

WAYS TO USE THE NATURAL WORLD FOR THERAPEUTIC PURPOSES

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The following exercises are means of moving an individual from a stuck or exaggerated shield, of assessing the content and makeup of a particular shield, or of “spinning the wheel” so that all shields may be experienced and expressed more freely. Each exercise requires the full consent of the participant, and each exercise will benefit from a thorough debriefing and exploration.

FOR ALL SHIELDS

24-hour solo fast

8-hour medicine walk (good as a diagnostic/screening tool)

Power Walk: Take a walk that involves concentration on balance in all four shields.

Walk in the dark to a pre-selected place where a small fire pit and a bundle of sticks are waiting. Light the fire and symbolically burn everything in your life that is no longer needed. Watch the fire burn down to nothing. Cover the firepit with dirt until it is invisible, sit on top, and wait for a sign.

Find and observe one square yard of territory for one hour. What the candidate observes is a mirror reflecting inner life.

FOR EXAGGERATED SPRING SHIELD: TO MOVE FROM EAST TO SOUTH

Find the gift the child left behind.

Take a walk, and embody the child. Take a walk, and be a body, be YOUR body.

Let the natural elements (water, air, sun, earth) touch you and pass through you.

Do something playful which has no purpose other than the doing of it.

Find examples of passion, innocence, dynamism, and growth in the natural world.

Take off your clothes. Go naked in the sun. Track a rattlesnake.

Observe an insect species. How does it mirror the candidate's life?

Get in touch with your raw energy by screaming. What images occur during the screaming?

Pick a spot in a natural area and stay there until you can say, “I am here.”

FOR EXAGGERATED SUMMER SHILD: TO MOVE FROM SOUTH TO WEST

Find the wound which makes you do your work.

Have a talk with the ancestors.

Study a specific insect, mammal, reptile, or bird. How does it mirror human life?

Analyze one square foot of soil. Of what is it composed? In what way does it reflect the candidate's life?

Find a hole (one being used), sit, and listen/watch. What kind of animal lives there? How is this animal like you?

Find a hole which is no longer in use. Contemplate your “wound.” How does your “wound” give you power?

Perform a death lodge ceremony. Clean up your karma.

A night in the earth lodge: Stay up all night in a sweat lodge or cave, pray and sing for the answer.

Take a ceremonial object into nature (fan, rattle, natural incense like sage, drum, mask, pipe, etc) and use it until an image or understanding comes.

Send candidate into a place where water can be found. Have him/her find the water by themselves, then use the water in some ceremonial way.

Send candidate to a creek and have him/she set adrift the past or launch prayers for the future. Use water for purification and cleansing.

Climb a hill, walk a canyon, etc. What does the hill or canyon *really represent*?

Bring back a gesture of defense, a stance that personifies connection to one’s own power.

In a natural place, feel your suffering and your wound. Tell the place or a natural object about it. Be with what is hardest for you to be with. Let nature be a therapist to you.

Go into the earth, a cave or depression.

Go into a field. Find the plant that is most friendly. Sit by the plant and talk to it. Observe associated species. Be aware of how plants define their own boundaries.

Take a walk at sunset and look for shadows.

Night walk: Candidate walks a measured, safe course (a couple of miles) on a moonless night.

Draw or paint a feeling or state of being. (Also Spring shield)

Watch the sun set.

FOR EXAGGERATED FALL SHIELD: TO MOVE FROM WEST TO NORTH

Find something which represents your gifts.

Pray for your people.

Intuitive cognition exercises: talk to a tree, a bush, a creek, the wind, a star, the moon, the sun, a stone, etc.

A night in the earth lodge: Stay up all night in the sweat lodge or cave, pray and sing for the answer.

Rites of incorporation with strangers: send candidate on a walk through a natural place where other people are to be encountered. Encounter one stranger. What is this stranger’s message to you?

Create and perform a self-created ceremony for self or for healing of another.

Find a power place and make it your own

The purpose circle: Stay up all night in the circle and pray and wait for an answer.

Interpret one symbol brought back from nature. How does this symbol reflect a central crisis in the candidate’s life? Talk intuitively with the object.

Make and plant a prayer arrow. Walk away for one hour. Turn and find it again. Leave it where it stands or bury it.

Equipped with a knife, go out and fashion a tool from the natural world. What kind of tool is it? How does it reflect your life profession?

Identify an edible plant, a tool-making plant, a bird, , an insect. an example of parasitism, symbiosis, erosion.

Stalk a particular animal for the purposes of gaining some of its power. Learn to respect it.

Take a walk and find examples of laws and structures, both natural and human.

Do something that is hard for you.

Make a plan and take a conscious action. See how it affects you and the people and the world around you.

With the stuff of nature, compose a ceremony of purification, mourning, divorce, joining, commitment resolution regeneration, etc.

Learn how to make fire with a bow drill, basket from native plants, food from edible plants, tools from stone, etc.

FOR EXAGGERATED WINTER SHIELD: TO MOVE FROM NORTH TO EAST

Suspend disbelief and have a conversation with a non-human object.

Take a walk and break your own rules.

Go into nature, bring back a chant, a song, a prayer, a name.

Construct a personal medicine shield which expresses your own gifts, capacities, limitations.

Go find and bring back one "sacred" symbol and one "profane" symbol.

Find something invisible and make it visible.

Find examples of death and birth, creativity, and spirit.

Draw a picture in the air.

Dance when no one is watching and sing when no one is listening.

The primary reference with more practices and rituals organized around the four shields is Foster, S., & Little, M. (1998). *The four shields: The initiatory seasons of human nature*. Big Pine, CA: Lost Borders Press. Go to <http://www.lostborderspress.com/>

For trainings in the Four Shields, visit the School of Lost Borders,
www.schooloflostborders.com