

Wild Animal Prayers

A 'hot' meditative practice
conceived by Andrea Mathieson

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Our body is the soul's finest emissary.

Paula M. Reeves

*The stronger the spiritual energy in the crown
chakra, the stronger must be the somatic
energy in the root chakra.*

Elinor Dickson

*If you can listen to
the wisdom of your body,
love this flesh and bone,
dedicate yourself to its mystery,
you may one day find yourself
smiling from your mirror.*

Marion Woodman

What is a Wild Animal Prayer?

Wild Animal Prayers call us home to ourselves, to the wisdom of our bodies, and the dark feminine mysteries. Rooted in the sacredness of our bodies, we are deeply connected to the heart of creation. While a rigorous meditation practice draws us into the heart of stillness, reconnecting us with Source, wild animal prayers are spontaneous, non-verbal expressions of our body-souls, celebrating our vitality and radiant, healing presence within creation. As women seeking wholeness in these times of profound change, we need both forms of prayer — the centering yin wisdom of contemplative meditation and the flowing yang activation of our instinctual wildness.

Through cultural conditioning, we have largely forgotten our natural 'wild' ways, yet they are an integral part of our birthright. We need this vitality to realize and express our embodied potential. Through spontaneous movement and untamed sounding, we can gradually open to the wisdom and powerful healing energies of our body-souls. Reconnecting with our essential wildness not only grounds and energizes us, it also opens a field of resonance with the natural world, allowing us to experience a deepening reciprocal communion with all Creation.

Origins for Wild Animal Prayers: This original work evolved over many years, gradually emerging in its current form through many women's gatherings and sound circles. While I noticed how intensely joyful I felt whenever I was dancing or sounding in sacred space with other women, my meditative writings also confirmed the importance of consciously working with the sexual life-energy through sound and movement to unify spirit, heart, and body. The experience was one of remembering and allowing rather than developing techniques, and as the practice evolved, I began to see how integral this work was to restoring Nature's forgotten frequencies.

*Our only hope
is to reinvigorate
the language of
the body, to
learn to let our
muscles and
bones sing again
in harmony with
the wild chorus
of the land, sea,
and air.*

C. de Quincey

Beginning a Wild Animal Prayer

Create safe boundaries in space and time. Wild Animal Prayers are best done within 'sacred' space, a safe time and space where you can consciously open to the wisdom of your body-soul through movement and sound. Begin with setting an approximate time-limit. Our psyche feels reassured when we agree to enter this work and at the beginning, even two or three minutes is plenty of time. Take a moment to look at your face in a handmirror...

Then cast a circle by walking the perimeter of a small area (approximately four to six feet in diameter) with an intention to create a safe, protected area. Step into the circle, pause and breathe as you tune-into your body, becoming aware of tension, blocked energy, or tiny involuntary movements. Anything that engages your attention can be your starting point. Like a snake in a snake-charmer's basket, let movement stir within you, and employ your mind to follow rather than direct your gestures.

Keep your throat chakra soft and your neck flexible. When energy begins to move in our bodies, we tend to tighten our throats, particularly as uncomfortable feelings and powerful energies arise. We are culturally conditioned to stifle most of our 'wild' sounds as we learn to communicate with words. As you begin to move and the energy begins to flow, let the sound(s) out without analyzing them. This work is not meant to be an intense catharsis. Keep following, keenly observing the impulse in each moment. If you feel too self-conscious to express loud or primal sounds rising within you, let your breath be expressed as an audible exhale to liberate the energy.

Concluding the work: There will be natural pause points where a new wave of energy may present itself; you can choose to continue moving or gently close the session. When you step out of the circle, give thanks for the sacred energies that held and contained you. Take time to gaze again into the mirror. Be gentle with yourself as you integrate the experience and when you feel ready, record your experience.

*Sometimes I
feel like a new
creature here,
part of the
forest, growing
moss and wings,
becoming
something
unknown to
myself,
becoming
something wild.
Lorraine Gane*

The Role of Witnessing, with Self and Others

Seeing and being seen with the eyes of love. As newborns, if we are fortunate enough to be held and cherished by our mothers, we can relax and trust that we are held in a field of love. The imprint of loving eye-to-eye and heart-to-heart witnessing assures us that we are safe and welcomed here on earth. While it is our birthright to be welcomed, loved, and fully accepted for who we are, our need for supportive witnessing continues throughout our lives, particularly as we move into unfamiliar waters. While communal rituals and ceremonies such as birthdays, marriages, and other rites of passage play this role at key times, it is natural to want to be seen through the eyes of love, in both our vulnerability and our strength.

