

## INTRODUCTION

The wisdom you seek is inside you.

Take a moment and feel the truth of those words.

One of the most important aspects of shamanism is that within every one of us is the light, the divinity, or as my ancestors would say, the *nagual*. Each one of us has our own truth inside ourselves. The quest of the shaman is to find, live, and express it.

Unlike some other traditions, shamanism is not based on hierarchy and deference to past teachers or following a sacred text with blind belief, but on uncovering the truths within yourself and bringing them out into the world to become a messenger of truth, a messenger of love.

The path of the shaman is largely an individual journey. Rituals, books, tools, and even other shamans only serve as guides to help you find the wisdom that comes from deep inside of you. No two shamanic journeys are alike, as we each ultimately make our own unique path, create our own art, and express ourselves in our own beautiful way. That's why I often say that you are both the student and the teacher on the shamanic journey, and life is expressing itself through you.

In my own tradition, that of the Toltec people of south central Mexico, we say that we are all artists. In fact, the word *Toltec* means "artist." This is not confined to the traditional understanding of the word as painters, sculptors, etc., or just to members of my ancestral tribe; this designation extends to every human being on this beautiful planet. The simple truth is that every person is an artist, and the art that we create is the story of our life.

If the Toltec tradition is the way of the artist, then we can say that the shamanic path is really an invitation to you, the artist, to create your own masterpiece, to use everything in your life as a brush to paint your own picture of personal freedom.

We also say in the Toltec tradition that everyone is dreaming all the time. This is because you can only ever see life through your own filters—the filter of “Jose” in my case. Therefore, life as you perceive it is a reflection of your perceptions and beliefs. It is not real, but rather a dream. To some this may sound negative, but in fact it is positive because if your life is a dream, and you become aware of the fact that you are the dreamer, then you can consciously create the dream you want to see and live the life you want to live.

There are actually two dreams that make up what we call life. First, you have the *personal dream*, which is your own perspective. It is how you see the world around you and how you make

sense of it in your mind through the stories you tell yourself about what you perceive. Things such as “My name is Jose,” “My parents are Miguel and Maria,” “I was born in 1978,” “I live in this place, that is my car, my house, my spouse, etc.”—this is your own personal dream.

There is also the *Dream of the Planet* or the collective dream we are all having. The Dream of the Planet is the sum total of all our personal dreams, and together they make up the world in which we live. Together we have created the oceans, the mountains, the flowers, the wars, the technology, the concepts of good and bad—all of it. The Dream of the Planet is the combination of all our personal dreams and forms the basis for how we interact and communicate with one another.

The Toltec understood that in both cases, personally and collectively, what we are perceiving as life is not real. Our perception of life is really just a complex set of overlapping stories, held together by our concept of time. In my family’s

traditions, the shamans, who were called *naguals* in our native language, were “the ones who are awake,” because they had woken up to that fact that we are all dreaming, that we are all storytellers, and that while the truth of who and what we really are is ultimately indescribable, the best way to say it is that we are life itself.

I find it interesting that halfway around the world more than 2,500 years ago, a man sat under a bodhi tree for forty days and nights until he realized his true nature, and when he got up from the tree and returned to his friends, they could tell this experience had changed him. They asked him, “What happened to you?” And the man replied in his native Pali language, “I am awake.” The word for *awake* in the Pali language is “Buddha.” In both Buddhism and shamanism, those who are masters in each tradition are referred to as awakened.

So who can be a shaman? Anyone who has the desire to awaken from the dream and find his or

her own personal freedom is a shaman. Of course, this is easier said than done, because the dream has several mechanisms it uses to keep us asleep, many of which we will look at in greater detail throughout the course of this book.

To be clear, waking up involves more than just knowing intellectually that everything around you is a dream. It is easy to be told something and believe it with your mind, but much more difficult to put it into practice. The point of the shamanic path is to have the experience of awakening, which involves something beyond the thinking mind or intellectual knowledge.

