

Foreword

In the *Western world* we try to think our way out of problems; we attempt to come up with a plan. The trouble is, the problems we have created in this world—war, greed, inequality of resources, feelings of scarcity, and fear—are often beyond a rational plan of action. We need to look both deeper and further for answers.

When we take time to reflect deeply on our lives, we notice that often an invisible hand, the divine, the spiritual forces of the universe have brought us out of a dark place into a place of healing or one where good things start to manifest. Those spiritual forces know how to create the transformation we are seeking. The more we can call in spirit and let it move in ways that are beyond our rational comprehension, the more we open the doorway for this to happen, both on a personal and planetary level. This is the way of the shaman.

In *Spirit Walking: A Course in Shamanic Power*, Evelyn Rysdyk brilliantly shares with us a means of practicing shamanism and tapping into this powerful ancient tradition for guidance and healing. Rather than focusing our thoughts and our imaginations on our challenges and troubles, which only ends up feeding them, we must practice using our imaginations to dream about a world that embraces love, peace, light, abundance, and equality for all.

We must dream it into being. In *Spirit Walking*, Evelyn teaches you how to do just that.

Spirit Walking addresses how when we step into the imaginal world of the shaman we discover a true richness of life. We learn how to once again regain the depth of senses, to hear our inner music, and to remember the preciousness of life. We start to wake up from the collective trance that keeps us from experiencing our deep inner world. And as we strengthen our connection to spirit and begin to create a new fabric of reality in the invisible realms, we begin to see it manifest into the physical world to replace all that is unraveling.

In this book Evelyn walks you through many practices that will connect you with the world of spirit and give you ways to call on the spirits for help. She brings a fresh perspective to the work by showing how the latest findings in quantum physics are verifying what the shamans have always known, namely that all matter is energy, that all matter has consciousness, and that we are all connected in a far more intricate web of energy and spirit than we have been led to believe. She shares powerful stories of shamans from a variety of cultures such as Nepalese, Tuvan, the Ulchi from Siberia, and from Peru. She helps us see how we can learn from indigenous teachers and integrate shamanic practices into our own lives. What I especially appreciate about Evelyn is that she is not a voyeur. It's easy to think we can simply copy what indigenous shamans do and get the same results. But of course that's not the way things work. Evelyn knows that deeply. She has delved into the practices herself and has made them her own, and she will show you how to walk a path that is enriched by the ways of the shaman and still authentic to your life and experience.

Evelyn takes away some of the mystery of shamanic work with her clear explanations and step-by-step instructions. And her original art, which is used throughout the book, not only inspires us but also imbues the work with special power.

Read *Spirit Walking* and learn from this master teacher. Read, reflect, devote yourself to the practices she teaches, and you too can become a spirit walker.

—SANDRA INGERMAN, AUTHOR OF *SHAMANIC JOURNEYING: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE* AND *THE SHAMAN'S TOOLKIT: ANCIENT TOOLS FOR SHAPING THE LIFE AND WORLD YOU WANT TO LIVE IN*

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge our clients whose courage has filled me with awe, our students for their excitement, energy, and input, which helps me to be an ever-better teacher—and to all the journeying shamans who have paved my way.

This book is dedicated to all my teachers in ordinary reality and in the spirit realms. I recognize the profound blessings I have received from the spirits of the Earth, my power animals, teachers, and ancestors. I offer a special heartfelt acknowledgment of the loving guidance and protection I have received from my Great, Great Grandma Henderer and Bear.

I offer deep gratitude to the many fine human teachers with whom I have been blessed to study. I choose to especially honor here Ai Churek, Roy Bauer, Gregg Braden, Grandfather Mikhail “Misha” Duvan, Nadyezda Duvan, Michael Harner, Sandra Harner, Sandra Ingerman, the Institute of HeartMath, Marrianna Konbou, Brooke Medicine Eagle, Fredy “Puma” Quispe Singona, and David Reilly, MD. Special thanks also to my dear friend, Bholá N. Banstola, my shamanic colleagues of URSA, my agent Stephany Evans of FinePrint Literary Management, Trudy Sloan for sharing her wonderful poetry in these pages, Aisha Saidi for being a rigorous, spirited, and patient editor, and Caroline Pincus of Red Wheel/Weiser for choosing to publish this volume.

