

Shamanism - Find Your True Nature in Nature



Episode 46: Shamanism - Find Your True Nature in Nature with Mara Bishop

Gregory Anne: Welcome back everybody. To another episode of Rebellious Wellness Over 50, where I bring you guests that are a little bit outside of the conventional wisdom for women and aging. Today, my guest is Mara Bishop. Mara, welcome.

Mara Bishop: Thank you so happy to be here.

Gregory Anne: Yeah, we're happy to have you too. So you are an intuitive consultant, shamanic practitioner, a teacher and author, and an artist. I'm wondering if you could tell the listeners how you became this person, what got you interested in shamanism and the spiritual side of life?

I kind of stumbled into the shamanism piece. I think it's the nature part of shamanic practice of connecting to the spiritual aspects of the natural world. That's always been a potent intimate part of my life. I think those relationships with animals and the plants, I know we were talking a little bit before we got on about connecting with animals and sometimes surprising, but really fun and enjoyable ways.

Mara Bishop: I grew up Catholic and talking about spirituality and spiritual practice and, and how meaningful that is. Not jumping ahead, but part of the reason why I developed the professional practice that I have, working with other people is because of how impactful my personal practice was.

When I was younger and growing up Catholic and coming from kind of a spiritually eclectic family, we have Judaism, we have Catholicism. We ultimately folded in the Shamanic piece. seeing how our interactions with nature and how much we are a part of nature can provide healing.

and such deep relationships. So that has evolved for me from being a kid in the backyard and looking for the particular animals that visited regularly, to being somebody who, as a young person questioned what is the nature of reality and religious structures and institutions, and kind of sought my own way.

Part of what really spoke to me about Shamanic practice was how foundational our relationship with our natural environment was.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. I noticed on your website, you said we are nature and nature is us, which is a lovely way to think about it. We're not separate from nature, right?

And we're animals.

Mara Bishop: I mean, I think that separation is at the heart of so many of the problems that we have, like our individual problems and our global problems is that we really kind of missed the boat on that. Somehow we forgot that that's the case. We're just a piece of it, you know, we're not,

Gregory Anne: A very teeny, tiny little weeny piece of it.

I want to make sure that the audience understands that you don't call yourself a Shaman. So just a little bit on the why that's an important distinction.

Mara Bishop: We have a limited time today, so this is a really big topic that we could spend a lot of time on, but the word shaman itself is from a particular people.

It's from the Tongass people of Siberia and. So there's history there. Anthropologists back when, took that word and then applied it to practices of other people. So I think now a lot in the mainstream, we think of shamans and shamanism as applying to maybe more native Americans or kind of a blanket statement and

technically is not correct. And then what I practice is core shamanism, which isn't seated in one particular cultural tradition. I like to be, aware of what my own cultural roots are, but really this is about the way I was trained and the way I practice is about direct revelation and connecting with guidance from my helping spirits, the spirits of nature.

What's around me from this particular place in this particular time. But not about the practices of a particular group, right? So we want to be really respectful and not to appropriate anybody else's traditions. And I think claiming that word, claiming that title of Shaman is part of that, of trying to navigate that line of giving some language so that if somebody wants to come to you as a client, or just to understand what you're talking about, we've got to put some language around what we do and that's a struggle.

Then also making sure that we're being respectful. So drawing from some of the practices of shamanism has a different flavor from I am the Shaman.

Gregory Anne: Thank you for that. I think that's an important point for people to understand. And there are people that say they are shamans in the world and that's fine for their expression of who they are.

You just have

Mara Bishop: And there are shamans in the world.

Gregory Anne: Why is this a particularly good time for people to explore this idea of connectedness to nature? We're coming out of COVID, there's been a lot of upset in the world.

Mara Bishop: You know, that old expression, when's the best time to plant a tree? 20 years ago, and then it was the second best time right now.

So I think now is a particularly potent time and a lot of people. Over the last couple of decades, even I think shamanism is becoming more popular and people are becoming more aware of these kinds of practices that are independent of an institution. We're looking for ways that we can have our own agency around our spiritual practice.

That may be somewhat related to how our institutions are crumbling. We're also experiencing this increased urgency around our relationship with nature, realizing how out of balance we are and how we need to maybe reestablish and that's huge.

