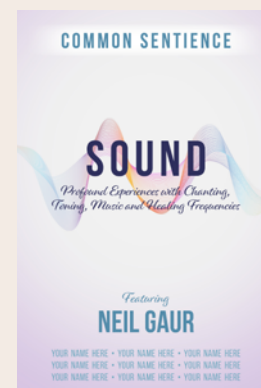
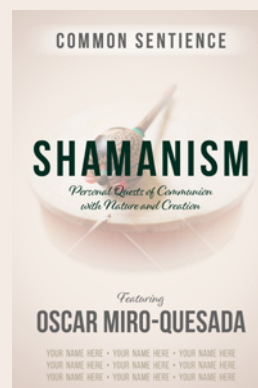
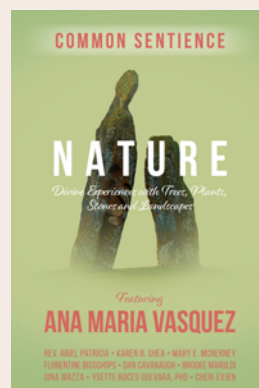
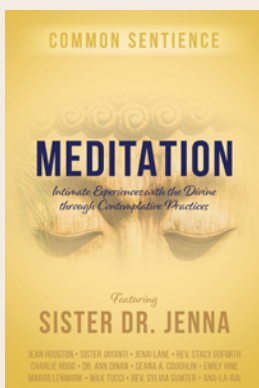
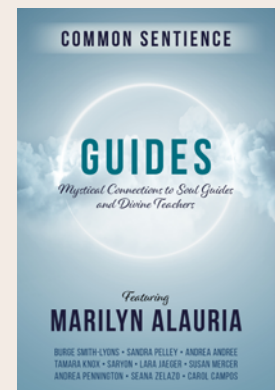
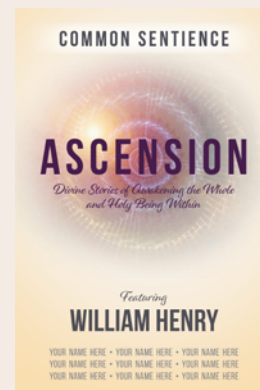
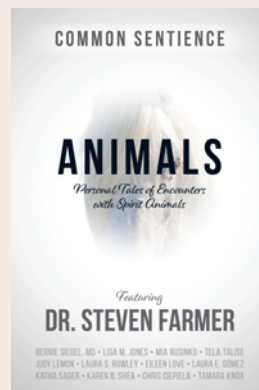
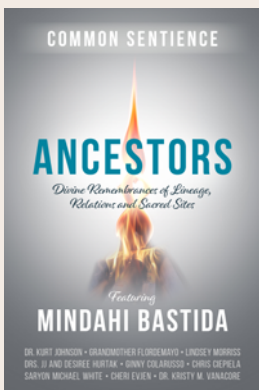
It's an exciting time to be alive! Our spiritual experiences are becoming more commonplace and we are all poised to go to the next level of awareness and understanding about these topics. To help us on our journeys, we've created the Common Sentience book series.


In each book of the series, the author gives an overview that will answer the "who, what, why" about these mystical beings and

encounters; then they delve fully into how each of us can be more deeply in relationship with these Divine aspects of angels, animals, ascension, ancestors, guides, meditation, nature, shamanism, and sound. To further expand our experience of the topics, we also include true mystical stories from individuals from around the world.

We hope you enjoy each of the books releasing this year, including **ANIMALS: Personal Tales of Encounters with Spirit Animals** by Dr. Steven Farmer and **MEDITATION: Intimate Experiences with the Divine through Contemplative Practices** by Sister Dr. Jenna which are available now.

READ OUR UNCOMMON BOOK SERIES



A landscape photograph of a grassy field at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a mix of deep blue and orange, with scattered clouds. The foreground is a lush green field. In the background, there are silhouettes of trees and a distant horizon. A white rectangular frame is centered in the image, containing the text.

**Be willing to be
a beginner every
single morning.**
– Meister Eckhart





INANNA: AN ICON DECONSTRUCTED

by Seana Zelazo, LICSW

The image to the left depicts Inanna, the Sumerian Goddess of Love and War, set in an Akkadian cylindrical seal (ca. 2334-2154). Although the figure of Inanna varies slightly across multiple mythologies, she is, at her core, the same. In Akkadian mythology, Inanna is Ishtar. In Syrian myths, she is Astarte. In Roman culture she is Venus, and in Greece, Aphrodite. Yet Inanna's Sumerian origin is the first expression of the Goddess in her entirety—an entirety captured in this poignant image.

The significance of this seal cannot be overstated. Art in ancient Sumer was not just a way to capture the cultural or pervading beliefs of the people but was considered a doorway to the divine, a medium through which the gods could inhabit the physical world and participate directly in the lives of its people. Examining the artwork

of Inanna is a profound way to resurrect her wisdom.

Inanna's epitaphs are many and include the Morning and the Evening Star, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, the Goddess of Love and War, and more specifically, she is known as the Goddess of Sexual Love. The latter is reflected in the seductive prowess captured in this image. Inanna's naked legged, revealed up to her thigh, invites viewers to gaze towards her "holy vulva," which she celebrates and functions centrally in her myths and hymns unearthed and recorded in cuneiform on clay tablets. Her people were by no means coy on the subject of sex. Her stories are loaded with sexual innuendo. In dialogue with her lover Dumuzi, we hear Inanna eagerly declare, "Then plow my vulva, man of my heart! Plow my vulva!"^[1]

Inanna's sexual prowess is fundamentally spiritual. She is a guide toward the wisdom of the womb and the kundalini, working with both for expansion and enlightenment. As is clear from her words, Inanna prioritizes her own pleasure—an important message for women today and part of what highlights her unapologetic nature. The focus on her pleasure is paramount for Inanna and is emphasized here in the placement of her powerful foot upon the back of a lion. The lion functions as a kind of totem for Inanna. With her foot upon its back and the leash held gently in her outstretched hand, we see her dichotomy on full display. The lion's ferocity, evident in its open-mouthed growl, does not frighten Inanna. She holds the reins. She is on top, underscoring a positionality and privileging of her own pleasure. The lion also symbolizes our untamed desires or the animalistic aspect of our brain—the limbic system, which, as we move through higher levels of consciousness, we learn to master. Indeed, through her myths, we come to see Inanna's mastery of the evolution of the soul.

Notably, Inanna is also depicted alongside Ninshubur, her wise and devoted guide, emphasizing her relational nature. Inanna's teachings emphasize learning about the self in relation to others. Hers is a unity consciousness—an insistence that we are all one. We see the eight-pointed star between Inanna and Ninshubur, marking her celestial power as the Morning and Evening Star, conceptualized as Venus itself. As love, Venus marks the threshold through which Inanna enters all relationships. Following the teachings of Inanna encourages us to connect with the other through love (Venus), thereby harmonizing the vibration of our world. Love truly is the answer to our collective healing.