Learning to witness myself has been one of the most challenging and intimate practices I have ever explored. For many years, I enjoyed doing the work with a friend; it felt much easier to explore the movement and sounds with someone else and to share our experiences. Eventually, I exercised some discipline — to turn up and enter the mystery of the moment by myself. Now my Wild Animal Prayers are a consistent practice, calling me home to my Self in a profoundly soul-nourishing way.

When you witness someone else, here are a few things to keep in mind. As your colleague begins moving and sounding, let your eyes be soft and welcoming, your mind relaxed, open and receptive rather than analytical. Your grounded, receptive energy will provide a gentle, diffuse embrace for her to find instinctively find her own way without bumping into your expectations. When she completes her prayer, give her time to fully integrate the experience before speaking. Always ask permission before sharing your thoughts and observations. “*Would you like to hear what I felt/observed?*” Offered too swiftly, your insights can easily override the subtle shifts of her own experience.

*You do not have
to be good.*

*You do not have
to walk on your
knees for one
hundred miles
in the desert,
repenting.*

*You only have
to let the soft
animal of your
body love what it
loves.*

Mary Oliver

*Pain held in is
pain...
Pain let out is
dance.*

*Sorrow held in
is sorrow...
But sorrow
let out is the
song of the
continents
moving together.
Mark Nepo*

Self-witnessing Techniques: There are several ways to anchor the shifts that occur during this powerful work. It is important to witness yourself while you are still in the altered state, otherwise the new energy tends to slip away and is easily lost. Using a mirror to gaze into my face before and after the work, it is remarkable how altered my expression can be after only a few minutes of movement and sounding. Frequently I look more alive, even younger!

I've also used a blank sketchbook to visually record my experience. With my focus, 'what is evolving through this work today?' I pick up a pencil or piece of charcoal, close my eyes or soften my gaze and let my arm move with the same rhythmic movement from the animal prayer. This swift and spontaneous gesture-drawing often feels more 'honest' and revealing than words.

As you find your own ways to record your experience, remember it is important to pause before moving back into your daily routine. Take time to honour your willingness to create and enter your own sacred space. Acknowledge your courage in surrendering to the beauty and healing power of your own voice and instinctual movements. Appreciate that this personal work is a form of primal activism within the core of your being that nourishes everything you do in the world. Be assured that as you reconnect with the wise animal of your body you are remembering an ancient non-verbal 'language' that begins to intimately reconnect you with the Soul of the World.

Journal Prompts *before* a Wild Animal Prayer

What calls me? What is seeking to be addressed?

What is ready and willing to be liberated with love?

What do I see in my face when I look in the mirror?

What am I aware of in my body, my thoughts, my feelings?

Journal Prompts *after* a Wild Animal Prayer

What has shifted through my movement and sounding?

What have I learned through this Wild Animal Prayer?

What sensation(s) do I feel in my body and heart now?

What changes do I see in my face as I look into the mirror?

We do this practice:

- to explore the inner landscape of our body and soul
- to restore vitality to our body-souls and creative fields
- to unify upper and lower chakra energies
- to heal the split between mind and body
- to intensify our authentic, grounded radiance
- to encourage a healthy flow of yang energy
- to liberate culturally repressed Dionysian life-energy
- to allow stuck emotions to move their organic resolution
- to practice the art of focused surrender
- to release ego, false control, and limiting beliefs
- to engage more fully with the Mystery of Life
- to expand non-verbal communion with the natural world
- to cultivate self-love and compassionate spaciousness
- to come home to oneself within the heart of Creation
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Wild Animal Prayers are not:

- performance art
- cathartic or explicitly psychotherapeutic
- dangerous, except to the ego!

*The
unconscious
wants truth.
It ceases to
speak to those
who want
something else
more than
truth.*

*...but from
here on I want
more crazy
mourning, more
howl, more
keening...*

Adrienne Rich