

Goals of Shamanism

by Carl Greer, PhD, PsyD

I believe that, at its essence, shamanism incorporates three major tenets or goals: knowing who we truly are; serving others from a place of love, gratitude, and compassion; and having a close connection with the sacred. Each of these shamanic goals reinforces the others. For example, as we learn to know ourselves, we can better know Source and serve others. Through a deeper connection to Source, we come to better know ourselves and feel motivated to serve others.

Knowing Ourselves

The process of doing shamanic work leads to knowing ourselves better. We reclaim parts of ourselves that have been repressed, lost, or forgotten. When our self-knowledge grows, we find it easier to move beyond our habitual roles and ways of perceiving the world. As we come to understand the holds that our current story and our emotional and psychological wounds have on us, we are able to disconnect the story and our wounds from the harsh, painful emotions wrapped around them. We learn to observe ourselves and others, as well as situations we encounter, with greater detachment and compassion. Then, we can be open to Source's voice and make new choices in order to find clarity and balance within ourselves as well as in our everyday lives.

Serving Others

When we are in mutuality with Source, we are connected to the infinite, and we feel an imperative to help others. The concept of being of service to others encompasses many things. For example, it can mean being authentic in our relationships, listening well, being kind to others, expressing gratitude, volunteering at a food pantry, or accompanying students on a school field trip. However, when it comes to serving others, balance is required. We can spend so much time serving others that we neglect other aspects of our lives.

Perhaps the most profound gift of service is simply being fully present in the company of others. Giving our full attention and listening intently, without judgment, preconceptions, or expectations, are gifts that can be of tremendous benefit to others as well as to ourselves, regardless of whether external conditions have objectively changed. Being fully present requires being fully open and as accepting as possible.

Having a Close Connection with Source

A goal of all shamanic work is to quiet the rational mind to allow access to the voice of Source within us. We come into greater harmony with the cosmos when we honor Source. We do this by paying attention to Source's communications and listening to our intuition. As we become more still and quiet, we clear ourselves of accumulated physical, mental, and emotional baggage. Then we become more capable of perceiving the voice of Source and allowing it to inform our choices. The goal is not to give up our free will and expect Source to take over; rather, it is to make the best choices we can in the present moment by listening to the guidance of Source and our inner knowing and then taking responsibility for our actions.

Transformation

An essence of the work
is learning how to make choices
unencumbered by our ancestral and karmic lineages—
constraints to which we are heedless,

limiting our freedom of action.
Is the goal to surrender all to Source?
No. It is to choose always anew,
In accord with our true soul's journey,
And to mind the promptings of Source
As we take responsibility,
Knowing our place in the cosmos.
Why do people enter the chrysalis?
What initiates a soul's metamorphosis?

To achieve the goal of being more present in the moment and open to the voice of Source, we need to recognize those situations where our thoughts, feelings, and roles take over and cause us to act unconsciously from a recurring pattern. We have to free ourselves of our habitual responses, thoughts, feelings, and actions. If we can interject a pause between stimuli that trigger our habitual patterns and our response to such stimuli, we have an opportunity to choose to be more fully present in the moment. We will become better able to broaden our perceptions and have experiences we would not otherwise have. When we have experienced a break from our ordinary reality, it is easier to recognize how important it is to reflect before acting if we want to change our lives and our stories.

Late one night years ago, I had the uncomfortable and frightening experience of feeling my heart wasn't working properly, due to what I now know was a treatable condition called atrial fibrillation. I didn't want to wake my wife and worry her, and I decided to perform some qigong exercises to see if that might help. I slipped out of our room, began the qigong, and suddenly heard a voice say, "Be still and know that I am God." In that moment, I realized that I was pushing myself too hard, taking on too much and trying to handle everything myself instead of trusting in Source to help me. I realized that Source was telling me that if I stopped "doing"—even doing qigong for health purposes at that moment—I could make myself more available to God's voice and agenda and not just my own.

We all contain the voice of Source within us and can access it when we decrease our mental chatter and shift our consciousness. But we also contain voices from our unconscious mind. It can be hard to distinguish among these voices. With practice, we can learn to determine whether a particular inner voice nurtures our self-awareness, helps us to be of service, and enhances our compassion. When it does, we know it is the voice of Source speaking through us and to us.

Blueprint Queries

How can the speck contain the whole?
How can the cell be the blueprint for the organ?
Is it magic or is it God?
Is God the same as life or Source?
Would Source laugh at definitions of the ineffable?
Why climb Everest?
What if we suitably define what remains?
Will Source reinvent itself, or will we both transform?
Shall we know Alpha and Omega?

Once, I spent some time in Abadiania, Brazil, at the house of John of God, a powerful

spiritual healer. On the morning of my last day there, I suddenly had a vision of cleaning my kitchen in a country house in preparation for a visitor. It was a simple kitchen with flowers and lots of light. Outside was a garden with more flowers. A guest arrived, Jesus, and I served a simple meal in the kitchen. We then went outside, and I showed Jesus my garden. He was genuinely appreciative. I felt humble that he would treat me as an equal, a brother. I cried.

In a visceral and deeply emotional way, this experience reminded me that the essence of Source is agape (ah-GAH-pay), or unconditional love, and that it is important to prepare a place for the Divine to visit so that we can present our kitchens, gardens, labors, and their fruits as offerings. I am still learning to become still and simply remain present with visions and messages from Source. I know that if I exercise patience, the meaning of what I see will become clear to me in time. Even so, after years of doing shamanic work, I still can relate to those who like quick answers.

Source's promise is that in each moment, we can begin again and create something new. We might be subject to economic, physical, or other seemingly insurmountable constraints, but if we can change our attitude toward our circumstances and realize that each moment is all that we truly ever have, our beliefs about our lives can improve dramatically. It's often very hard to move beyond our pain, but it does not have to define our lives. We are not our pain. Moreover, we are part of a much larger story shared by all.

In each moment, we breathe in and out, think thoughts or not, feel emotions or not, and act or not. Our attitude, and our faith in our ability to generate new ideas, new feelings, and new hope, moment to moment, can make all the difference in how we experience our current story.

All There Is

Each moment only
breath in, breath out,
thoughts, feelings in
thoughts, feelings out
some sticking, some repeating
but always with the possibility
of creating a new world of
attitudes, thoughts, feelings, actions
from the myriad possibilities
of our is-ness.

The choices we make today help determine which of many possible destinies we will experience. Once we have a strong connection with Source, we can tap into the destiny that best serves us and Source in this lifetime. Our destiny is not necessarily what our ego wants, but what we can co-create with Source. Unlike fate, which is what we experience when we go through life unconsciously, destiny is something we can influence through conscious effort. When we are on a journey of destiny that is right for us, we gain from our choices a sense of rightness and profound well-being. We feel more enlivened by life and more engaged in a bigger, richer, complex, meaningful existence. Then we make decisions and take actions that move us toward that destiny.

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