Inanna is also depicted with wings, marking her divine nature as an Anunnaki^[2] goddess from the heavens. However, it is possible that her wings were earned through the initiatory process revealed in one of her most notable stories, The



An alternate depiction of Inanna's royal attire.

Inanna: An Icon Deconstructed

Descent of Inanna, wherein she faces her death and goes through a journey of self-mastery. In the story, Inanna descends to the underworld and is born anew and resurrected. The tale is a powerful lesson about ascension from a female teacher. As such, she paves the way for other powerful female masters like Mary Magdalene and Mother Mary.

The arrows Inanna carries on her back mark her as the Goddess of War, which many interpret literally. She is indeed tempestuous and is occasionally referred to as the Goddess of Thunderstorms. Yet, the arrows may symbolize whatever helps us slay the inner demons or egoic attachments that keep us bound to the physical world, a medium by which we may free ourselves from the Wheel of Karma to ascend. The arrows symbolize an invitation for us to find our own tools to cut ourselves free from the ego on our spiritual path.

In her left hand Inanna holds a rod, one of the possessions she takes with her to the underworld

to face her death. We are told she “took the lapis measuring rod and line in her hand.”^[3]

According to historian and scholar William Henry’s extraordinary work on the art of ascension, we might theorize this rod as what he calls, “the resurrection stick,” one of the essential tools he identifies marks ascension teachers in art.^[4]

Finally, Inanna’s royal attire is worth an examination. On her head, she wears the “crown of the steppe,” capturing her nature as Queen of Heaven and Earth. However, it also suggests the cranial protrusion in Buddhist art, revealing the expanded crown chakra or enlightenment. As noted, her dress is slit up to her thigh, stopping just short of her “wonderous” feminine magic, making that center of power prominent to the viewer. It is also noteworthy that her dress is tiered. There are exactly seven tiers, a spiritually significant number that functions symbolically

in Inanna's decent story. Inanna encounters seven gates, marking the seven chakras or energy centers in the body, whereby she is required to remove an item of clothing upon entering. In this depiction, Inanna reveals that by engaging with these centers and releasing the egoic attachments bound within each, we can begin to free ourselves for the process of ascension.

Inanna's wonderfully paradoxical nature is captured in this image. She reveals her true self unabashedly, owning all seeming disparate aspects of herself and bringing these juxtapositions to the foreground. She is alluring and sensual, yet strong and muscular. Capable of holding her own, she is depicted here in collaboration with Ninshubur. She is winged and otherworldly but stands solidly on the ground over which she presides. Despite her divinity, she is also extremely human in the above depiction; this is an image of a strong woman. The attributes of a fickle, quickly changing heart, impatience, and short temper show up in

her stories and are all too human. She is, therefore, a relatable icon for humanity—encouraging us to own our paradoxes rather than feel dissonance and allow them to become integrated in an exquisite depiction of unapologetic self-acceptance.

Seana Zelazo, LICSW is a psychotherapist, spiritual coach, and intuitive channel committed to helping others live unapologetically by restoring balance through the wisdom of the Sumerian Goddess Inanna. Look for her upcoming book *The Return of Inanna: The Unapologetic Heroine* in 2022. seanazelazo.com

[1] Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth, Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 37.

[2] The Anunnaki refers to the Divine pantheon within the Sumerian culture. Seven gods reigned supreme in their ability to decree fate, of which Inanna was one.

[3] Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth, Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 53.

[4] <https://courses.sacredstories.com/courses/rainbowlightbody>



WisdomKeepers

Centering Prayer:

Resting in God's Embrace

by Kate Sheehan Roach

Centering Prayer is a method of silent, still meditation by which practitioners welcome the presence and action of God into the deepest recesses of the heart. It's a practice of surrender. The French root of the word "surrender" can be broken down as render (to give) and sur (over), together meaning "to give-over." Surrender is not waving a white flag in defeat, but rather giving ourselves over to God in love. We let go of all expectations and simply bask in what's already at the core of our being, what Centering Prayer founder Thomas Keating called Ultimate Reality.

Centering Prayer was first developed in the 1970s by Keating and two fellow Trappists—William Meninger and Basil Pennington—inspired by a Vatican II invitation to revive the contemplative Christian tradition. As the story goes, there was a Buddhist retreat center somewhere in the vicinity of St. Joseph's monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts that attracted throngs of Beatles-inspired hippies and Grateful Dead Heads seeking nirvana. Inevitably, they would get lost and end up on St. Joseph's doorstep asking Abbot Keating for directions. This story might be apocryphal, but it represents an accurate portrayal of the way 20th century Westerners walked right past the Christian tradition as they traveled eastward in search of spiritual enlightenment.

It turns out the Christian tradition has long had its own deep mysticism, modeled by Jesus of Nazareth, and later cultivated among the Desert Fathers and Mothers—3rd-century ascetics who formed contemplative communities in the deserts of Egypt. The practices they developed were preserved over generations and further refined within various monastic traditions until they were eventually distilled and delivered to the masses by these three spiritual outliers brilliantly disguised as Trappist monks. Steeped in the wisdom of John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, John Cassian, Thomas Merton, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the founders of Centering Prayer also spent time with contemporary Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish mystics. And so, an inter-spiritual Christian meditative method that meshes perfectly with 21st-century global sensibilities was born.

The practice is simple: we commit to a twice-daily practice of sitting in silent stillness, and

when distracted by thoughts, we silently introduce a word or phrase of our own choosing that reminds us of God's presence and action within. This "sacred word" is not meant to be repeated like a mantra throughout the practice, nor should it hold any powerful meaning or emotion in itself. It's meant to be a simple reminder of our intention to rest in God for this period of time. Something with one or two syllables, like "peace" or "be still" or "welcome home" or "Om" is recommended. When thoughts arise—and they will—we simply return to the word or phrase in the moment, speaking it silently to ourselves rather than getting hooked into an internal dialogue about our to-do list, memories from the past, future plans, or anything else that comes up. We just let the thoughts float by without resisting them or reflecting on them.

