

Shamanic Drum Journey Work

By Angeles Arrien

A universal shamanic practice used to access information from the divine or sacred self is journeywork. A naturally induced altered state of consciousness can be entered through the use of sonics, ie., the drum, the rattle, the bell, or singing/chanting, giving one access to a non-ordinary reality. In Western culture, high intensity sound may also be used for journeywork. In fact, the majority of journeywork in Western culture is done without an instrument of induction. This journeywork takes the form of daydreams, fantasy, contemplation, meditation, imagination, etc. We may “space out” when we drive, shower, or move into any other habituated routine. We may miss sections of a meeting or a speech because we were “journeying”-not fully present.

Each journey is considered sacred. The work is to surrender and open. We are given a vision in images on a journey; it is creative energy brought into this reality-the middle world. Images may be visual, auditory, or somatic (felt in the body.) Shamanic societies believe that there is no difference between the realities of the invisible world and those of the visible world. They have no words for the concept of *make believe* or *imagination* and believe that the invisible world and the visible world must be equally honored, valued, and respected. The symbol is the psychological mechanism for transforming energy. In shamanic societies, symbols are the bridge between visible and invisible realities. They believe that our own symbolic structures contain divine revelations-teaching tools that provide healing, education, and wisdom.

Where do stories and images come from that we “make up?” They have to be somewhere inside us. It takes approximately 13 billion brain cells to fire off one image. Why that particular image at this time? If we devalue or discount these images, we disempower the creative energy within us-the force of our own personal psychomythology. The psyche is relentless about using every possible symbol to let us know where we are in our journey-physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

In each journey, we will be presented with what we spiritually need. What we “need,” however, may not include any of the pictures held by the ego of what is supposed to happen. The journey will reveal where we are ego-invested and where we are not.

The journey is a process and is not product oriented. If it seems that nothing is given, it is time to walk the world of “I don’t know,” the land of gray clouds. Journeywork is a form of magnetic meditation; you watch and wait. Different sonics (drum, bells, click sticks, rattle, music) will access different information, as will the various body postures of lying, standing, sitting, walking, or dancing.

Illusions About Journey Work

- How do we know we have had a successful inner journey? What's my idea about that? It is an illusion to think that if we don't bring something back, there is something wrong and/or my journey is a failure. It is important to explore doorways we hadn't considered.
- Don't discount feelings such as unexpected emotions, body sensations (temperature shifts, energy rushes, jerks, etc.), memories, associations, people, conversations. All of this is information.
- Wait, watch, and observe; the task is just to witness.
- Wherever we go is exactly where we need to go at this point in time. If we don't know where we went, deep healing occurred. Just be open.
- There is not something to get, but something to use from the experience, and I am having an experience.

The Experience I Get Is The One I Need

"IF I JUDGE THE EXPERIENCE AT ALL, I BEGIN TO TAKE AWAY FROM IT."

"I MAKE NO JUDGEMENTS OR COMPARISONS"

HONORING THE JOURNEY

- Once we have completed the journey, it is very important that we honor it by bringing the wisdom of it back into this reality, grounding it in the middle world, the twilight place, where we can walk both worlds simultaneously. If I do not consciously apply it to “now,” it will be wasted. The way we give back to the mystery is through creativity. We must take our journey into form: write it, give voice to it in a story, sing it, dance it, draw it, etc. We must remember that we have been given a vision; the journey is creative energy brought into this reality.
- Give thanks to the images, people, and animals that appeared. Gather information about them. Give tribute to them with carvings, pictures, needlework, artwork, poetry, music, dance, etc.
- It is important to honor the journey as it is. We desacralize the experience by inflating or deflating it. The truth carries no exaggeration or stories.
- We will always be dissatisfied if we do not honor the experience in which we find ourselves. The experience isn't the story. What we want to share is the seed, the essence. A helpful process to glean the seed of our journey is to title it. If we can't yet title our journey, it is not time for us to come forward. We are still “in it.”

Where did I go?

What did I see, sense, feel?

What colors, people, plants, places, objects, discoveries, relations appeared?

What was the psycho-mythology that was revealed to me?

Where did I begin to let go? Or did I stay in the middle world?

Did I connect with my power animal or helping allies?

What surprised me?

What inspired me?

What challenged me?

What touched and moved me?

Journeying

On a classic shamanic journey, there are three worlds from which to receive information: upper world, lower world, and middle world. In the upper world and lower world, wisdom will reveal itself in images, colors, etc. One can visit all three worlds in a single journey. There is no “right way” to journey.

UPPER WORLD

The upper world is always a place of wonder; it has to do with exploring the beauty of who we are. It will often be entered from the top of a mountain or butte, by climbing a tree, or by being carried on the wings of a big bird.

The themes of the upper world are: inner teacher; guidance; ecstatic experiences; the transpersonal; the numinous. This inner teacher/guide is someone or something that will assist us in listening to our own divine wisdom. It is here where we go when we ask that a teacher or a teaching be given to us.

The upper world journey is associated with: soaring/flying; winged creatures; being uplifted; feeling the body or parts of the body expanded; floating; gifts; treasures; magnificent gardens; bejeweled and magical or mythological animals; historical or mythic people.

LOWER WORLD

The lower world is where we will journey to find solutions for the problems of our current tests and challenges. Any broken part can be nurtured and healed here in process shamanic societies call *soul retrieval*. Here, we may empower ourselves.

The lower world journey often involves a sense of going down, of falling. It is often reached by entering a cave or a tunnel, a hole in the ground, through a hollow tree into its roots, or the bottom of a spring.

The themes of the lower world journey are: Personal empowerment, personal health and wellbeing; creative ways of handling tests and challenges; ways of bringing leadership and inspiration into the middle world; soul retrieval or bringing back lost parts of ourselves; power animals and helping allies; old memories; empowerment.

The lower world journey is associated with: going down; body feeling thick and heavy; power animal and helping allies.

Power Animal

It is to the lower world that we journey to find out power animal, which represents our full instinctual nature. Our power animal and its helping allies, protect our health and wellbeing. It sees to it that we get what we need to maintain our life force. It is in the lower world that one may go to heal severe depression or energy depletion (soul loss).

MIDDLE WORLD

If we stay attentive to all that is occurring in the room, we are in middle-world. We listen to the drums; hear breathing, sense movement, etc. A middle-world journey indicates that we have practical, tangible, creative work to do. We need to manifest. We have choices to make in middle world, this reality, concerning health, finances, relationships, and/or creativity.

Most people with a middle world experience think that “nothing happened,” and they are “doing it wrong.” Ego wants to edit, control, push or hold back. Psyche says, “Don’t judge your process.”

NOTHINGNESS

We experienced nothingness. Maybe we went somewhere, but we don’t know where. This is considered to be a deep healing journey.

SLEEP

If we found ourselves asleep, we need creative energy that is deeply nurturing. We need soft, subtle energy until the body is replenished. When the body is exhausted, creative fires will be on low. It is time to replenish the well. If we go to sleep, we’ve been pushing and driving, and we need to make time in our lives to truly rest. There is subtle work happening of which we may not be conscious.

DRUMMING: THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS

GENERAL

Celebration
Clarity
Community building
Concentration (improved)
Conflict resolution
Focus
Leadership skills
Self-esteem (enhanced)
Spirituality
Teamwork

MEDICAL

ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)
Addiction (drug and alcohol)
Alzheimer's disease
Chronic pain
Dementia
Depression / isolation
Diabetes
Dyslexia
Parkinson's disease
PTSD, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome
Nervous system (realignment)
Stress reduction
Stroke