For instance, when I tell you that you are dreaming all the time, you may trust me and believe it, but it isn't until you integrate that knowledge and experience it for yourself that your world begins to change. Prior to that it is only a belief. Once this belief becomes your experience, then it becomes a part of your personal reality.

So at first, the shaman tells you that you are asleep, that you are dreaming, and offers you a path to awaken to who you really are. The shaman wants you to come to know yourself beyond the little story you have created, the little you. The shaman can do this because he or she has come to know him- or herself as an individual expression of this divine life force and that this divinity, this life force, is in all things. That's why shamanism is so connected to the natural world that surrounds us. The shaman knows that all life is connected, all life is one. And this doesn't just refer to the bodies we can see, but the space between everything as well. We are connected through the air we breathe, through the ground underneath our feet, the water we share that makes up so much of our bodies, and everything else that constitutes this planet and beyond. The connection is so obvious to the shaman, but the illusion of the mind and its constant dreaming prevent many people from seeing this truth.

As a simple example, think of an oak tree. This tree is the culmination of so many things—earth, sun, water, air, an acorn blown by the wind or carried by a bird—all of which have worked together to manifest this beautiful creation of art that we call a tree. If you were to take away any one of any of these things, this tree would not exist. The same can be said for you, for all of us, everything. We are a creation of all that has gone before us. Yet the mind clings to the illusion of separateness. But it is only that: an illusion, and the shaman is the one who sees through the illusion to the interconnectivity between all things and beings.

Many of us are lost in the dream for many years before the seed of awakening begins to manifest in us, and when it finally does, it is more akin to a process of unlearning rather than learning. In other words, you have been taught so much, starting when you were very young. You were told your name, who your parents were,



where you came from, what you liked and didn't like, and you agreed with it. In the Toltec tradition, we call this process *domestication*. Although some forms of domestication can be negative, it's important to remember that domestication itself is not necessarily negative. It is a normal and necessary process; it is the way we create the Dream of the Planet.

For example, when you were young, your parents likely domesticated you to be respectful and kind to others, to share, and to develop friendships. In this way, they were giving you the tools you need to interact with the Dream of the Planet. The point here is that not all domestication is bad, even though the word itself often carries with it a negative connotation. Other forms of domestication are obviously negative: racism, sexism, and classism are easy examples, and then there are the subtler forms, such as when we adopt ideas like "I must succeed in life to receive love" or "I must have a perfect body in order to receive love."

The process of awakening is often referred to as unlearning, because you begin to see how you were domesticated in the Dream of the Planet and you can consciously choose which ideas and beliefs you want to keep and which you want to let go. When you begin unraveling your domestications, you see that you were fed all of these ideas about yourself and you used these ideas to build the story of who you are. As any architect will tell you, a structure built on faulty foundations will ultimately collapse, and that is what happens to every story.

Perhaps you have already experienced the collapse of your story, and that is why you picked up this book. The truth is that any story of your life is just that, a story, and its collapse is a beautiful thing, because when it collapses you find out who you really are; you discover that you are really life itself.

This process of unlearning is our personal journey and unique to each individual. Although there

may be similarities, no two people wake up in the exact same way. This is a major tenet in shamanism: everyone's path will be different. Certainly we will receive help and guidance from others, but because we are all unique, our awakening will be unique as well. That is our own art. While some of the rituals and things we do will be the same as or inspired by what others have done, the shaman mimics no one, not even other shamans.

For instance, many people do not know this, but my father's most famous book, *The Four Agreements* (Amber-Allen Publishing, 1997), is really the story of his own awakening. He overcame his inner negativity and the self-created problems in his personal dream by practicing those four agreements in every area of his life. He saw how he was giving his power away through not being impeccable with his word, taking things personally, making assumptions, and not doing his best. As a result, he formed these four agreements with himself so he could live in his true power.