Imagine holding perfectly still so God can perform a delicate surgery on the heart-mind, removing the pain that living brings and restoring a wholeness that allows us to live in open-



hearted service to love. The idea is to sit comfortably, with your back straight if possible, preferable upright so you're less likely to doze off. The guidelines to Centering Prayer, as crafted by Thomas Keating and Contemplative Outreach (the organization he founded to support the teachings of Centering Prayer) are as follows:

- Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

- Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
- When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
- At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

The idea is to set aside twenty minutes twice a day to rest in

Centering Prayer: Resting in God's Embrace

God's embrace. When asked why a Centering Prayer "sit" is twenty minutes long, one Centering Prayer facilitator replied, tongue in cheek, "I sit for twenty minutes because it takes me about nineteen minutes to settle in." Twenty minutes can feel like a long time if you're not accustomed to silent stillness, so it's okay to start out sitting for just a few minutes and gradually work up to twenty or thirty. Another facilitator offers this simple koan-like statement: "Just show up. You can't do it wrong...but you can't do it right either." And I've always loved something Thomas Keating would say with that signature twinkle in his eye: "Think of it as a twenty-minute vacation from yourself!"

Twenty or thirty minutes of silent stillness in the morning and another similar "sit" later in the day remind us that life is indeed eternal—a never-ending freefall into love. The guidelines of Centering Prayer describe returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word, which Thomas Keating sometimes compares to "a feather falling onto soft cotton." It's that gentle. That subtle. And through this practice, prayer moves

beyond conversation to a deeper communion with God.

Some people enter into the prayer by slowly reciting Psalm 46:10 in this way:

"Be Still and know that I am God."

"Be Still and know that I am."

"Be Still and know."

"Be Still."

"Be."


Over time, practicing Centering Prayer increases our capacity to just "be." We develop a sense that God is the one praying. We just show up. And so, Centering Prayer really isn't something we do. It's something God does.

Kate Sheehan Roach is Director of Content for [Contemplative Life](#). She studied cultural history before beginning her editorial career with St. Martin's Press, later co-founding [Contemplative Journal](#), [Transformation365.org](#), and [Prosocial Spirituality](#). Kate is a certified Centering Prayer facilitator who serves on two national teams for [Contemplative Outreach](#) and the [United Religions Initiative North America Leadership Council](#).



ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

by Franne Demetrician



Like everyone else, I'm taking the baby steps necessary to move back into my "normal life"—whatever that means—in the wake of more than a year and a half of lockdown and re-entry. I don't think I'm alone when I say that I'm hesitant to allow myself to fully immerse into a maskless, hug-filled, handshaking hello life. But I also welcome those precious moments of recognition that I am indeed able to hug, shake hands, and even leave my mask off from time to time. It's liberating.

Looking in my rearview, I see where we've been, and I see where I've been. It's not always a fun process to rehash these last months, but it is always

insightful. I'm amazed at how life during the pandemic has changed me in unimaginable ways.

One very significant change is that after a 25-year career as a holistic health care provider, I am now a full-time artist and teacher. This may not seem significant to those who have been teachers and artists all along. But for me, at age 72, I have once again re-invented myself. The pandemic provided me with an opportunity to shift gears and finally step into a role I have longed to inhabit.

Art has been one of the great passions of my life. For me, art-making is a

spiritual and therapeutic tool. When I am “in the zone” at my easel, time is suspended, and I am in a place of pure freedom and connection. That is not to say that art-making is always easy or that everything I make is successful. It’s not about that. It’s about the process, saying “yes” to the impulse to create. And that’s where the joy lives.

In my adult life, I’ve had many careers. From wife/mother to executive assistant, to a massage therapist, minister, spiritual counselor, dean/mentor, trainer, and always artist-photographer-writer. Whew, that’s a lot of identities. All of them created the amalgam that allowed me to say “yes” to a new opportunity.

No one was more surprised than me when a friend suggested I answer a call to teach an art course online. At first, I was reluctant.

“Me, teach? Create an art course? Nah... I can’t do that.”

My friend, who knows me well, encouraged me to check into it. Amazingly, I was inspired to create my course, Art From The Heart. I was

surprised when people signed up and even more surprised when they showed up for my first class.

Almost 18 months later, I have taught this course quite a few times in different venues. I’ve authored two other art courses, and I am about to create another. How could I possibly have anticipated that the tragic circumstances of the pandemic would unlock another path for me?

I realize now that grace has placed me here at this time and place. Even at this golden time in my life, I have something to offer. All my previous experiences and careers have given me the resources to create opportunities for others to learn, expand their self-awareness, and tap into their Spirit-given creativity. This and my art practice, along with my precious family and deep friendships, energize my days and electrify my dreams.

Rev. Franne Demetrician is an interfaith minister. She has been a licensed holistic health practitioner since 1995 and wrote a spiritually oriented weekly blog from 2015 -2018. Franne is a working artist, photographer, writer, spiritual counselor, mentor, and teacher.

In the Name of Myself

by Laura Gray



"She baptized herself because she realized she could. She realized that all along within her she contained the power to save herself. And so she did."

- Meggan Watterson

My trip to Italy was never about shopping for silk scarves or sipping blackcurrant cabernets on cobblestone streets. Instead, I was drawn to Lake Como and its healing power potential. Just as the waters of Christian baptism symbolize the purification of a newborn from "original sin", I have pondered my tarnished transition into this world.

Although baptized as an infant in the Catholic church, I identified with dirt and shame all my life having suffered sexual abuse at the hands of a Catholic priest in my childhood. The color white has never represented clean to me. Not when I repeatedly glared at it, wrapped around the neck of the devil.

Dirt. Shame. Evil. Pain. He was a wolf in priest's clothing.

At the age of 1, I fell into a swimming pool and rapidly sunk towards the

bottom. Fortunately, my father was nearby on the deck and jumped in, fully clothed in his khakis and cotton t-shirt, to rescue me. Many years later, as I stood on the shores of Lake Como, I realized it was never going to be all the kings' horses and all the kings' men. Nor would it be my father again. At this pivotal moment in my life, it was up to me to save myself and put myself back together. From a child of broken shards into a magnificent mosaic; a stained-glass wonder ready to be renewed.

Each of my spiritual support team played an essential role. Katherine, a writer, who graciously served as our host, gathered ferns to form a crown symbolizing new life and new beginnings. My sister Jean, an interfaith chaplain, served as the sacred presider for the ceremony. And Michelle, my cousin, a police officer whose mere presence provided me with a sense of strength and security.

Cloaked in a white robe, to signify rebirth, with the wreath placed on my head, the 3 women formed a circle around me. Each cupped water in her hand and gently poured



it over my shoulders while Jean read the divine baptismal blessings.