Lastly and most importantly, I honor the loving blessings I receive from my wonderful family, my dear friends, and my incredible life partner, Allie Knowlton, who is a wealth of heart wisdom and always a ready coconspirator!

Disclaimer

I wrote *this book to support* you in developing a personal practice of shamanism. The suggestions, therapeutic processes, and shamanic techniques described in this book are in no way meant to replace professional medical or mental health assistance. Please consult a medical professional for any persistent condition. In addition, while this program offers rituals to heal you, this book does not replace formal instruction in shamanic healing on behalf of others. No one should attempt the techniques in this book on another person without such training. To do so could bring serious harm to your patient as well as you.

Introduction

W*hile many people are fascinated* by the ways of the shaman, few people feel that they are able to access genuine spiritual power themselves. This book is meant to help each of you awaken your inherent spiritual abilities and make connections with the boundless energies that animate the cosmos. By following the methods presented in these pages, you can become a person who dances along the shaman's path between this world and that of the spirits—a “spirit walker!”

Shamanism is an ancient spiritual practice rooted in the ideas that all matter has consciousness and that accessing the spirit in all things is part of what keeps the world and people healthy, in balance, and in harmony. The spirit beings that surround us are also the source of a spirit walker's ability to profoundly influence life events and thrive in difficult circumstances.

My own difficult situation led me to explore the ways of the shaman. In my thirties, I experienced a profound depression. The light and joy drained from my life. While I worked with a counselor and took medication to allow me to sleep, neither these nor my strength of will was enough to lift me out of the darkness. Being deeply depressed is like being a horse wearing blinders. Your world narrows to a sliver of its former richness. You lose all ability to perceive the full depth and breadth of life.

While searching for ways to recover my confidence and vitality, I found an advertisement for a workshop with anthropologist Michael Harner about the Way of the Shaman. After a half day of his delightful stories, Michael led me into my first shamanic journey experience. As soon as I entered the world of the spirits, something astonishing occurred. I had the extraordinary feeling of possibilities rushing back to me. They weren't specific notions, just the sense that opportunities, ideas, and desires were suddenly feasible again.

That moment set my feet on the spirit walker's path. I read, took workshops, studied with tribal shamans, but most importantly, I entered into relationships with a power animal and spirit teacher. Over the next twenty years, I came to understand what these affiliations provided. These relationships with spirits altered my ways of interacting with other people, other beings, and my environment. I was changed and discovered that these connections were the true source of power.

A spirit walker or shamanic practitioner chooses to be a special kind of person. This individual chooses to be in right relationship with All That Is and thus is able to access the powers that flow around us. The spirit walker accesses these powers for the good of all beings—for healing, gaining insight, getting guidance, and generally making life better. The shamanic rituals, healings, and journeys that the spirit walker performs are grounded in methods that have endured for millennia around the globe. But despite their long history, these methods offer fresh approaches, which can support you in regaining your vitality and renewing the energy in your life right now. As you wend your way along this journey of deep connection, you will be supported in remembering your own intrinsic preciousness as well.

In living a more powerful, healthier, and more loving life, you will affect the other people whom your life touches. Your positive shifts will become healing ripples throughout the entire web of life. In my years of doing this work and helping many people find

their way along this path, I have come to believe that this is how the world can and will be healed. It all begins with one extraordinary being—you—feeling the power of connection with the entire fabric of existence!