Practicing these four agreements was really a process of unlearning all the negativity he had adopted in his own personal dream.

When he awoke, he wanted to be of service to others, and that book is a manifestation of his art. In his case, this art was recognized around the world as truth and helped many people wake up (as of this writing *The Four Agreements* has sold over seven million copies worldwide). That is a wonderful thing, but my father will tell you he had nothing to do with that. In other words, while he chose to share his work with millions in the form of a book, he knows his work is no more important than that of the shaman who wakes up and helps those in his own community. They are the same, and in fact one could not exist without the other. Like the oak tree, my father would not have awakened without inspiration and guidance from the myriad of shamans who have awakened before him.

As my father's example illustrates, once the shaman awakens to who she really is, she sees

that the best thing to do for herself and the world is to serve the great mother, or life itself. She sees the divinity in all beings, and she wants to help others awaken to this truth. She does so not out of any desire for personal gain (such as getting into heaven or gaining merit for rebirth), but because she has reached a state of peace, clarity, and awareness hitherto unknown to her. She has become a vessel of love, and when you fill yourself up with love, it begins to overflow. This overflow of love is what the shaman shares with others, because that is all that is left. That is why the shaman wants to help others wake up to the fact they are dreaming.

To make another comparison to Buddhism, this is very similar to the concept of the bodhisattva in the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, where the bodhisattva is the one who awakens but stays in the world and devotes his or her life to helping others. We see this care and concern for others in all the great masters of the world's religions,

including Jesus, the Islamic poet Rumi, and many of the Hindu avatars from India. In each great tradition there is always someone who has woken up and then begins to spread a message of awakening to help others.

## **The Importance of Stories**

One way that the shamans plant the seeds of awakening in others is through storytelling. Because the shamans realized that the mind is always dreaming and creating stories, they began to tell stories as a way to pierce the veil of the mind. In this way, the shamans were and are master teachers, as they use the mind's own love of stories to awaken it from the dream.

In this book, I will share some of the parables, legends, and true stories told by the shamans in my family's tradition, and together we will discern their deeper meaning. You will see how the shamans shared these stories to plant the seed of awakening in the people who

listened to them. I will also use these stories to introduce you to the shamanic tools of awareness, forgiveness, recapitulation, power objects, totem animals, and other instruments that are designed to help you on your own journey. At the end of each chapter I have included exercises and meditations, which can help you put these teachings into practice in your everyday life. As I said earlier, it's not enough to just read about these teachings, you must incorporate them in your life through action to receive the benefits. The exercises and meditations will help you do that.

Even as you begin to awaken, I want to be clear that awakening to the dream doesn't mean you will stop dreaming. Dreaming is simply what the mind does in the same way that the heart beats and the lungs draw breath. Awakening means that you *realize* you are dreaming. When you become aware of the fact that you are dreaming, you can then focus your energy on creating a beautiful dream rather than a nightmare.

A nightmare, in the terms of Toltec teachings, is whenever you live life unconscious of who and what you really are, and the result is that you suffer needlessly. When you sleepwalk through life, you get caught in the traps of negativity and emotional poison, and you fail to realize that in so many cases you are the cause of your own suffering. The shamans in my family's tradition saw this pattern as a collective human condition that can be described as an "addiction to suffering," and this addiction to suffering is a habit of the mind.

Some of you reading this may recoil at the idea that we as a species are addicted to suffering, but take a moment to think about all the ways humans cause problems for ourselves and others. For instance, turn on the nearest television. If you watch any news channel for just a few minutes, you can see several ways we cause our own suffering. Next, turn the channel to any soap opera or drama. Have you ever wondered why we watch shows where the entire purpose is to create heartache



and emotional pain inside us? Think about your own life for a moment. When things are going well for too long, do you look for a “problem” to stir things up?