We've known this for a while. We're heading in the wrong direction in a lot of ways. With COVID particularly, this idea of coming home . Many of us, has been forced into, our stay at home orders and having to come back into our home spaces, whether that's

private spaces where we're alone in ways that we haven't been, or where we're having to be in close quarters with family members. That's intense. That can be like this crucible of Aha, I've got to be with myself. Without distraction. I've got to be in this one place for prolonged periods.

I remember in the beginning of the pandemic, we were seeing all those pictures of here's Venice and look what the waters look like. There's nobody around all the tourists are gone. Here are these wild animals that are walking around.

Gregory Anne: I was thinking that same thing.

Mara Bishop: It was this amazing kind of surreal imagery of nature reclaiming urban areas temporarily.

Well, I think it kind of sparked in a lot of us, this idea of, huh? What if we really changed how we were in relationship. And at the same time we have this opportunity to think about, I've got my own backyard space. I have a class called back yard shamanism. And it's where my work is headed. About really focusing on our relationship with nature.

We often think about whether it's with Shamanic work or spiritual work or wilderness work is we want to go somewhere wild. We've got to go to the Amazon, we've got to go to Tibet and Nepal. We've got to go to somewhere that we think of as these places of power. We have places of power right outside our door.

Yes.

You know, wherever you live. You could be in a city apartment, you can be in a suburban place. Wherever you are, that's where your power can be. So I think we, have had an opportunity to get some glimpses about how to reframe that.

Gregory Anne: And when you're talking about urban, suburban, I think because I mostly grew up in cities and you always have the sky.

I remember no matter what I was thinking of or rushing to get to work to the subway, when I would come up out of the subway, I would be looking up and there would be a sky, whether it was cloudy or sunny or whatever, I always felt like, okay, I have that.

I always love watching the clouds and the changing sky. We're never without something to remind us. So I want to talk this.

Mara Bishop: Yeah, it's always with us. I think your point is great. Our breath or that little, the little tree you mentioned, or it's just the little tree on the corner, but filled with little tiny sparrows, wherever it is, you got something.

Gregory Anne: And speaking of the sparrows, anybody who's lived in a city has probably seen pigeons or sparrows, despite all odds, dirty air, noisy, crazy people, thousands of people, they manage to make their way.

They get like rooted, I see a breadcrumb, I'm getting it like it just to me, that's it's that drive to life. That resilience that we all have inside of us as well. And countless religious texts have talked about nature, being as strong as a mustard seed. There are so many references, we have gotten disconnected from the power that is even within looking at a little Sparrow or a little

thing coming up in the concrete that always amazes me. That nature will just take over.

Mara Bishop: Absolutely. We all have that inside of us.

Gregory Anne: So. I think it was a perfect time to talk about your new book. You're talking about wherever we go we have this potential connection and your book is Shamanism for Every Day. And is that a, is that a page a day kind of, idea a day book 365 journies? It is.

Mara Bishop: Yeah. Kind of framed by an introduction to shamanism, shamanic practice and the method of journeying itself about connecting to your own, helping spirits, kind of creating a personal Pantheon of helping beings that are maybe not in physical form. We're often used to thinking of, power animals or animals in spirit form, maybe they're plant allies. Every spiritual tradition has some variant on that, that we're born and we have this guardian angel or...

There's kind of an introductory piece about how do you set up a regular spiritual practice for yourself? And since I'm coming at it from shamanism, I give more instructions about working through the the core of Shamanic method, but, um, I'm really clear my intention with this is that the page a day,

The idea a day can be used to seed a journey or for a meditation or for a prayer, or for just to sit and think about it and see what comes to you intuitively. My hope is that, and it seems to be playing out with the feedback I get, that people of many different religions or practices could feel connected to the topics that I'm sharing and that,

you can use it, how you want. If you want to go here every everyday, I'm going to use dun dun da da. Great. If you want to say, what do I need today? And open it up to a page that works as well. If you want to skip around and pick which ones work for you, good. That it's kind of an easy, low stress, help to establish something regular.

Gregory Anne: So if you skip around, it's not a bad thing, right? It's not like a book that has to be gone from page one to page 365.

Mara Bishop: Exactly, if you, you don't have to do an order, you don't have to feel bad if you don't do one. For me, there's always that balance of having the regularity and the discipline.