Shamanic spirituality has always been intimately connected to survival. At its origins with our ancient ancestors, the shaman's efforts helped the tribal group successfully negotiate a healthy path through the perils of both the seen and unseen worlds. Whether through locating the migrating herds of animals on which the people depended for sustenance or tending to the sick with songs and medicinal plants, the shaman's skill was necessary to support people's lives.



Figure 1. Grandfather Mikhail “Misha” Duvan, the last male shaman of the Ulchi of Siberia, in his ritual garb. Pen and ink.

The survival of our species may once again depend on those who choose to follow the shaman's path. We human beings have made it this far because of our interconnection and interdependence on each other and other species. The more deeply we explore these especially delicate interconnections—the strands that create the fabric of life on Earth—the more awestruck and humbled we become. Unfortunately, many people are unable to see or feel these bonds, often exploiting the richness and beauty of the Earth in a vain effort to gain power.

You are reading this because you think and feel differently. You are willing to remember your authentic, power-filled self. You understand that each of us is intimately connected to everything else. You may also have a sense that the shamanic way can give you a much-needed bridge back to balance and joy. While it may not be possible to fully reclaim the ancient lifestyle that gave birth to the first shamans, it is possible to reconnect with your own power and with your ancestors' understanding of the precious nature of all beings.



Throughout this book, you will be given exercises and questions to consider to deepen your experience. Take your time, answer the questions as honestly as you can, and follow through with each of the exercises: they are meant to support your evolution into a spirit walker. This is an essential part of any shamanic path. The spirit walker follows an inward journey of growing personal power, even as she or he develops awareness of and connections to the spiritual power that is all around.

To make sure you get the most benefit from these exercises and questions, dedicate a notebook or journal to the work of this book. This will be of invaluable assistance in helping you fully internalize all that you will learn in these pages. The audio files you will need and other resources to support your exploration may be found at www.myspiritwalk.com. A companion book, *A Spirit Walker's Guide to Shamanic Implements*, is also available through the site.

You will also notice that the terms *spirit walker* and *shaman* have different meanings in this book. A shaman is a healer—often indigenous—who is recognized as such by her or his community. I use the term spirit walker or shamanic practitioner to distinguish the essence of what it means to be a shaman apart from the role within the community. That is, you not only walk between the realms to access the spiritual, you also walk alongside the spirits of nature and your helping spirits. It is these relationships with spirits, animals, birds, plants, natural forces, and other human beings that provide a fresh way to be in harmony with All That Is.

So, as it has been in the distant past, the spirit walker's path—your path—is about creating a way to thrive in community. In deciding to walk with the spirits, you are choosing to reclaim the magic that people lost along the way to the twenty-first century. Supported by the loving spirits of All That Is, who are whispering their encouragement, you will help weave a new future for yourself and our planet.

Now, let's embark on this marvelous, spirit-walking adventure together!

EVELYN C. RYSDYK

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The Search
*I turn the pages
And wander through the centuries
In and out of great minds
Seeking answers.
I hope to pick up truth
A polished pebble for my pocket
Something solid to save,
Grasp in times of shaken need.
But truth is never pocket-sized,
Never solid.
The wise let truth carry them,
Content to be polished
By the ceaseless motion
Of its questions.*

TRUDY SLOAN

Chapter 1

Unraveling the Mysteries

Shamanism has roots that extend very deeply into our collective human past. Originating in the time when people all over the globe lived as hunters and gatherers, shamanism is an ancient spiritual tradition that presupposes that the world around us is alive: the plants, trees, animals, birds, and people are filled with *spirit* that enlivens and animates them. Furthermore, the health and strength of any individual being is a direct reflection of the vitality of this animating force. During the subsequent spread of our species to every corner of the Earth, we carried this understanding of the world with us and incorporated it into our different tribal traditions. Observers of widely diverse shamanic cultures—from Africa to the Americas to Asia—see amazingly similar practices that clearly reflect our common spiritual origins.