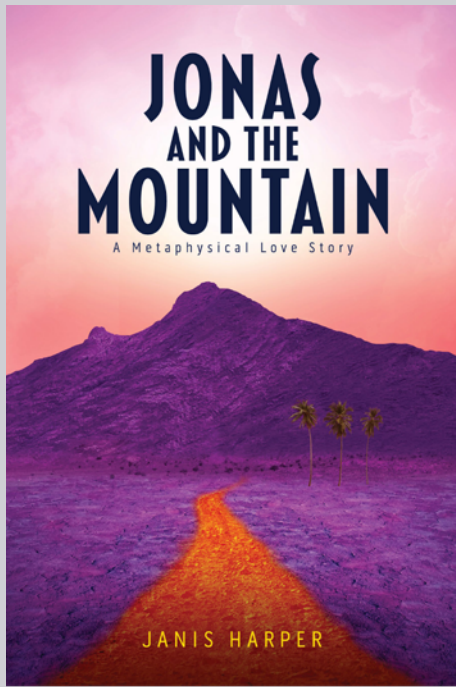
Upon the final prayer, candles were lit, and the 3 women laid their hands on me to sanctify the sacrament.

As we collected our things, we reflected on the significance of our shared experience. Then, with unadulterated joy, I completed a celebratory cartwheel along the grassy lake shore and commemorated the oh so sweet healing of my inner child.

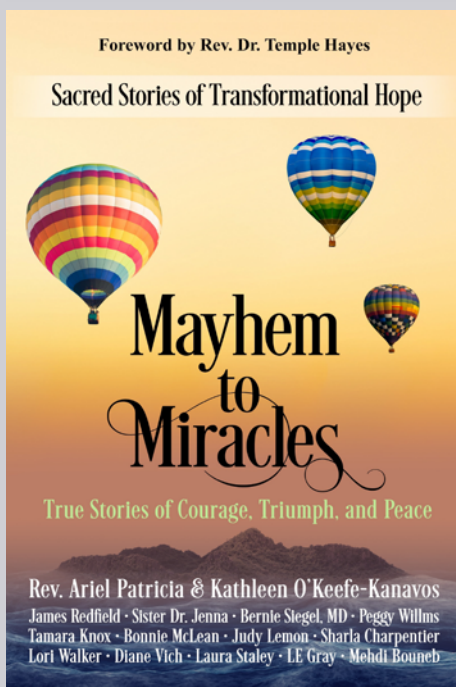
***Laura Gray** is the Founder/Executive Director of IPride, a self-esteem, empowerment program for youth which she created in 2015. A published author, her story is in the recently released Amazon bestseller *Mayhem to Miracles*. A living kidney donor and a fervent advocate for sexual assault victims, Laura is a proud mother of 3 sons and 3 dogs. She strives to live each day with a grateful heart and feels especially connected to herself and God when she is in nature. For additional information on IPride, please visit ipride.net.*

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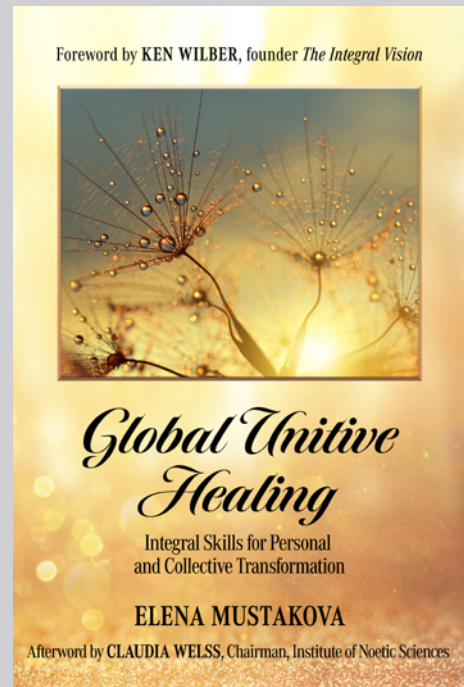
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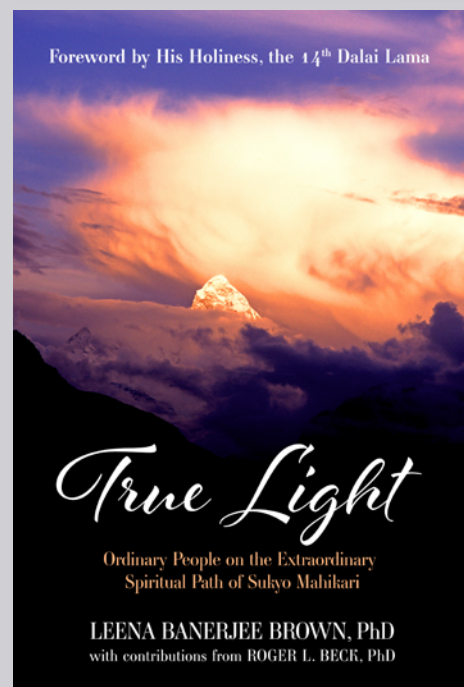
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Concerted, Connected, and Consultative *Action* *Amidst Code Red for Humanity*

by Dr. Elena Mustakova

The recent 26th Conference of Parties (COP 26) in Glasgow on addressing climate change made clear that governments are too embedded in existing power-and-greed structures to call a climate emergency and to initiate the scaled-up action now needed to forestall climate catastrophe. The global climate movement and the Earth Charter^[1] have established the essential shift of values needed at this tipping point toward conscious world citizenship and an ethic of care for all life on the planet.

The global movement for planetary regeneration found expression in the Global Regeneration Summit, run by Ubiquity University parallel to the COP 26^[2]. Represented in this movement are three strands – faith-based

environmental initiatives, indigenous and inter-spiritual initiatives, and secular activism. The question now is how to coordinate these into a massive citizens-driven movement scaled up to an effective and rapid global impact.

We have excellent examples of how faith and Interfaith communities in different parts of the world mobilize for collective action. According to the Alliance for Religion and Conservation, there are now about 1.5 million environmental projects run by world religions, engaging over 700 faiths. In 2022, FaithInvest is launching the largest collective movement of faith projects around the world.

We have compelling examples of transformation at the level of local

communities, and even individual nations, such as Finland. A growing number of governors, mayors, investment and business leaders, and university presidents are creating a culture of radical collaboration and learning by doing. Initiatives such as the Global Regeneration Corps are working to connect individuals and organizations into a massive I-We World movement. There is a wealth of models on how to create distributive cooperative organizations with value-based accountability and whole-community governance.^[3]

The next urgent phase is organizing into interfaith and inter-spiritual citizen-activism communities in every *locality* worldwide to create local parallel polis poised for immediate action.

