

THE PERSONAL TOTEM POLE™

A Pathway for Learning, Healing and Growth

A POWERFUL TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION

The Personal Totem Pole™ is a process of guided Interactive Imagery that enables you to gain access to your inner wisdom, strength and truth and to establish an ongoing relationship with them. Developed in 1979 by Eligio Stephen Gallegos, Ph.D., it draws from three traditions: the theory of active imagination, developed by Dr. Carl Jung; the ancient Far Eastern concept of chakras, or energy centers in the body; and the Native American tradition of speaking to and learning from animals.

In a state of deep relaxation, you focus on each of the chakras in turn and invite the image of an animal to emerge. The Animals become counsellors and guides, dedicated to helping you live your life more effectively and come into greater wholeness.

The first time I met with my Animals was an interesting experience. I met all of my Chakra animals and gained useful insights from each. My second meeting with them was, for me, an epiphany. While in the first encounter the imagery progressed smoothly, in the second session I initially felt blocked. When I became aware of a painful tension in my right temple, the person guiding me suggested I return through imagery to the first time I experienced such a sensation.

Instantly I was standing in front of the refrigerator in the house where I grew up. I was about four years old. I had just spilled the milk and in my house spilling the milk was a very big deal. My guide told me to tell the little girl that even though she had spilled the milk, she was still loveable and that I loved her.

I knew that this was a good suggestion and that I should tell the little girl that she was no less worthwhile because she had made a mistake. I wanted to say that she didn't need to be perfect to be loveable. These were things that, as a practicing psychologist, I had told my clients countless times. But I felt completely incapable of offering such consolation and support to this little girl. Instead I shared her horror at what she had done and found her reprehensible, all the while aware of how preposterous that was. I felt absolutely and very painfully stuck.

Suddenly, out of nowhere and completely unbidden my Heart Animal, which is an Eagle, appeared and wrapped its wings around the little girl in a gesture of consoling love and protection. Eagle told the little girl that she was loveable. It was simply the most powerful healing experience I had ever known. Since that time the work with Animal imagery has been my own path for learning, healing and growth and has been the most powerful and effective tool I have encountered in helping clients.

LEARNING FROM THE CHAKRAS

The Animal imagery comes from your own inner wisdom, bringing with it unerring awareness of just what you need at any particular moment for your learning and growth. This information becomes available as you enter into relationship with your Animal guides. It is this interaction that is at the center of the Personal Totem Pole

TM Process. In this work the coach's primary role is as a guide, facilitating the relationship between you and your Animal guides.

Each Animal provides a distinct perspective related to the chakra from which it comes. As explained by Gallegos in his book, The Personal Totem Pole¹, each of the chakras is related to a different aspect of functioning. The first chakra, located at the base of the spine in the middle of the perineum concerns survival issues and a basic sense of security; the second, found just below the navel relates to passions, emotions and sexuality; the third is in the solar plexus and refers to effectiveness in the world; the fourth, centered in the heart, concerns love and compassion; the fifth, in the throat deals with communication and expression; the sixth located in the center of the forehead is related to intellect and seeing clearly and the seventh, found at the crown of the head, concerns spirituality.

Each Animal, then, represents the aspect of functioning corresponding to the chakra with which it is associated. The condition of the animal and your attitude toward it tell a great deal about that particular aspect of functioning for you. Thus, Animals may be robust and healthy or they may be ill, caged or trapped. You may feel close to an animal or distant, comfortable with it or terrified of it.

For example, one man I worked with had a Snake for the Animal of his third chakra (associated with power and effectiveness). He was very frightened of snakes and most unhappy to encounter a snake as one of his chakra Animals. Through work with the Snake, which was supported by his other Animals, he came to appreciate and love his Snake and, as he did so, began to manifest greater effectiveness in the work that he did as well as in his personal and professional relationships.

Often the insight the Animal offers is no different from what friends or relatives have told you or what I, as your coach, might say. The crucial difference is that this awareness comes from your own inner wisdom and so carries a certain power and sense of personal truth which make the message more impactful and persuasive. It's as if the learning, arising from behind your personal defences, is more immediate and acceptable and therefore, more available for integration.

DISCOVERING RESOURCES WITHIN

The Animals, dedicated as they are to helping you achieve greater wholeness, often bring into awareness aspects of your self that have been repressed or disowned. Thus, an Animal can embody strength, tenderness, courage or any other trait or characteristic that you have felt to be beyond your grasp. In imagery you can actually merge with an Animal, experiencing the world as that Animal experiences it, feeling and knowing what that Animal feels and knows. In actually experiencing unfamiliar attitudes and traits, you can develop and integrate lost parts of yourself.

A man experiencing difficulty in making an important decision was able to soar with his Eagle and perceive the larger picture. He found that with this new perspective his options were clarified and he was able to move ahead confidently with his choice.