Much of the malaise people experience in our contemporary world seems to originate from the perceived disconnection of our bodies, minds, and spirits. The greatest gifts the shamanic path can offer you are ways to access your innate wisdom while recalling your profound spiritual connection to *All That Is*. As my Spirit Teacher says, it is about you remembering your “*inherent preciousness*.” Through relationships with helpful and healing spirits and the spirits of nature, you can recognize that you are “no more or less important than any other being in Creation and as a Divine being, you are both loved and Love itself.”¹

As you remember your relationship with All That Is, your perceptions will shift about who you are, why you are here, and how you can participate in the larger world. We create our understanding of what is real based upon our perceptions of the world. As you shift and change, your reality itself will be altered leading to real concrete changes in your life.

Most of what we know about the world is learned information. The very first education we receive is from the family in which we are raised and later from the larger culture in which our family exists. In other words, each of us was taught our conscious and subconscious definitions of reality. This process affects how we understand the world and ourselves. As we learn new definitions, we are capable of replacing our previously learned views with a more harmonious way of knowing.

As you connect more deeply with yourself, with the world of the spirits, and with nature, you will gain indisputable personal evidence to act as an antidote to the compartmentalized and isolating view of the world that has become prevalent during the past few centuries. As this happens, the limiting beliefs you were taught in your early life will begin to fade away. You will step back into a way of knowing held by your most ancient ancestors—that you are an integral part of the Circle of Life that holds us all.

The Shaman's Paradigm

While the shamanic view may be considered “primitive” today, modern science is discovering principles that support the ways our ancestors understood the world surrounding them. In the shamanic worldview, it isn't just the animals, birds, and plants that are alive; everything is spirit-filled. This concept is called animism. The word *animism*, first coined by English anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor in *Primitive Cultures* (1871), comes from the Latin *anima*, or soul.

Whether it is the plants, animals, birds, or even landscape features such as rivers and mountains or forces such as the wind and the rain—animists believe that each part of our environment has a vital essence or spirit and a consciousness. A shaman also understands that spirit is the framework on which physical existence is sustained. Spirit is at the foundation of everything, and it is the connective tissue of all aspects of our physical existence.

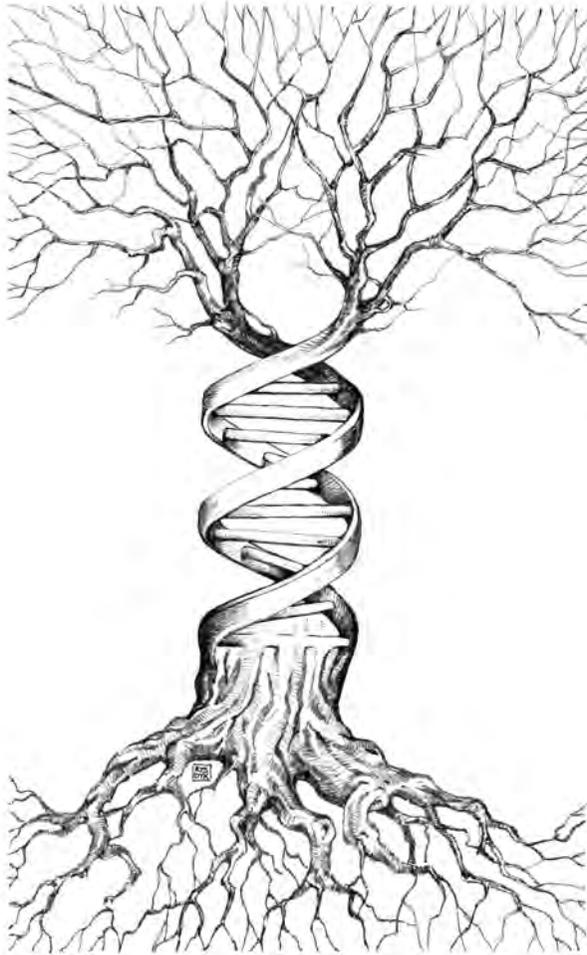


Figure 2. Tree of Life.