COMMUNITIES FOR SPIRITUAL DEEPENING AND SOCIAL ACTION

The main obstacle to coming together is our habitual identity struggles that have become a social norm. As we re-orient ourselves to the spirit that connects us all and deepen and strengthen that spirit in open inclusive circles, we begin to *really*

listen and build on each other and can move rapidly from a sequence of monologues to a collective organic momentum.^[4]

Open circles can foster spiritual maturity expressed in an elevating spiritual language that opens horizons, honors nobility, and encourages the united pursuit of truth. Contemplative prayer and deepening in sources from different wisdom traditions, as well as from scientists and activists on the cusp of new knowledge, can bring our vision together, cultivate an ethic of genuine interdependence, and build the momentum for united action. Creating neighborhood communities of a new kind, spiritually minded, scientifically informed, action-oriented, inclusive, and collaborative, can become the essential holding environment for planetary change.^[5]

BECOMING SKILLFUL TOGETHER

In spiritually illumined shared spaces, we develop interpersonal skills that honor our interdependence. We learn to listen with open hearts and minds. We realize the toxicity of backbiting and fault-finding and learn to abstain from it. We learn to embrace the

diversity of perspectives and find common ground. In the process, we also develop skills for intrapersonal integration. We become more self-aware, discerning, and loving, more able to be non-reactive and present to our inner reality, and cultivate mental discipline and spiritual susceptibilities. In contexts that use language consciously to elevate and bring “*a clear vision, a pure heart, and an attentive ear*”, we “*enter the court of holiness*”^[6] and naturally move toward inner wholeness and coherence of heart and mind.

Through this process, communities become increasingly skillful in holding spaces where no individual or group dominates, and consultative exploration brings organic solutions. What is the skill of consultation and how is it different than the conversations and dialogues we are used to?

Consultation is an orientation to the wisdom that arises among us when we listen deeply to each perspective without engaging in debate over it, nor identifying too much with a position. It is a spiritual attitude of humility and openness to spirit, which

allows fresh insights to emerge. Imagine if meetings in localities across the globe were to pose one single question for spiritual reflection and consultation: *How can we act with urgency now in our locality to avert climate catastrophe?*

Consultation builds skills for understanding and working with reality. We learn to discern how consciousness as a spiritual reality becomes expressed at the material and social level, and how sound methodological approaches to problems, informed by scientific and spiritual understanding, bring positive results. We develop a healthy relationship of stewardship to our natural environment and resources.

Community circles of spiritual and scientific inquiry and social action can become natural educational environments, a breeding ground for the development of skills for social evolution. Through consultative processes and decision-making, people redefine authority and governance in a planetary age. As we develop the collective maturity to act out of our interdependence and ultimate oneness, we will see the

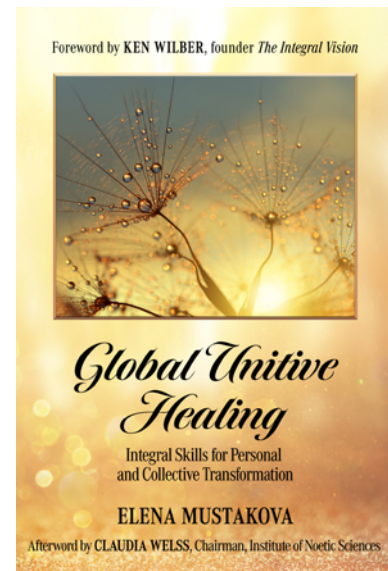
emergence of governing bodies of a new kind – elected consultative bodies of scientists and spiritually-minded activists, representative of human diversity, able to bring about social, political, economic, and spiritual unity.

The time has come to move toward concerted, connected, and consultative action to respond at the local and regional levels to the climate crisis and associated issues of clean air and water, protection of biodiversity, and reducing our carbon footprint. Let us seek out the Greta Thunbergs in our cities and towns and join in with the mobilization of youth for the cause of saving our planet. Let us open circles where we can share energy, spiritual wisdom, experience, and germinate relentless action that transforms consumer culture into regenerative cultures and a just and sustainable planetary society.

Adapted from Dr. Elena's new book
Global Unitive Healing: Integral
Skills for Personal and Collective
Transformation

Dr. Elena Mustakova is author of
[*Global Unitive Healing: Integral Skills for
Personal and Collective Transformation,*](#)

a book which has been called “a hymn to collective sanity”, offering “potent and wise medicine for our time.” A psychologist, educator, social scientist, spiritual activist, member of the Sustainable Development Goals Thought Leaders Circle is author of Critical Consciousness and senior editor of Toward a Socially Responsible Psychology for a Global Era.



[1] Launched in 2000, this document lays out sixteen principles of an ethical framework for a sustainable future.


[2] Humanity Rising Global Solutions Summit at <https://www.youtube.com/c/UbiquityUniversity/videos>

[3] Stacco Troncoso's model, and explore global Bahá'í community-building response at <https://news.bahai.org/story/1477/>

[4] For an example for inter-religious consultative efforts to address gender equality in the United Arab Emirates, see <https://news.bahai.org/story/1520/>

[5] <https://news.bahai.org/story/1445>

[6] Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Persian #11



**Listen to the wind, it talks. Listen to
the silence, it speaks. Listen to your
heart, it knows.**

— Native American Proverb



The Heart of the Matter

for Spiritually Conscious Parents

by Mary Ellen Lucas



Every child is intrinsically beautiful. Every child is complete and whole as is and shines with a light of holy goodness. Every parent who imprints this message of inner

beauty in their children could make a profound difference in their lives, infusing them with confidence as they learn to navigate their world.

PRESSURES ON CHILDREN

Society's message of beauty runs contrary to the message that every child is beautiful. Cultural beauty metrics are based upon outward appearances, the standard by which some are deemed 'worthy' of attention or not. As pressures mount on young people to look and act a certain way to be included within the ranks of the popular crowd, some children and teenagers lose their ability to see their own worth.

Adding to the pressure on children is the rise of social networking platforms. Recently Facebook had some of their internal documents of research released to the public and reports indicated an increased risk of suicide and eating disorders in teenage girls that use Instagram, their photo and video sharing social network. Social media outlets don't intend to create harm, yet many tweens and teenagers admit they feel worse about themselves while using them. Their mental health is impacted. Due to a public backlash, Facebook's launch of Instagram Kids aimed at pre-teens has been suspended temporarily. A concerted effort on the part of parents

and educators to counterbalance societal and social media messages needs to be ramped up.

THE ESSENCE OF BEAUTY DEFINED

How does a parent downplay societal pressures and the cultural definition of beauty and instead cultivate a child's essence as inherently beautiful? Parents must begin planting and nurturing the seeds of a truer understanding of beauty from a young age for the belief to take root. Beauty is not based upon looks or clothes. Every child is beautiful because they are a creation of God, created by love, instilled with the sacred. Beauty is the nature of all of creation.

Parents, you are the beholders of your child's inner beauty. Hold the mirror up for them to see in your eyes the reflection of how precious they are to you, especially during the times when they fail to see their beauty for themselves. A parent who shores up a child's sense of security, born from the understanding that beauty is their birthright, can say to them with absolute certainty, "Let me tell you about yourself... you are a beautiful, unique being, completely lovable, and

immeasurably precious, just because you are!”