And then also being easy with yourself and not feeling like you've got to. Most of us, I don't want to speak for everybody, but so much in our lives so much that we have to do. Right. But we don't want to take the joy out of a spiritual practice. Practice can sound so, uh, I don't want to do that thing today. So, as I said in the beginning, part of this modeled on what I did for myself, and finding that, doing the same thing over and over again, you know, there's benefit in repetition, but then sometimes that just gets kind of stale.

It becomes a hollow ritual and we need to mix things up . We need to, let ourselves have some change or add some creativity or, be really open, you know, one day we might want a very specific direct question the next day we might want, hey, tell me what I need to know. Now, let me not direct this, or let's let this be an experience in my body versus a question where I'm getting data. So I try and make it easy to have that real range and sampling of experiences so that, the reader, the person who's doing the practice doesn't have to come up with that for themselves every day.

Gregory Anne: Can you give us an example of one?

Mara Bishop: Yeah, let's see. What should we hear today?

The power of rest.

Do you want me to read it?

Gregory Anne: Yes, please.

Mara Bishop: Okay. So each page starts out with, a quote from somewhere. So this is the power of rest and the quote is "There is no music in arrest, but there is the making of music in it." And that's John Ruskin. And then there's a little description of the topic and then there'll be the journey itself.

So rests are an essential part of music. Without rest the notes would sound chaotic and incoherent and musicians couldn't complete a performance. Similarly rest is absolutely necessary to create a harmonious and coherent life. Without adequate rest, we are less productive, less creative and less healthy. Study after study describes the detrimental effects of not enough sleep and the benefits of adequate rest.

So for today's journey, I'll give you some options. Take a short power nap journey and ask for guidance around your sleep patterns or journey or meditate to simply be calm and relaxed.

I think that's another thing that's been reformed for people during this time is this idea of rest. I know it has for me . A lot of our patterns have been interrupted over these last couple of years where we're having the great resignation people are, for different reasons, setting some boundaries around work.

Gregory Anne: I'm curious to see how the world changes in the next couple of years because of this upset. As you said, institutions are crumbling, the great resignation people are leaving jobs that were a not satisfying and or the commute was too hard on them.

They like being with their family more. So much is shifting. And then the animosity within which we seem to exist. I think is untenable. But anyway, so all of that to say how a practice like you have in the book, the journeys that you're offering people to me seem like something that would be a tether to sanity and to sanity/spirituality, obviously there's the mind thing and the spirit, but you know what I mean? And I think the word spirituality it puts some people off right off the bat. Because if you're a fervent religious, Judeo-Christian perhaps that word spirituality, God was spirit.

We can't have that. It seems another place for separation to occur. But I think for the listeners here, what I would like them to take away and I want your opinion is spirituality is just a connection with who we are. We are spirit that's even in the Bible, pneuma, the word pneuma means spirit.

It's the breath of life. So we can't be separate from spirituality. What do you say?

Mara Bishop: That's, that's my belief that, you know, at our core we're spiritual beings, and then we have our bodies, our thoughts, our emotions, all these other aspects, but that our fundamental nature is of spirit.

I don't really presume to know exactly what that means. Hmm. My working definition of what that is evolves and changes over time. And I think, in the scheme of things, we're all kind of babies we're figuring it out. Maybe we don't quite have the language, we don't quite have the comprehension and we're all doing our best.

Those of us that think it's absolutely this and those of us that say we have no spirit it's our physical body and when we die, we go into the ground and we're trying, I believe there's this other substance. I mean, there's so many, you talking about the pneuma right?

We talk about chi So many different cultures, religions practices, talk about this, the substance that we're trying to get a handle on that somehow animates us. I think that's important. You touched on the sanity, you know, like staying sane, right. That's kind of like the cognitive counterpart to having peace.

Maybe the spiritual part is we're looking for some inner peace. We're looking for some sanity. And we're also looking for connection, kitty,

Gregory Anne: speaking of nature, and the animals of mine say hi, Fig.

Mara Bishop: That's one of my very favorite parts of working over zoom is getting to see everybody's pets.

Gregory Anne: That's great.

Mara Bishop: I have, you know, a regular monthly circle that just started up last week. That's roughly based on this book, a 365 journey circle, in different ways, people are looking for a way to connect with one another too.

