

What would BEAR do? – Spirit Animal Guidance
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“If you talk to the animals they will talk with you and you will know each other. If you do not talk to them, you will not know them and what you do not know you will fear. What one fears one destroys.

Chief Dan George

from Animal-Speak by Ted Andrews

Hawk circles; Wolf howls; Prairie Dog greets; Tiger stalks. Do these phrases evoke images and emotions related to your personal encounters with animals - whether in a movie, a dream or real life? We humans are fascinated, even mesmerized, by their mysteries. And for good reason! Their wisdom can inform our attempts to devise solutions, manifest dreams, and exact changes.

We are deeply aware that animals possess abilities that we don't, and demonstrate power beyond our understanding. They perceive the world in an uncomplicated way. Consequently, we aspire to many of their attributes. Valuing animals for who they are, elevates the human race to the higher role of stewardship, rather than domination.

Bear, for example, carries a deep significance for work dear to our hearts. I must thank Bear, without whose guidance, I would not have been able to set aside adequate time to write this. Bear helps one share with the world whatever has awakened within. I asked, “What would Bear do?” in order to deal with the many interruptions threatening completion.

Although Bear often guides me, she is not my Totem animal, but one of my spirit guides. Any animal can become your spirit guide. You probably have many already, whether you are aware of them or not. Attune to these animals more consciously by paying close attention to daily sightings. Consider those who appear infrequently but at special times as well.

Learn more about animals by being near them, sharing space and time. For instance, I learned to honor my own rhythm by engaging with my cats in theirs – napping, exploring, eating and napping again. My dogs taught me to be present in each moment. Something to smell, bark at, and chase. Hurray! They led; I followed.

While volunteering at the W.O.L.F. Sanctuary (www.wolfsanctuary.net), Whisper, an adult female wolf, taught me that two predators could temporarily trust each other and snooze in close proximity. And a baby bear in Alaska shared a spontaneous dance with me before I wisely got back into the car.

In interacting with these precious beings, I was communing with my own animal nature. These encounters are optimum pathways to self-understanding through fresh approaches, unfamiliar rhythms and non-verbal communication.

Each animal sighting has meaning. You can look up the animal's qualities in a deck like the Medicine Cards, and apply them immediately to a problem you are mulling over, a

next step you are contemplating, or an emotion that was evoked. Let the special qualities and gifts of the animals lend insight and wisdom to you.

After an encounter, create a journal of your thoughts and impressions. Study a book such as Animal-Speak. Examine your dreams. Visit habitats; try habits. Move in the dark like an owl. Play in the sea like an otter. Eat what they eat. Imagine you are in their body – smell, see, hear, feel, move and taste.

As you review your life experiences, there has probably been one animal that seems more significant than others. This may be your Totem, the animal who has chosen to guide you for your entire life. That is correct – **he has chosen you** since he is aware of your life lessons and his ability to assist you. Whether it is Ant or Skunk, Elk or Rabbit, you must accept and revere this teacher. This is a key to deeper spiritual connections.

Our relationship to the animal kingdom is not without its shadow, however. Our misunderstandings about animals, as well as our mistreatment of them, has often stemmed from religious, financial or anthropocentric motives. Believing that humans are exceedingly entitled, without a deeper responsibility, has led to disastrous outcomes. Widespread factory farming, the eradication of the wolf, and the success of puppy mills, are typical results of this sort of unhealthy greed.

I believe our craving for a deeper connection to their vocalizations, movement, and appearance, is our best attempt to really know the animals, and in turn, to accept our own animal nature. Until that happens, we continue to destroy entire animal nations, and cruelly corrupt others. I submit that if we were to give space to animals and their ways, we would readily awaken within ourselves many qualities needed for a more peaceful and tender world for all beings.

On their behalf, and ours, don't limit yourself to accepting guidance from the animals, but do give something back in return. Advocate for your Totem, your spirit guides and other animals in meaningful ways. Support a sanctuary or rescue, modify your habits or lifestyle, preserve a habitat, or enact a law.

Love your animal nature and promise to do something wildly expressive soon.

And please, speak for the animals not because they don't have language – they do. Speak for them because many humans think ours is the only language that matters.

In closing, lest you think only Bear helped me today, let me share that Dog did too. My dogs helped, that is. Their wisdom urged me to take a break and play with them in the autumn sun. How blessed am I!

The Misha May Foundation, *mutts in safe homes always*, a 501(c)(3) non-profit dog rescue, which rehabilitates and re-homes dogs who have run out of time at shelters, or who have specific medical or behavior needs. Adoption information and a description of holistic classes and services can be found at www.mishamayfoundation.org.