

ENCHANTED CHAT WITH A SEAGULL

I HAD A CHAT WITH A SEAGULL. We were both oceanside in Oregon. The sleek white bird stood in the sand just above the tideline and didn't budge as I jogged closer. I stopped a few feet away and became present with the being before me.

"Hello, Beautiful!" I said. "Thank you for being brave and saying *hi*." It cocked its head and gave me a closer look.

In my early twenties, having stepped away from the religion of my parents, I began developing a spiritual path that felt more authentic and positive. My lifelong love of nature and nonhuman animals immediately attracted me to indigenous, earth-centric spiritual traditions, including animism.

Rooted in the Greek word *anima* (soul/spirit), animism is a worldview that sees the elements of nature—animals, plants, rocks, rivers—not as insentient or inanimate objects, but as spiritual beings possessing souls and capable of interaction. Naturalistic animists use animism as a frame through which to build meaningful relationships with the landscape and its plants, animals, mountains, and rivers.

Seagull is a generic term for the gull family, *Laridae*, which includes more than 50 species. All of them are associated with water, most commonly the sea. Gulls have long been among my favorite birds. They are bold, feisty, and often misunderstood and labeled pests since they can make human messes messier by strewing garbage around. Ecologically, however, they play invaluable roles cleaning up shorelines and beaches.

Animal spirit medicine refers to the belief that the spiritual essence, energy, and characteristics of animals can provide guidance, healing, and wisdom to humans. When animals appear to us, in waking life or in dreams, we can gain insights from understanding this medicine. Gull medicine includes resourcefulness, emotional freedom, and effective communication.

Animism is a feature of the Yoruban religion, which originated in West Africa and made its way to the Americas through the transatlantic slave trade. I haven't done a deep dive into Yoruban, but the concept of orishas stuck with

CYLVIA HAYES is a speaker, author, and Unity minister. Her Substack, *Transcend*, is about raised consciousness, economic system change, and a world that works better for all. She's also the former First Lady of Oregon. Visit cylviahayes.com.



Being open to the possibility that all beings and elements of nature are connected adds enchantment to my life.

me. Orishas are powerful, nature-based deities representing forces like thunder, iron, and rivers. The orisha associated with oceans and rivers is Yemoja. A feminine force, nurturing and protective, particularly of women, Yemoja can also be fierce and destructive like a tidal wave.

From the moment I learned of Yemoja, I have greeted oceans by her name, as I did during the recent visit to the Oregon coast I mentioned. I typically say, "Greetings, Yemoja. Thank you for your magnificence and life-giving essence." Knowing the many pressures oceans are now facing—overfishing, plastic pollution, noise pollution, climate change, and acidification—I sent a prayer affirming healing of the insanity of humanity so that oceans, and all of creation, can heal.

With Yemoja crashing waves onto the shore, the gull turned away and I resumed jogging, now reflecting on areas in my life that could benefit from resourcefulness and clearer communication. Do I know with certainty the winged one had a message for me? No. Am I certain there's meaning when a deer shows up in my yard or a butterfly lands on my hand? No. It could just be random. But being open to the possibility that all beings and elements of nature are connected and have spiritual essences that I can attune to and learn from adds beauty, richness, and enchantment to my life.

I'm not sure if everything happens for a purpose, but I know for certain we can make purpose from everything that happens. ☺

ACTION IDEA: Make use of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch (seafoodwatch.org/recommendations), which provides guides to help people avoid purchasing seafood that is endangered or environmentally damaging.