

## Shamanic Solitaire

A shaman is never alone. Once someone understands that all the elements of our ecosystem are alive and sentient, it becomes impossible to truly separate one's self. Although a shaman may place him or herself away from the company of other human beings, a shaman's world is filled with wise and loving companions.

The shaman, or in fact any spiritual person, sometimes needs to take a respite from other humans and sit among the strong voices in Nature. The wilderness quest is common to many traditions. It provides the seeker with an opportunity to learn about him or herself in the context of other beings' wisdom. Goethe once stated, "In the human spirit, as in the universe, nothing is higher or lower; everything has equal rights to a common center which manifests its hidden existence precisely through this harmonic relationship between every part and itself." In other words, we can understand ourselves and the universe as a whole better by intentionally entering into a relationship with the other species with whom we share our planet. In order to listen to the trees, plants, animals, birds, rocks or wind, we need to go outside and away from other people. Since we are a social species, we naturally reach out our hearts and minds to connect with others.

Typically, humans have an inborn desire for communion with Another. It is why we see isolation as a form of punishment in our prisons. When away from our usual "tribe" of humans, we naturally reach out for connections with the other beings around us. In addition, being away from our own species allows perceptions that are not "human" to more freely enter into our minds and hearts. It is only being alone in the presence of water that we can really hear its voice, feel its rhythm and understand a bit of its deeper nature. These awarenesses offer us a perspective on our existence that is enlivening and refreshing. We can glimpse the expanse of All That Is and the tenacity that Life has to fill every available niche. Perhaps it is the awareness of Life's amazing ability to always reassert itself, that is the most moving.

In any season, we can go outside and witness the remarkable cycles of Nature. When one sees the energy each species expends toward the Great Continuance of Life, we are at once humbled and warmed. This most powerful aspect of Nature can provide us a solace and comfort that even our most trusted human companions can not always provide. This is particularly true in times of grief. When we lose a loved one, we feel an ache in our center that feels impossible to salve. It is in these times that Nature can be our most powerful counselor and teacher. It is perhaps because Beauty can fill us more easily when we are vulnerable. When we are hurting, we are defenseless to the whirring of the hummingbird, we yield more easily to the scent of a rose and allow ourselves to be swept away by the salty spray of the ocean. As we watch the robin sitting patiently on her eggs or the plant making a flower we may even come to understand that our loved one and our own consciousness lives beyond form. As the Aboriginal people of Australia say, "You can kill kangaroo but you can't kill Kangaroo Dreaming." By that, they mean that the Spirit of Kangaroo is eternal even as an individual kangaroo is not. A part of every being remains--always.

For that reason, it is also easier to connect with those that we have lost while walking or sitting in nature. For instance, I connect with the presence of my late father most easily in a quiet autumn wood. Just under the aroma of the forest itself, I can keenly smell my father's scent. No longer localized in a form--nor limited by his personality's perceptions--his spirit fills the

woods and I find myself surrounded by his love. My paternal grandmother visits me in the Sun creating rays down through a cloud. I find my mother's mother filling the shady places under leafy trees. My maternal grandfather plays in the sea smoke dancing over the surface of the ocean. My father's father prefers to meet me in swaying grasses under a Midsummer sun.

Along with those presences we knew as human family, we can connect with Grandfather Oak who teaches with the patience of one who never moves his feet. In the presence of Wyatah, the Royal River, we are reminded to be fluid and to gently flow over and around the obstacles we might encounter. Sister Moss reminds us that even with just a little nurturance we can flourish and make the path softer for others. Bear Mother models flexibility and teaches us to take full advantage of plenty when it is available and being still in times that are lean. Brother Chickadee reminds us to spread our treasures around as he secretes a few seeds in many different places across the woods just as Ant teaches us that we are a lot stronger than we may look. We don't open just our minds when we go out into Nature, we open our hearts. And this heart opening is essential to being able to receive the wisdom that surrounds us. Our minds have taken us many places, but they have also taken us away from our larger family of Creation. In our arrogance, we have come to think of ourselves as the height of the evolutionary scheme and even named ourselves Homo Sapien Sapien or wise, wise man. Perhaps in truth we are actually insecure about this as we had to remind ourselves of our "wisdom" twice. Unconsciously--in our deepest hearts--we are keenly aware of our folly.

It is by stepping outside of our human paradigm and into Nature that we can learn the teachings that the rest of our "family" can offer. These interactions can help us to change our species' relationship with the rest of creation to one that is more healing and mutually beneficial than our current self-serving attempts at dominance. The old system has not served us as well as we once believed. We have dirtied our planet's air, water and soil and decimated innumerable species in our stubborn belief that we had the knowledge and right to control the Earth and her creatures.

Our contemporary society's aging anthropocentric view can be seen as a system of thought and behavior. Since this system is simply a collection of learned information, it is possible to replace it with new thoughts and behaviors. The act of tuning in and receiving the input from the other spirits within the Universe can certainly assist us in this work and keep us from recreating that which doesn't serve us or the planet well.

In spite of appearing isolated in our individual existences we need to be reminded about what Buckminster Fuller said, "You can not get out of Universe. Universe is not a system. Universe is not a shape. Universe is a scenario. You are always in Universe. You can only get out of systems." Step outside alone away from your systematic existence and reconnect to your larger family and your ancestors. The future you will begin to sense there is one we can all enjoy if we take the time to open our hearts and listen to the wisdom that surrounds us!

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Nationally recognized shaman teacher/healer, speaker, and author, Evelyn C. Rysdyk delights in supporting people to remember their sacred place in All That Is. Whether through face-to-face contact with individual patients, groups and conference participants, or through the printed word in books, columns and articles--Evelyn uses her loving humor and passion to open people's hearts and inspire them to live more joyful, fulfilling and purposeful lives.

She is the author of *Modern Shamanic Living: New Explorations of an Ancient Path* (1999), columnist and writer of numerous articles and features. Her writing and artwork have appeared in regional, national and international publications—both in print and online-- and she is the executive editor of *Spirit Living*, an eco-spiritual e-magazine.

In joint practice with C. Allie Knowlton as Spirit Passages since 1991, she offers workshops in advanced experiential shamanism across the USA and Canada. In addition, as founding members of True North, an integrated medical center in Falmouth, Maine, she and Allie collaborate with physicians, nurses, a psychiatrist, naturopath and other complementary health practitioners. Evelyn may be contacted through her website: [www.spiritpassages.com](http://www.spiritpassages.com).