One woman, deeply doubtful of her ability to mother successfully, found herself unable to move ahead with plans to adopt a child. Over time her Power Animal, a Bear and her two Cubs, taught this person much about her instinctive mothering abilities, helping her to resolve her fears of failure. With new-found confidence, this

woman and her husband moved beyond the impasse these doubts had created, and went on to adopt.

The Animals are consistently available to assist in bringing about the transformation and growth they call forth. This may take the form of loving support and assurance or specific suggestions for direct action to implement change.

Conversely, you can help your Animals to grow. Once you nourish an Animal or free a trapped Animal or help to heal a wounded one, you will experience renewed energy and enhanced feelings of well being and may manifest changes in your daily life.

YOUR OWN INNER TRUTH HAS THE GREATEST POWER TO TRANSFORM

The truths the Animals bring you have a precise appropriateness that is informed by an absolute familiarity with every moment of your existence, every aspect of your experience. Everything that has ever occurred in each of our lives is recorded in our unconscious and it is this unconscious which is the source of the imagery.

No matter how insightful I might be as your coach, it is simply impossible for me to approach the level of awareness that is available through imagery that comes from within yourself. So, another beauty of this process is that in using it, you become aware that you are the truest author of your own learning, healing and growth. This awareness of personal authority, this appreciation of the vast capacities within for wisdom and knowing, is astonishingly powerful in enhancing self-esteem and your sense of personal power and effectiveness.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO HEAL THE PAST

The Animals are especially skilful at bringing you back to those crucial moments in your past when feelings, assumptions or attitudes were created that interfere with you achieving your goals in the present. In Interactive Imagery you can return to these experiences with an astonishing clarity and immediacy. Once you are present in such experiences, the Animals know precisely how to appropriately intervene for your healing and growth.

My own experience mentioned earlier of the Eagle embracing the little girl is an excellent example of this. In another instance of this work, a Lion took a man I will call Tim back to an incident in his childhood when his father and brother ridiculed him as he sat at the piano, making up melodies and words to go with them. Lion put his big paws over the father's and brother's mouths and pointed out that their eyes were saying something quite different from what Tim was hearing. In the eyes of his brother, Tim saw envy bordering on jealousy. In his father's eyes Tim could see the older man's regret that his religious beliefs stood in the way of his enjoying and nurturing what Tim was doing. Lion encouraged Tim to change the way he remembered that scene, recalling the eyes of his father and brother and not what they were saying.

Tim had previously addressed this incident numerous times in therapy. It was only after he revisited it through Interactive Imagery that he was able to move beyond the creative block he had been experiencing and fulfil his goal of writing music.

A WAY TO COME INTO BALANCED WHOLENESS

Once you have met with each of your Chakra Animals, the next step is to invite all of the Animals to come together to meet in Council. The ultimate goal is not just a positive relationship between you and each of your Animals, but a harmonious interaction among all of the Animals, as well.

In some instances one or another animal is ostracized or feared by the others or is afraid of them. Sometimes there is conflict between two or more of the Animals. This generally reflects an historically problematic relationship among the areas of functioning. For example, you may characteristically have used your thinking to control your feelings and self-expression. In such a case the Head Animal may be dominant in the Council and the others may be resentful or fearful of that one. In such a situation it is critically important that the Animals come into positive relationship and balance with one another so that the special strengths of each become available for the good of the whole. As this happens you can experience an awakening of capabilities that have long been repressed or denied.

I once worked with a woman whose Gut Animal (feelings) was a timid white Mouse who was terrified of the Throat Animal (creativity and self-expression) which was a pugilistic Kangaroo wearing boxing gloves. The Kangaroo, in turn, felt contempt for the little Mouse. As these Animals worked out their relationship with the support of the other Animals in the council, the Kangaroo came to respect the Mouse and the Mouse no longer feared the Kangaroo. As these changes were going on in this woman's imagery, she reported that she experienced growing ease and comfort in expressing her feelings to others.

In the twenty years I have been working with the Animals I have been consistently awed at the power, beauty and elegance of the work. In the deepest of ways, each of us knows intuitively how we need to grow. With their remarkable wisdom, insight and humour, the Animals are available to facilitate that growth, bringing us into a wholeness that is the birthright of us all.

1. Gallegos, E.S. *The Personal Totem Pole: Animal Imagery, the Chakras, and Psychotherapy*. 2nd Ed. Santa Fe: Moon Bear Press, 1990.

Jeannette Samanen, Ph.D. has been practicing psychology for over thirty years and working with animal imagery for twenty of those years. For eight years Jeannette has been using Interactive Imagery to achieve positive results in life coaching. She has led numerous workshops in the Personal Totem Pole™ Process and other related topics. She has been certified by E.S. Gallegos, Ph.D., the founder of the Personal Totem Pole™ Process as a guide, workshop leader and trainer in this work.

You can learn more about Interactive Imagery and life coaching by checking out Jeannette's website: www.achieveyourgoals.com.

To explore how The Personal Totem Pole™ Process can help you transform your life for the better, call Jeannette at 610.935.9305.