THE HIGH BEAMS OF THE HEART'S LOVE LIGHT

Help your child develop a relationship with their inner beauty, independent of the ego. A helpful metaphor to use is how when driving down a dark road at night or if the night is shrouded in fog, extra light is needed to see more clearly. A driver has an option to turn on the high beam feature causing the automobile's headlights to illuminate more brightly the road ahead.

When your child loses sight of seeing their inherent self as beautiful, you can remind them that you will always be able to see them for who they truly are. During the times when your child is struggling with self-esteem issues, teach your child that they can turn on the high beams of love light within their hearts to see better, just like a driver will do who needs to see more clearly.

Use this simple method which won't take longer than a few minutes:

- Ask your child to sit or lay down. Encourage them to tap their

forehead to send any negative thoughts to the trash bin.

- Place one or both hands over their heart. Imagine their hands as plugs connecting them inside to their heart.
- Ask them to close their eyes, 'turn on' the high beams of love light and imagine their heart flooding with light. Remind them their True Self can now be seen, for the heart will only reveal what is true. The heart's message will always tell them they are beautiful, holy, and whole as is.
- After doing this exercise, ask if they feel different than the way they felt before? Encourage your child to often use the high beams of the heart's light metaphor to help them shift their thoughts and shine a more loving light within themselves.

CHOOSE TO SEE BEAUTY

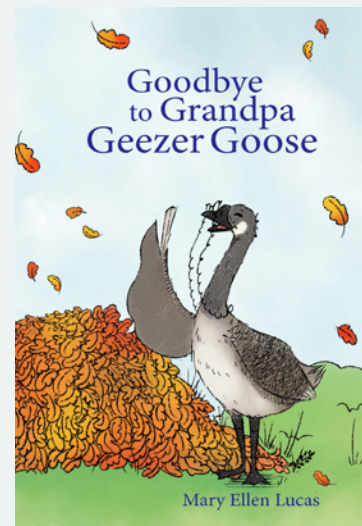
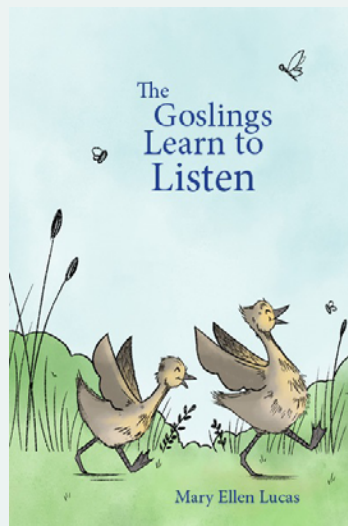
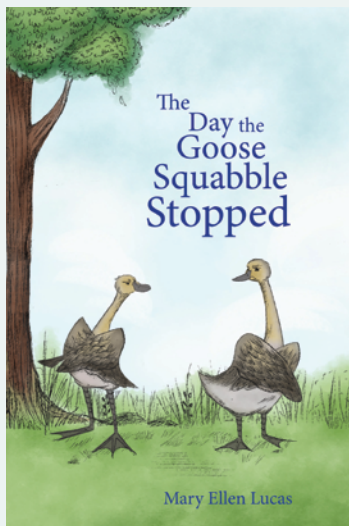
Beauty, the sacred essence existing within everyone, is always present, in all of creation. Sadly, much of the world operates solely with the low beams of heart lights on. The capacity to truly

see other people is greatly diminished. The beautiful essence within is missed or not visibly clear. When your child learns that they have the choice in how they see themselves and others, gently ask, when appropriate, which lights they are using their high beams or low beams? The high beams of the heart's love light will be an intentional choice and will help them see through the eyes of love.

Children taught to see their internal essence as beautiful and of goodness can live confidently no matter the external messages they may receive. If they know that the beauty they have is always within, it's then not too big of a stretch to think that beauty is within everyone. True, some people

do a really good job of disguising their true nature of beauty. However, with practice, the high beam of the heart's love light can pierce through the darkness to reveal the secret beauty hidden behind the eyes of every being.

Mary Ellen Lucas, an Interfaith / Interspiritual Minister, believes we can learn to make wiser choices that create pathways of connection and collaboration to ensure a better world for our children. *Life on Little Puddle Pond* is a series of children's books she wrote with silly goose playfulness along with meaningful lessons. The books are pre-chapter books and appropriate for children four to eight years old. Available from online retailers worldwide.



THE MAKING *of Peace*

by Rachel Mann, PhD



Peace is truly a simple concept. At its very root, it is a condition in which there is little or no inner and outer discord. At the community level, we live among people with whom there is: fluid give-and-take, mutual respect, and safety. We have shelter, food on the table, clothing, and abundance in other ways. When there are occasional disagreements, everything is resolved quickly and equitably for all concerned because creativity is engaged.

We can imagine peace on an individual level; as a sustained state of ease, inner security, comfort, and love. There is no suffering mind and no emotional turmoil. While life in the physical has its messiness, we can navigate it with trust and confidence. With our wounds healed, we are in the flow.

Further, because we know the presence of Spirit, we experience ourselves as expanded far beyond the natural pains of living in a body in a physical universe. We will as the Buddha said experience challenges, but we can, through diligent practice, reach a state of being wherein we do not suffer.

This would be the true peace of enlightenment. It is as much a state of existence as of consciousness.

Yet, in these times, the word “peace” is used in myriad, often conflicting ways. There is peace between nations or neighbors. This could mean true concord and friendship, but it could also mean a cessation of hostilities—for the time being.

The lurking shadow of the human capacity for acting out of fear, greed, and hatred—what we might call evil—can distort the word peace to support or define self-serving ends. Peace to one person might mean the ability to steal land from another and have it justified by friends, neighbors, the law, or the government. In this scenario, one party might feel safe and secure (at peace with self) due to having land and systemic support, while the other is alone and without, along with the grief of loss. Peace can also mean that two nations agree they will continue to own a certain number of nuclear warheads as long as they do not use them.

In these latter scenarios, there is no peace. If weapons are considered necessary, or a defensive-offensive

posture is needed, or when one person's greed overrides mutual reciprocity; then there is no real safety. There is no peace. If there are no practices and processes for developing and maintaining balance and harmony within the individual and the community, peace is fragile. And where there is a lack of commitment to a sacred ethics of inclusion and compassion founded on values of equality, reciprocity, mutual respect, and consideration; then real peace is illusory.

This is the world we currently live in.

These truths and definitions frame the challenge ahead of us if we are committed to dreaming into being a world without war, slavery, genocide, oppression, abuse, poverty, destruction of the Earth, and the myriad manifestations arising out of Mind of Separation and Domination.

How do we, in the midst of this, foster an inner expansion into peace consciousness, as well as promote the making of peace in the outer world? There are two necessary and interconnected elements, both starting with **Sacred Activism for Peacemaking**.