Shantideva, the eighth-century Indian mystic and poet, noted this addiction to suffering in the following lines:<sup>1</sup>

*For beings long to free themselves from misery;  
But misery itself they follow and pursue.  
They long for joy, but in their ignorance destroy it  
As they would a hated enemy.*

I could not agree with him more. So the question arises, why do we pursue suffering? First, we do so because we are unconscious, because we don't realize what we are doing, and that is the purpose of waking up. Second, we do so out of habit. Creating suffering is simply a habit of

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<sup>1</sup>This translation of Shantideva's famous work can be found in *No Time to Lose: A Timely Guide to the Way of the Bodhisattva* by Pema Chödrön. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2007.

mind. Even as we begin to wake up, the old habits of suffering continue to ensnare us, and that's why the shamans refer to it as an addiction. As with any addiction, the first step to ending it is to be aware of it and admit that it exists.

As we move into the stories from my family's tradition in the pages that follow, I invite you to see how the lessons from them might apply in your own life. Also, keep in mind what I have said about the human mind's addiction to suffering because as you will see, this is a recurring theme throughout these stories.

Lastly, while I will offer my own interpretations of these stories, please remember that you may find other meanings or truths that are more relevant to you and your own life. That is the beauty of shamanism: it encourages you to find your own truth, to follow your own heart, and to see that the answers you seek are already inside you. Let these stories, and this book, be your guide to finding them.

## CHAPTER 1

# THE EAGLE AND THE SNAKE

### *Finding Your Own Truth*



Many of you will recognize this story from the Aztec tradition of how Mexico City was founded centuries ago. The national flag of Mexico has a beautiful image of an eagle eating a snake while it rests on a cactus, which, as you will see, is a major symbol in this story.

*A long time ago in the middle of a desert, in what is now Mexico, lived a powerful shaman who served as a great leader and helper to his tribe. When he*

*realized that his physical form was dying, he decided to leave one final and very important lesson for the next generation.*

*“My time in this body is coming to an end,” he told his tribe as they gathered around the campfire one evening. “In the morning you will have to say goodbye to this village. Take only what you need when you leave here. Everything that you don’t need, everything that doesn’t serve you in your life anymore, leave it here. Tomorrow is a day of great transformation.”*

*Then, to mark this moment, the old shaman threw some magic dust into the fire, and it turned the flame into a bright blue, cleansing blaze that sparkled like the stars in the night sky. He continued, “Tomorrow you will begin your journey to create a new dream, and you will roam the wilderness until you see an eagle devouring a snake above a cactus garden—that will be the sign that you have found home.”*

*And with that the old man dismissed the circle, and when the morning came, they went to the shaman and found that he was no longer in his body. They packed only the most basic necessities and started the journey to find their new home.*

*The journey was not easy. For years they walked and walked until finally one day they saw a lake. In the middle of the lake there was a small island, and that island was full of cactus trees. Looking up into the sky, they saw an eagle dive down toward the island where it grabbed a snake from the ground. With the snake clutched in its claws, the eagle landed on a cactus. The villagers watched in awe as the eagle began to devour the snake. They were overjoyed because this was the symbol they were searching for! They immediately began to build their new home. This was the beginning of the great city of the Aztecs, Tenochtitlan, where Mexico City stands today.*

*That night the tribe built a great bonfire and gathered in a circle just as they had on the last*

*night of the old dream. The tribe said thank you to the grandfather shaman because they had found their new home, but as they were giving thanks to him for his guidance, suddenly a bright blue light sparkled in the bonfire and they all recognized it as the grandfather's spirit.*

*"Hello, my children!" his voice said from the flames. "I see that you have made the lesser journey, and now you must make the greater journey."*

*The tribe was confused, for they had spent a long time on the difficult journey to find the location for their new home. What could be greater than this?*

*The voice continued. "The eagle is a symbol for the truth, the snake is a symbol for lies, and the cactus garden represents the garden of the human mind. When the eagle of truth devours the snake of lies in the garden of your mind, then you will find a home within yourself—you will find your own personal freedom."*

One thing that television, social media, and other broadcast mediums teach us is that the world has many rich, famous, and accomplished people. Sadly, we also learn from these sources that many of these accomplished people are very unhappy.