In quantum physics, the world is seen as originating in the vibrations created by infinitesimal superstrings. Each of these imperceptible features has the capacity to produce a particle of matter. In the paradigm of New Physics, this invisible and impalpable “something” connects all physical reality. Everything we think of as living, as well as those aspects of our world that we perceive as inanimate, are interlinked on the quantum level.

Even our own bodies’ physicality reveals points of connection that our ancestors believed were an intrinsic feature of life. Today, we know that the elemental raw materials that compose our bodies, such as iron, calcium, oxygen, sodium, and all the rest, are the same materials that make up the mountains, seas, atmosphere, and soils of our planet.

Within every one of our cells, we carry the elemental building blocks of life—DNA—a remarkable double helix-shaped chain of chemical information that shapes our physical form. And housed within the twisting steps of this amazing molecule is the story of our evolution as human beings. What is truly astounding is that we share 90 percent of our genetic material with other species. Everything from the bear to the oak tree to the tiniest bacteria has the same four amino acids making up their bodies. Recent discoveries have documented the fact that inside of the 60,000 to 80,000 genes that constitute our human genome lies the information to create all other life-forms on the planet. When molecular biologists examine the complex strands of our DNA, they also find housed within it more than a blueprint for a human being, but rather an extraordinary library of codes for all life on Earth. We carry the entire interlinked biosphere in every cell. We are part of all of Creation and all of Creation is held within us.²

In addition to being an extraordinary storehouse of information, the structure of our DNA is also a source of measurable energy. Studies in the 1980s determined that DNA emits photons

in the visible light range (400-700 nanometer), which although weak, exhibit a laser-like coherency.³ Photons are particles of light matter having no mass; they may be proven by physics, but not weighed in the traditional manner.⁴ They are normally imperceptible to our senses, yet they are constantly radiating from the DNA in every cell. A remarkable property of a photon is that, since it has no measurable mass, it is able to travel over great distances. That means the energy of our bodies, expressed as the photons emitted from our DNA, is intermingled with that of all other beings with whom our energy comes into contact. And since all DNA radiates these particles of light, it exists everywhere as a subtle energy—infusing, as it were, all of Creation.

This means that your DNA-emitted photons—the invisible part of you—cannot help but constantly interact with the invisible part of all other beings. This interaction creates yet another exciting situation. When one energy wave contacts another energy wave, it enters into a positive feedback loop. In this dynamic interaction, each element in the loop affects and is affected by the other. What this means is that, through interactions with different beings, the invisible, radiant part of you has the capacity to change and evolve. And if this information weren't staggering enough, since photons continue to travel endlessly onward, they have the ability to keep growing, interacting, and evolving, even after the body that generated them expires!⁵

It seems that the long road of science is bringing us back to a more ancient understanding of the world. If we examine all this scientific information using a shamanic lens, we would call this subtle energy or vibration, *Spirit*. Perhaps, 60,000 years ago, a shaman would have understood the idea of Creation in this way: “First there is Spirit. This imperceptible force is what both shapes and infuses the body, and it is that same Spirit that radiates from us, continuing after our bodies are no longer alive.”



Figure 3. Upper Paleolithic handprints are reminders of those who walked the Earth and interacted with the spirits millennia before our time.

So this view of human beings as timeless, radiant beings, interconnected to all other forms of life has parallels with cutting-edge quantum physics and pioneering genetic research; yet the people who first developed these concepts about reality lived as early as the Paleolithic era. How is it possible that these same ideas initially arose in the far-distant past? How was it possible to understand that which could not be seen, heard, or touched? It is clear that some other way of looking, listening, and feeling must have been available to them so that they could reach beyond the limitation of their senses.