Making is an active word like, for instance, making bread. Hence, peacemaking implies that we are engaged in actions bringing together all the ingredients necessary to create and sustain a resonant vibration of compassion and love within ourselves and in the world.

To that end, **Sacred Activism for Peacemaking** is a pragmatic and spiritual pathway to magnetize humanity's highest destiny lines to a world without violence. The sacred in activism is an acknowledgment that we are more than bodies and minds operating in a consumerist, physical world. We recognize that we are spiritual beings and, as such, we understand that everything is energetic and interconnected. That, at a primary, fundamental level, we exist in oneness and unity.

It is pragmatic because we agree it is important to be awake and aware of the trouble our world is in. We do not use our spirituality to be in denial. We are committed to being actively involved in inner and outer efforts to create positive change towards an enduring peace for present and future generations.



As an activist in the outer sense of the word, we may be engaged in: peaceful protest marches, being an energy healer, therapist, or minister, educating others about humanity's history of both violence and peace, giving to those in need, writing an inspiring book on spiritual awakening or a topic pressingly relevant to present-day challenges, working in politics or the law, participating in the Black Lives Matter or anti-poverty movements, supporting animals in need, building an environment of ethical inclusion at your workplace, or creating soul-activating and thought-provoking art on the concerns of the day.

There are myriad causes and activities for peace, healing, violence prevention, and post-violence recovery and restoration. We each must choose where our passion lies. Together we must dream forth radical and creative alternatives to what now exists.

What is important is that we authentically engage our kindness and caring at whatever level is right for us. Service to others is a sacred dimension of our human capacity and is spiritually pragmatic, as it fosters interconnection and builds bonds of love.

Pragmatically, we also recognize that the outer world in turmoil is also a mirror of the same deep within our psyches. There is the messiness of our personal humanity—our confusion, fear, anger, suffering, and even hatred, no matter how subtle. We also carry imprints within our genetic makeup from our ancestors' grief, wounds, and fear. Ancestors here means both those in our family's bloodlines, as well as our reincarnation existences through and within time. Even deeper than these personal layers, we also carry the collective imprint of the bloody stream of violence. Growing up in this world, we breathe it in like smog.

It is therefore a spiritual and sacred act to grow in conscious awareness of and to work skillfully with these shadow dimensions of self. If we do not, we risk in our outer work unconsciously contributing to the destiny line of ongoing cycles of hurt and harm. Therefore, we must engage diligently in healing our personal and ancestral wounds, doing deep inner contemplation, meditation, prayer, and ceremony. So it is, with our whole self engaged in inner and outer action, we make peace like leavening, kneading, and baking bread. This much effort is



necessary to change the world. With as little as 3.5% of the human population engaged in **Sacred Activism for Peacemaking**, there is no doubt that a future of enduring peace, compassion, and love will rise.

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Write for Good

by Laura Staley

During my college years, I loved having conversations about questions no one could really answer. During these brainstorming sessions of pondering different perspectives, I wondered about many mysteries of life. I enjoyed the permission of not knowing the correct answer, even if this seemed uncomfortable. Diving into what I did not know that I did not know became a great adventure, especially for someone who cogitated internally about life, people, and many mysteries. I even pondered why human beings existed.

One question I had not ever been asked, I got to return to and hold onto for a while.

Asking myself the question, what is yearning to be expressed? I engaged in brand-new delicious homework a couple years ago. During a leadership training exercise, I got asked repeatedly by another workshop participant, the question, what is yearning to be expressed? I blurted out many answers in a short amount of time. She scribbled whatever I said into my notebook.

Some ideas I uttered included the following:

- Joy Being Alive
- Comedic Action
- Connection to others
- Why Am I Here?
- Speak up when something is not right
- Find voice in the moment & trust I will be heard
- Sing, Dance, Laughter
- Connection to God

After the workshop, I continued engaging with this question. I also chose to consciously act and express myself creatively. I had no idea what lived inside of me.

The permission to hold a question in your mind and heart over time offers

many benefits. Sometimes the first answer you blurt out only points to deeper ones, more soulful realizations, and an enhanced curiosity about many ways to express what has been inside many rooms of an abandoned house in which the doors have been closed for too long. Like a different version of the game Hide and Seek—you can find yourself consciously seeking out what has been hidden as you unearth many treasures of expressions you had tucked away for a variety of reasons.

Expressing yourself may include shredding limiting beliefs. Here are three:

- **If you cannot say something nice, do not say anything at all.**

Self-expression is about finding your anchored core in different situations. You can speak your lived experiences, core commitments, ask questions from a place of curiosity and calmness. You can offer honest insights without being snarky. If you have been unkind in your interactions with other people, you may choose to consciously practice altering your tone of voice. You can shift your demeanor



to being receptive or curious. You can become committed to understanding and being understood rather than righteousness or winning.

If you have tended to be silent or tentative about speaking up, you get to become uncomfortable and bravely share your perspective and point of view, maybe with your leg shaking and the words struggling to escape your

lips. Practice with people you trust and who support your growth and courage.

- **If you do not have something valuable to say, people will not listen.**

Maybe you learned to hold your tongue and wondered if you had intrinsic value. You began an earnest

search for valuable content to contribute to other people. Or possibly you learned the fine art of extreme listening, which can be an exceptional contribution to loved ones and neighbors you are meeting for the first time. Radical empathy for a friend, family member, or colleague is transformative. Patiently allowing another human being sacred space to be heard fully and believed utterly, you can be a haven for hurting, healing human beings.

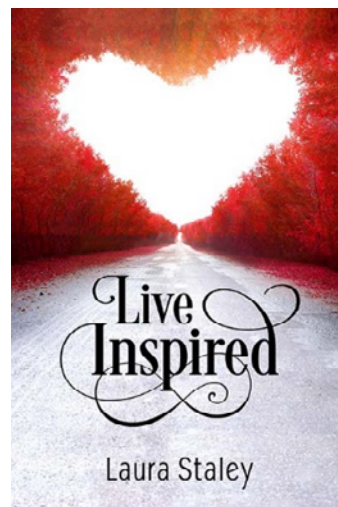
- **What will the neighbors think!**

Neighbors are usually focused on their own life circumstances, dreams, and challenges. They rarely wake up in the morning thinking about you. Yet, you can be thinking of making a positive difference for them. Be willing to relinquish the approval of others and share your joy.

Expressing yourself can include the seemingly ordinary ways you uniquely brush your teeth, eat a bowl of chips, put together an outfit, walk into a room full of strangers, and laugh from your belly.