Of course, this doesn't just apply to the rich and famous. We all know people in our own spheres who have accomplished much outwardly but are greatly unhappy in their personal lives. Perhaps we have neighbors or family members who fall into this category, and perhaps we were once one of those people. They may have acquired many possessions or titles, but they are also lost and confused.

We can say that through their outer accomplishments they have made the lesser journey, but the greater journey of finding their own personal freedom still awaits them.

This begs the question, what do I mean by the phrase *personal freedom*?

For me, personal freedom is when our hearts and minds are ruled by love instead of fear. Personal freedom is when we are comfortable in our own skin and we love and accept ourselves completely, even the parts we don't like. Personal freedom is when we stop trying to be this or that, but instead are content to just be.

Personal freedom comes as the result of examining our mind's domestications and releasing any unhealthy beliefs or ideas that we find there. It occurs every moment that we break the habit of our addiction to suffering.

From this place of self-understanding, self-acceptance, and self-love, we can see ourselves when we look into the eyes of another, and that is one reason why we help other people. We know that they are us and we are them—that we are all interconnected and thus to help them is also to help ourselves.

For me, all of this is personal freedom, and it is at the heart of the shamanic path.



Whatever else you do in the world—your job, your hobbies, anything you accomplish—those are all wonderful things, but they represent the lesser journey. The most important journey you will ever make is the one inside yourself, and this is at the heart of the shamanic path. It is the journey of finding your own truth.

The shaman in this story understood that each generation had to find its own truth, to create its own dream, and that they could not rely on the legacy of previous generations to create their dream for them. To this end, he sent them away into the desert to find a new home and to let go of the old dream so that they could create a new one.

Sometimes life serves as our shaman and sets up situations that completely destroy our old dream. Death, divorce, the loss of job are all things that require us to go out into the wilderness, taking with us very few of our possessions, and find a new dream. But our home, our truth,

is always inside us, and we take that wherever we go. In every dream we create, if we stay true to ourselves and true to our own heart's desire, then we will find peace again.

In my view, everyone has their own truth within themselves. Because we are all unique, this personal truth will never be exactly the same for any two people. That's what makes it personal. Shamanism is not based on hierarchy, deference to past teachers, or following a sacred text with blind belief, but rather on finding the wisdom within yourself. When you find your own truth and wisdom within you, you will find your own personal freedom.

## **Silent Knowledge**

In the Toltec tradition, we have a concept called *silent knowledge*, and cultivating your connection to it can help you find the truth within yourself.

Silent knowledge is a knowing that is beyond the thinking mind. It is difficult to write or talk

about, because language is the main tool of the mind, but I will do my best to explain.

Silent knowledge is the deep, innate wisdom that is in all things. It comes from the interconnectedness of all beings and creatures. It is the wisdom of the universe. For instance, if you've ever simply known the answer to a question without any logical way that your brain could have discovered it—like when a mother can feel that her child is in danger or when you know the moment a relative transitions into death—this is all silent knowledge. It is the universal wisdom that has always been at our fingertips, but that we often neglect to tap into, either because we don't know or have forgotten how.

Being able to see the next right action in any given situation, disregarding the *mitote* (the noisy voices that clamor for your attention) in your mind—this is silent knowledge, and as you begin to unravel your domestications and live in a way that feels authentic to you, you will find yourself

in touch with it. When you develop an awareness of silent knowledge, you begin to shift your attention to it more often, especially when faced with an important choice or decision.

The insights that you get from silent knowledge can come to you in the form of an inspired thought or even an energetic feeling in your body. In either case, when a message comes to you from silent knowledge, you sense a “knowing” that the insight you are receiving is not from your thinking mind.