For the shaman, this visionary way of perceiving the world may be an inherent outcome of the rituals necessary for attaining

their powers. Shamans are initiated in ways as various as there are tribes of people on the planet, but there are parallels between many of these practices. Their common threads involve a loss or stripping away of the initiate's ordinary way of perceiving reality, as well as a detachment from the personality or ego self. This death and rebirth initiatory experience seems to be a critical aspect of shifting one's understanding of the world from focusing on matter to centering around spirit. Common threads of these ecstatic experiences include a dismemberment or dissolution of the physical body, which is followed by a gradual renewal of the flesh—sometimes appearing different or having different components than the original viscera.⁶ During this experience of being dissolved or destroyed, the shamanic initiates would experience some new view of reality and their place within it. This view may show that their existence is inexorably tied to all other beings, or they may see their bodies as constructed in such a manner that they contain all living things.⁷ They may describe being able to perceive light emanating from living beings⁸ or experience seeing luminous threads holding the world together. These anomalous experiences of reality (*anomalous* in that they appear to defy the *reason* of Newtonian physics) are consistent with those described by people who undergo a brief period of clinical death due to severe accident, illness, or surgery.⁹ It would appear that this loss of the ordinary self allows the quantum view of reality to be revealed.¹⁰

This loss or moving aside of the obscuring self may be accomplished in several ways. Rituals may include a form of suffering whereby a supplicant is asked to abstain from food and drink for a prescribed, lengthy period of time, or submit to extreme conditions (heat, cold, wounding) to perceive the death of self in a deep, visionary experience.¹¹

When asked to define their experiences, shamans variously describe the spiritual realm as being light-filled or having sounds as its essential framework to relate the perception of a vibrational

world. This is true of the shamans from the Amazon basin to the far reaches of Siberia, as well as for those contemporary individuals who have chosen to expand their perceptions beyond the ordinary.

Thankfully, it is *not* necessary for you to suffer to be a spirit walker! With a strong desire and intention, it is possible to use dancing, singing, rattling, or drumming for extended periods of time to shift out of your ordinary way of seeing the world. Indeed, repetitive auditory stimuli have the ability to create vivid visionary states that match those experienced while under the influence of sacred hallucinogens.¹² The powerful methods outlined in these pages are profoundly effective, and the information in this book will support you to make the necessary shifts in a safe way.

Perhaps It's Not Too Late

I was born into a sacred world,

Knew without the effort of instruction

That the old oak was a grandfather

And the night wind had a voice.

I knew dancing songs to celebrate the seasons

And that, if I stumbled, life would catch me.

It took much to wean me from my early ways,

Left me with blunted instincts clinging

To just pretend stories like an orphaned child.

But I have turned to return at last

Hoping against the lonely logic of long years

That life is there to catch me.

TRUDY SLOAN

Chapter 2

Beginning the Path

Y*our choice to become a spirit walker* requires that you not only learn shamanic methods, but also how to be a true person of power. This path is not one of ego or grandiosity; instead, it is the humble walk into a deeper relationship with All That Is. A shaman is guided by her or his heart and celebrates the interconnections that unite and nourish all beings.

To be able to become this kind of person, you must go through an evolution. That means learning how to approach the world from a place of love and gratitude that diminishes fear and anger. This is not the tendency of the culture that surrounds you. Every day you are bathed in the energies of society's fear and anger and the painful expressions of these lower vibrations. From a widespread epidemic of anxiety and depression to outright violence and senseless mayhem, you bear witness to unconscious, poorly modulated emotional energy. In following the path of the shaman, you learn the discipline to be and behave in a more powerful way.

To start this new way of being, it is important to put yourself in an open and relaxed state of mind. The following meditation is an excellent way to center and focus yourself. It is useful not only for beginning this new venture, but also as a way to be more fully grounded and present. You may want to begin each day with it.

Read the exercise through once or twice before you begin listening to the "Embodied Light" mp3 audio file that is available for you at www.myspiritwalk.com.