I think maybe you're doing that with this podcast is how people who have some aspect of like-mindedness. Some of us are blessed that we have people in our lives where we can share, we can talk about things like this, and we feel safe to talk about it. And we have other people who won't look at us funny when we talk about our experiences, spirit realm, whatever language you want to put on that.

And there are many people who really don't have that community or safe space to understand, Or to be understanding about those experiences. It can be really easy to

feel isolated and particularly as people become more and more interested in more and more open, there that can become kind of overwhelming too.

I think when people's intuition starts to develop and you become, maybe more sensitive to the world around you. I was talking with somebody, last night who was here, we were doing an outdoor session. I do some work with energetic boundaries, the energy system work.

It's related to the Shining Bright Without Burning Out audio course. That's coming up in the spring too. So it's kind of this body of work about how do we. This was what prompted me is this, when you say stay sane, right? You want to be able to be open.

We want to be able to be connected to nature to each other, to our own spirits and be really present. But sometimes that can be overwhelming too. When we get really interconnected and really present spiritually in the world that, you know, as you're describing feels kind of chaotic and there's a lot of animosity.

Things are crumbling. We also want to have some tools so that we don't have empathic overload. We don't like in psychology language, we don't get compassion, fatigue. We don't end up in that burnout area. And then have to retreat into ourselves.

Gregory Anne: Yeah. I think sometimes we hear the word or use the word spirituality and it might be taken as

out there. We go out there to be spiritual when in fact, and that's true, some people, as you said, you start to develop intuition and you want to go further into the ascended master realm, and that too can get overwhelming. Like how much should I do?

And how far do I go? But nature will always help us stay grounded. I think as we practice or. Maybe we're having experiences of, guidance, literally hearing a voice or seeing something and that can be disturbing or unnerving. I say, get outside and meet a tree. Honestly, no matter what's going on, I might have some really wackadoodle dream one night, or, you know, even having a download when I'm just meditating.

And I don't know how to process it. I can't do that in the four walls. I can't do it looking at my work. I don't want to see my spouse, not for any reason, just that I need to process it. I don't care what the temperature is. I'm going to go outside or at least stare outside. I have a beautiful little grotto in the back of my house.

Just focus on it. So grounding is the antithesis. Sometimes it's all we need to help bring us back from that head space.

Mara Bishop: Yeah, I absolutely agree. And I would a hundred percent. The other piece I would add, I do think that sometimes people have the sense of you have to go up, like you have to go into those realms to get connected. And I think maybe that goes back into the more Judeo-Christian having up down thing.

So I would argue that what you're describing about going outside and getting grounded. Yes, 100%. And then also we can go outside and be in that earth place or the sun place. And the answers can be there too. Like spirit is everywhere, whatever spirit, however, we're defining that.

Whether it's our own wise spirits, whether it's the spirit of the environment, whether it's the spirit of an ancestor that's passed on, whether it's however we want to define God or goddess whatever our language is. That can be anywhere. Right. I do think we're,

yes, humans. I think we're non-local. I think there's lots of non-local spirits. And I do think partly with, with shamanism, there is that idea of, we might go upper world or lower world, but it's not a qualitative difference. Right. It might feel different, but it's not like this is positive and this is negative.

Gregory Anne: That's a great point. You have the book, you mentioned a class or two, do you run them regularly?

Mara Bishop: Yeah, so I have regular series of energy ecosystem class, which is about boundaries.

I'll do journeying classes. Uh, backyard shamanism class, which is really about the spirits of place and where you are and managing crisis and change and creativity, and how to kind of bring what you want into your life. I do those regularly, I'll do talks at different places. The, the shining bright without burning out is an audio course. So people can do that at their own pace. So that's nice if you can't make it to a class, even though, even if they're Zoom classes or whatever.

It comes out March 1st. And that's from Sounds True. So you can get that from there. You can go to my website and then find it, which is [whole spirit.com](http://www.wholespirit.com). This is the most recent one that we've been talking about.

I also have an earlier book, Inner Divinity, which people can also get wherever they might want.

Gregory Anne: And that's about intuitive development. If I remember

Mara Bishop: That's one part of it, it's got seven sections and it's really a lot about what we're talking about is how do we connect to our spiritual core.

