

Spirit Animals – Setting the Language

By Judith Hirst-Joyeux

Hooray for the activists and wildlife experts and environmentalists that have raised everyone's awareness about the plight of animal kind. The Universe or Creator put animals (the two legged, the four legged, the finned, the furred, the feathered ones and the unseen) to balance the plant life and to create a beautiful garden. In addition to creating a marvellous ecosystem, each animal and plant works with humankind to provide humans with something that they need. It may be anything from food to medicine to information.

There are three aspects of animal that may be sent to guide us - the mythic (the physical aspect), the symbolic or archetype (the universal story that each animal carries to us), and finally, the energetic which is the spirit of the animal which speaks to our soul. To set some further language guidelines around the discussion of spirit animals, we need to talk about totem, power, and spirit animals. Some writers and speakers use these words interchangeably. Setting some definitions around the words will help our discussion and create understanding.

When we hear the word "totem", we may tend to think of the totem pole. Well this would be a good starting point in understanding the totem animal. The totem animal usually represents a group of people such as a tribe or village or city. This animal has become a physical symbol for this group of people. Athletic groups use mascots and very often, these mascots are animals. For example, the Calgary Stampeders use a horse as a symbol of the stampede. At each football game, whenever a touchdown occurs, the horse gallops or stampedes across the stadium. A huge number of schools and universities and even pro teams use the bear as their mascot or symbol. The bear represents size, intimidation. It is a force to be reckoned as one thinks about the physical image of the animal. (We are talking about a large bear - grizzly, Kodiak, big black.) This then is the totem for that team. The mythic level of the bear speaks to the size, strength, wisdom and protective nature of the animal. Bears protect their young ferociously, and are very maternal. This speaks to the nurturing within the team and the way they support each other, generally on and off the field. Hibernation equates to the teams on and then off-season. Each team hibernates to prepare for the next season. The bear has been worshiped as a deity for eons. Cave drawings show it as one of the oldest clan animals. All the mythologies speak of one bear god or goddess. Astrology even recognizes the bear in the sky. Therefore, energetically, the bear transfers its strength, size and loyalty to the spirit and soul of the players on the team. "We are Bears!" becomes more than a chant. It becomes an identity.

So, is the bear a power animal as well? Yes. Understand that a power animal is the animal that comes to you as part of your journey, to lend you their strength and knowledge. The animal has chosen you, and you feel an affinity for it. You may even have some of its characteristics. It has chosen you, as part of its life journey to share its power with you. People who work with their power animal will find that at some level, they are bear, and they may dream or vision as if they were bear. If bear is your power animal, you may have a keen awareness of the seasons and be fond of honey, salmon, or fish. You may have more than one power animal, and they may change through out your life. Generally though, we all have one animal that journeys with us all of our life.

How does the spirit animal fit into this? Regardless of the fact that you have a power animal or that the group you belong to has a totem animal, you may be visited by different animals physically, in dreamtime, or even through a series of coincidences. The coincidences might be that you see a picture of a bear. Several hours later, you hear a song

about a bear ("The Bear Came Over The Mountain", is a song that comes to mind). Shortly after the song, you may meet someone who has been nicknamed "Bear". The spirit animal, then, is a message from the Universe (substitute God, Creator, Higher Self or your belief system if this makes you more comfortable). Looking at the characteristics and the mythology of the animal will help you determine what the message is. For example, if you are doing too much, and are thinking about taking on some new challenge, the bear, when it appears, depending on the season, may be telling you to be conscious of self-care, family care, or stepping back and retreating into your "den". The closer the animal comes to you physically, the more sure you can be that you are not "hearing" the animal's message. The more the spirit animal is ignored, the more often it will appear, and it may be joined by animals similar to it. For example, the bear may be joined by the badger, the wolverine, or polar bear.

The appearance of a totem animal, power animal or spirit animal in one's life is not accidental. As we make soul contracts with other souls who incarnate as humans, so too do we make contracts with animals. And, since we humans live in separateness, it is the animal who remembers and honours the contract. Now take a look at what animals are around you in your home, at work, or in your casual life. What do they do to support you or to guide you? What are their traits? Are they like you? These are the types of questions that we will explore in the next issue.

Join Judy-Hirst Joyeux as she explores the journey with your power animal in the March issue. If you have any questions about this article, please send them to Judy at hirst14@yahoo.ca. If you have an animal in your life and are not sure about what it is telling you, send us the question. We would love to share this information with all our readers.