Exercise: Embodied Light Meditation

1. Begin by finding a quiet space where you will not be disturbed. Sit down in a comfortable chair that allows your back to be straight while your feet are on the floor.
2. With your hands folded gently in your lap, close your eyes and take a few moments to breathe. Allow your breaths to be both quiet and full—somewhat like the breaths of a deep sleep state.
3. As you begin to relax, notice that your breath originates in the center of your chest. Imagine a light there that grows brighter with every breath you take.
4. As this light grows brighter, see it also expanding to fill your entire body—growing ever brighter.
5. Your radiant body is a gift of the stars.
6. Exploding novas seeded the cosmos with all the elements to make you and the body of our beautiful planet. All the iron, calcium, oxygen, and other elements are gifts from the stars. This gift is what you inhabit while you are embodied. You are a divine radiance wrapped in star-stuff!
7. Allow your light to expand so that your physical body is enfolded in light. Your spirit—your light—completely surrounds your body. This is your true state of being.
8. Your entire being is full, rich, radiant, beautiful, and divine.
9. While continuing to breathe, notice how your radiant body is connected to the radiant body of the Earth.
10. Your body moves within the atmosphere of our planet. You live by swimming through her air with your feet touching her body. Your body is held by your light and is always cradled by the Earth.
11. Allow yourself to reach out even further and feel how the Sun's radiance embraces the Earth as she embraces you in her loving warmth. Allow all your senses to be fully enlivened by this nurture.

12. You are an embodied light, a divine and magnificent aspect of the All That Is, made manifest by your physicality and always connected to the Earth and All That Is.
13. Breathe in the depth of this radiant, loving connection and allow it to bring you to a peaceful and fully enlivened state of being.
14. When you feel full of this experience—clasp your folded hands tightly together. As you are doing this, recall the sensations of being fully enlivened and cradled by the Earth—completely peaceful.
15. Whenever you wish, you will be able to attain this fully embodied state by repeating this symbolic gesture with your hands.
16. Now, gently release your hands and allow yourself to slowly return your attention to the room in which you are sitting. Take a full, deep, sighing breath and gently open your eyes.

Once you've read the meditation, find a comfortable position and listen to the guided version through headphones. When you feel ready, you may wish to make notes about what you experienced while doing this meditation. Take time to record all that you felt, saw, and heard.

If you experience difficulty visualizing or feeling the light at your heart center, don't worry. Sometimes it can take some time to move the consciousness down into the body and into the heart. This is especially true when we are used to being in our heads or being out of our body as a protection. Those wonderfully ingenious strategies, which may have helped us survive when we were younger, can interfere with us thriving as an adult. However, with practice you will be able to move into a heart-centered experience.



If, on the other hand, you feel foggy, confused, or light-headed after this meditation, that means you need to practice grounding yourself. Some easy ways to do this include:

- Eating a light snack
- Spending time outdoors—especially in a natural setting, with grass, trees, or by the ocean or a river
- Doing something with your hands—making something, touching stones, playing in water, or digging in dirt
- Sitting on the ground with your back up against a tree
- Breathing with a focus on the soles of your feet—feeling them touching the inside of your shoes or the ground
- Imagining roots coming from the bottom of your feet into the ground to firmly tie you to the core of the Earth
- Listening to whatever music makes you want to dance—and *dancing!*

Above all, please be gentle with yourself—especially if you find your experience with the meditation—or any other lesson in this book—feels difficult. You are in the process of transforming! This is something that is best done with a loving patience and a gentle persistence. Over time, a kind of softening begins to occur whereby the new way of being gradually becomes easier.

Choose a time of day to practice this meditation. Do this exercise with the audio file once a day for at least thirty days. As you stay with this practice, you will be able to attain this state of being more easily. Keep records of what you realize about your own process.

Process Questions

- Articulate, as best as you can, in your journal the bodily, emotional, and spiritual sensations of being simultaneously radiant and grounded on the Earth.
- How do your feelings now differ from your feelings before you practiced this meditation?
- Think about how this practice could benefit your daily life. Record your impressions.