So it's about how do you connect to yourself from your inner divinity, right? Your divine nature. How do you create healthy relationships? How do you relate to your environment? How do you develop your intuition? There's a section on shamanism. There's a section on, creating, different spiritual practices and creating health.

And then there's a section on your future. There's a series of meditations that go with that. There's iTunes downloads. And then I have the regular group that people can join and that's just a free group.

People can join and see what it's like.

Gregory Anne: And there's a link to that on your website.

Mara Bishop: Yeah, it's all on the website, there's a lot of information there.

Gregory Anne: There's a lot of information here, people.

Mara Bishop: The website is pretty dense.

Gregory Anne: That's great though. It's laid out well, it's easy to follow.

Mara Bishop: Thank you.

Gregory Anne: And people can have one-on-one sessions with you virtually or is that only in person?

Mara Bishop: Yep. They used to be in person or virtually, and then since the pandemic at this point, it's primarily virtual. So yeah.

Gregory Anne: Who would be a candidate to have a session with you? What would somebody be wanting?

Mara Bishop: It's really a range.

People who are interested in figuring out what their next steps are, a lot of times I'll have people who are combining a couple of issues, right? Maybe this particular

time is bringing up some angst. It's bringing up some old issues and we're wanting to look at what's the energetic side of those things.

I have a degree in psychology, but I'm not a psychologist. I've got training in shamanism, then I do, so I do also hands-on or remotely in this case, energy methods. What I'm always trying to help people tease out is what are the patterns that are leading up to the current situation that they want insight about whether that's relationships or career.

I've got a lot of people who are like, I've something about what I'm doing right now in my life doesn't feel congruent with how I want my life to be. That's a great topic for me to work with with people because we'll figure out what's led up to where they are, what are they motivated by?

And then is there healing work that we can do around that? People who are feeling like they're not feeling like they're entirely seated in their body. Some of those core shamanic methods are about understanding. Have we kind of taken on energy that isn't ours or, have we lost connection to some of what is naturally ours?

Gregory Anne: Oh, interesting.

Mara Bishop: There are different methods that we would use, so that people really are clear in their own energy, but also making sure that they're not disconnected. There's not this sense of, I'm kind of going through the motions.

I'm not really present which happens a lot when we've had trauma in our lives. Psychology language. We can kind of dissociate a little bit. We check out. So there are specific Shamanic methods like soul retrieval. It could be useful for that. Then there's a lot of people that are interested in how do I use these methods for, with other people too.

So there's kind of the range of just I'm really struggling right now to help me. I'm thinking about how I might want to shift my own work to do something more. Like what I do and I have apprenticeships .

Gregory Anne: And that's good to know, because I know there's a subset of the movement of second career, mostly women that want to be involved somehow in personal development, spirituality.

And right now they may only have an interest or a practice of their own, daily practice, and then they want to go to the next level. So some people may be interested in your work specifically.

Mara Bishop: I've been doing for quite a number of years only one-on-one mentoring and one-on-one like practitioner apprenticeship training where I covered the intuitive part, the shamanic part, the energy part and the

People supervision and practice with clients so that they can like leave and feel like this is good and all the ethics and the boundaries that I think a lot of people don't get. I'm sometimes amazed at the stories that people tell me of, um, what happens when they're in sessions that for me, feel like ethical violations. So that's part of the training, but I'm reworking how I'm going to do the mentoring. Starting earlier in the year to give people a small group experience, but also that sense of let's work and work on ourselves for a little while, like our own practice and then see, like, so that you can be kind of teed up if you want to do an apprenticeship and do the work for other people you would have had that had that preparation.

Or maybe you don't, maybe it's just, you want your practice to be deeper, but it's not about a professional work. Yeah.

Gregory Anne: Well, I would like you to give us a message. As we end the session, it's been wonderful. Lots of juicy information and your website and link to your book, they'll all be on the, page for this episode, but as we close, I wonder if you want to leave us with some message of inspiration.

Mara Bishop: I do so what I saw when I asked, what is that message? It was go outside. And I loved how you said sometimes it just looking out the window. So either do this in real, or do it as you envision it because the power of our imaginations are huge.

And what I saw, the message that came through was you put your hand on the earth and give some love to the earth and the earth is loving us back. Right. The earth is loving us back. So just put your hand on there and give some love to the earth.

Gregory Anne: Beautiful. You very much. Thank you very much.