Feeling safe enough and brave enough to open doors to self-expression, creative pursuits unleash your imagination. Freed from the constraints of limiting beliefs you can evolve yourself as an artist of being alive. Your limited days on earth can become filled with delight and wonder. Your individuality is the most precious gift you bring to the world, a gift you can fearlessly unwrap with joy.

*The founder of Cherish Your World, **Laura Staley** passionately supports people thriving by guiding them to a holistic transformation of space, heart, and life. Laura is the published author of four books including [Live Inspired](#) which reveals the brave and deep work of self-discovery and her book of short writings and poetry [Abundant Heart](#).*



**Forgiveness says you are given
another chance to make a new
beginning.**

— Desmond Tutu



EXCERPT FROM

ANIMALS

*Personal Tales of Encounters
with Spirit Animals*

Dr. Steven Farmer

PART ONE

UNDERSTANDING 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 ecosystems, 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

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

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 a 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.

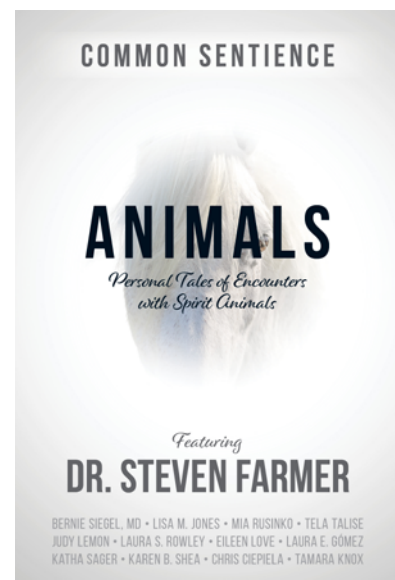
With a blank piece of paper before you and a pen in hand, close your eyes, breathe slowly and deeply, and allow yourself to relax as much as possible.

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

***Dr. Steven Farmer** is the author of the recently released book **Animals: Personal Tales of Encounters with Spirit Animals**. He is a licensed psychotherapist, soul healer, and author of several best-selling books and oracle cards, including **Animal Spirit Guides**, **Earth Magic**, **Earth Magic Oracle Cards**, **Children's Spirit Animal Cards**, **Healing Ancestral Karma** and the recently released oracle cards **Shaman's Path**.*



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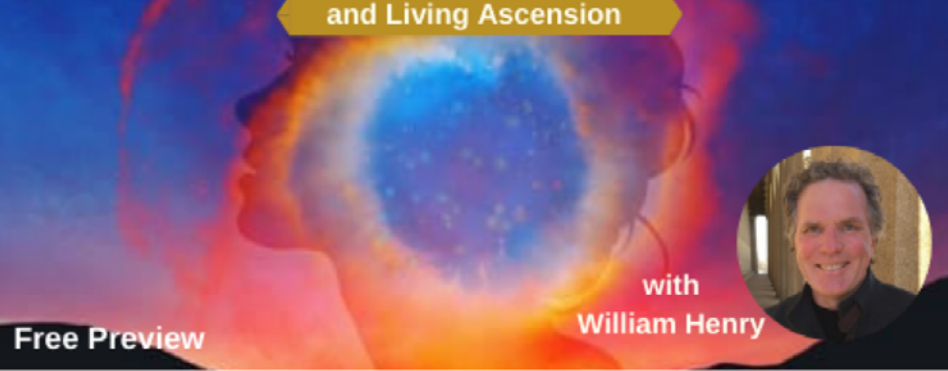
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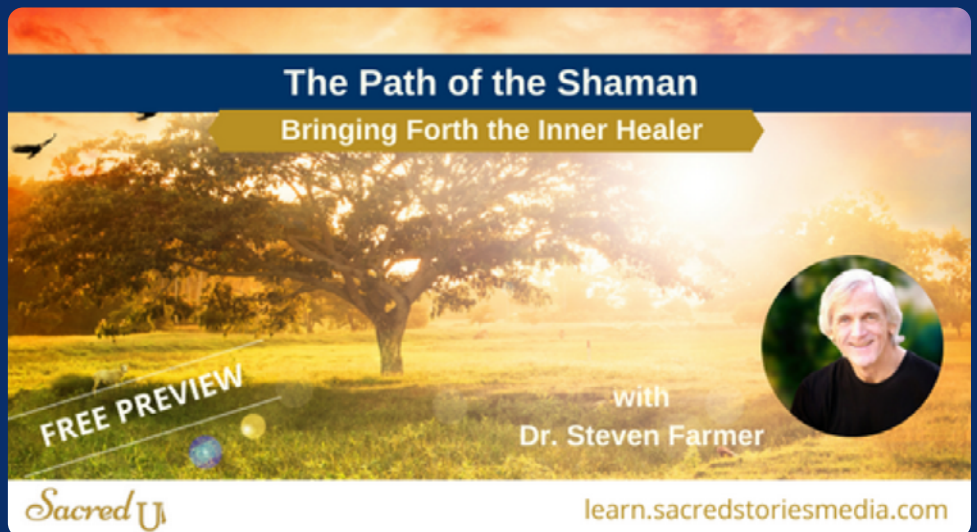
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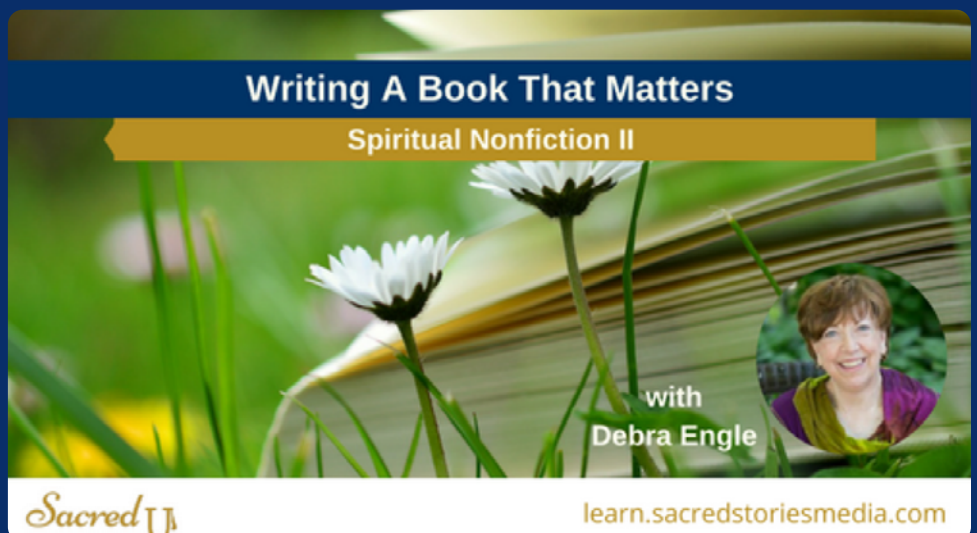
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