Furthermore, silent knowledge never carries the energy of hate, resentment, or revenge. If any message you get originates from this type of energy, then you know that this is not silent knowledge, but coming out of the mind’s addiction to suffering instead.

Another means for accessing silent knowledge is to pay attention to your emotions. When it comes to making decisions, our emotions can

sometimes be better indicators than our discerning minds.

For instance, let's say you are trying to make a decision about a situation and one choice may seem correct logically, but you have a nagging feeling that something isn't right. Let's say you've been offered a new job with better pay, but when you visit with your potential employer, you get a negative vibe inside that you can't explain.

Rather than dismiss those sensations, it would be wise to recognize them as clues from the realm of silent knowledge. This doesn't necessarily mean the answer is a "no" and you shouldn't take the job, but rather that you should do more investigating before making a final decision.

I have traveled to India on several occasions, and I love the teachings of both Hinduism and Buddhism. In India we find one of the greatest teachers of silence in the twentieth-century sadhu Ramana Maharshi. The word *sadhu* is from Sanskrit and

means a monk or holy person, but to me the sadhu is the Indian equivalent of the shaman.

Ramana Maharshi was probably the most famous teacher in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After experiencing a spontaneous awakening as a teenager, he went into a period of silence that lasted for years. Although he would go on to teach and speak again, he always maintained that the best teacher was silence. People would come from all over to sit with him in his ashram, many with lists of questions, but once they sat in his silent presence, the questions would dissolve or become unimportant. His story reminds me of the words of the thirteenth-century Muslim poet Jalaluddin Mevlana Rumi: “Silence is the language of God, all else is poor translation.”

Seen in this light, silent knowledge is one of the most powerful tools at a shaman’s disposal. This is at the heart of the wisdom of the shaman, and when you are in alignment with yourself, you

have much better access to this realm of knowing beyond the thinking mind.

Silent knowledge is available to you right now, and one helpful step to finding it is to practice outer silence and meditation, as both create an environment that allows universal wisdom to emerge within us. I have included an exercise to help you begin this practice at the end of this chapter.

## **Divination**

Another tool that is often talked about in shamanic circles is *divination*, or the ability to access what we think of as the future. Because divination also comes from a realm beyond the thinking mind, I want to take a moment to discuss it.

From a shamanic perspective, there is no past or future; there is only the now. Everything that ever happens occurs in this universe of now, but the Dream of Time—or the idea of time, which is a construct that we humans have created—is what allows our minds to make sense

of it all, to add order to it. Without the Dream of Time your mind could not comprehend all of the things that are occurring now. Divination is a tool that can allow us to glimpse sights of other things that are also happening now but the mind understands as in the “future.” Accessing these other events that appear to be in the future is the principle behind divination.

There are many tools for this: cards, pendulums, runes, all of which can be helpful in certain situations. If you are faced with an important decision in life and you are unable to decide what path to take, using a divination tool could bring you some clarity. At the same time you must be very careful not to overuse these tools. The more we rely on divination tools, the less accurate these tools become, in part because the mind begins to take ownership of them, seeing patterns or suggestions that aren't actually there.

I recommend that divination tools should only be brought in when you feel completely lost,



even when you search the truth within yourself. Remember, one of the core principles of shamanism is that the wisdom you seek is inside you already, so a divination tool only helps you find answers that you already have, but perhaps are having difficulty seeing.

When you reconnect with your inner knowing, you are following the path of the shaman—not the shamans that have come before you, but the shaman that you are, the messenger of love that you are in your deepest being. In order to find the truth and wisdom within ourselves, we must see all outside sources, whether divination tools, old traditions, or even other shamans, as what they are: guides to help us find the truth from within ourselves.

We are the artists of our own lives and we can use these tools to start to create our art, but then it is up to us to put our own style and flair on the masterpiece that is our life by living from what is true for us as an individual, rather than relying

on what we have been told by outside sources. The purpose of all of these tools is to help you on the greater journey, the one that leads you to the wisdom inside your own beautiful heart.

## **Exercises**

### ***What Is Your Definition of Personal Freedom?***

I'd like you to write down your own definition of personal freedom. What are the things that will free you? Perhaps some of the things included in my definition will also be in yours, but yours will still be different by virtue of the fact that it is *yours* and not mine. What do you want to release or let go of? What wisdom within do you want to get in touch with? Keep this definition so you can look back on it whenever you feel lost—or when you think your definition may have changed!

### ***What Old Dreams Are You Holding On To?***

It's often our old dreams that keep us from living in the present and enjoying a new dream

that may better serve us. Do you still hold things over your own head? Do you hear yourself saying things like “If I hadn’t got divorced, . . .” “If I hadn’t dropped out of school, . . .” or “if I had taken that job, . . .”? You aren’t letting go of an old dream of what could have been that no longer speaks to *who you are*.

Take some time to think about your old dreams and what parts of them you may still be hanging on to. Write an old dream down on a piece of paper. You may have more than one old dream to work with. If so, write them on separate papers. But I also suggest working with just one dream at a time to make sure that you are feeling the full effects before moving on.

Now, fold or crumple the paper with your old dream on it and find a safe place to burn it. As you burn the paper, say a gentle and sweet goodbye to your old dream, thanking it for all the ways that it has served you, and allow yourself to release the old dream with the smoke from the fire.

### ***Silent Knowledge Meditation***

Meditation is a powerful tool for many spiritual practices. For the Toltec, meditation is used in a variety of ways, but one of the most important benefits is that in meditation we are able to see past the *mitote* of the mind. Doing so creates an environment within ourselves that allows us to better connect to *silent knowledge*.

For this meditation, our goal is to open ourselves to silent knowledge. To begin meditating, find a quiet, comfortable space where you won't be interrupted for the next several minutes. This could be on the back porch while the pets are inside, in the bathtub because the bathroom door is the only one that keeps the kids out, or in an armchair in the study. There is no wrong place or posture for meditation, so experiment and find what works best for you.

Our goal will be to simply open your mind and allow universal wisdom to be present in your awareness. As you become more familiar with

meditation, feel free to ask or meditate on certain questions that you need to have answered. By taking questions into your meditation, you will be bringing them to the source of all wisdom and may receive your answers in the form of silent knowledge.

Once you find a quiet place and a comfortable position, close your eyes and take a few moments to settle in. For this meditation, I want you to just listen. Listen to any sounds happening outside of you without putting too much importance on any of them. What do you hear? The wind rustling in the trees? The hum of the refrigerator in the other room? Take it all in, it's all welcome here. Now I want you to listen to the silence that is just behind the sounds you hear. The silence is there: it's the space which makes hearing the other sounds possible. Hold that silence in your mind as you find it.

Next I want you to bring your attention inward—listening to the silence that is inside you.

Like the silence on the outside, inner silence is underneath all the other sensations you find. The mind will wander and begin to think—because that is the nature of the mind—but when it does, gently try to release those thoughts and find the silence again, and again, and again.

When you first start meditating, you may not be able to hold this silence for long, and that is okay. The key is to judge nothing, but just listen. When the mind wanders, you simply bring it back to listening to the outer world, then the silence on the outside, and then the silence on the inside. If you are new to meditation, begin by doing this for just five minutes at a time. If you like this practice, try to go a little longer and then a little longer each time, building up to thirty minutes or more. Your mind will still wander, but you will find it easier to bring it back to the silence the more you practice.

If you would like to take a question into meditation, ask the question once at the beginning of the meditation and then begin your meditation

listening to the outer world and then to the silence behind all the sounds, both without and within. It's important that you ask your question and then let the question go. In these moments of stillness found in meditation, silent wisdom may come to you regarding your question, or you may find through meditation that the question is unimportant and no longer needs an answer.