



Opposite page: Taz with some Shaman Stones; Above: Medicine tools made by Taz; Left: Jewellery made with shamanic intent.

POWERING UP

Objects are not inanimate when it comes to shamanic thought, and having power objects can help in your healing work, as Taz Thornton explains...

Not too long ago, I was lying in bed trying to get to sleep. It was late and I had an early appointment the next morning. Eventually, having counted all the sheep I could muster up, I decided to try some third eye meditation techniques to help me find elusive Morpheus.

I didn't even realise I'd fallen asleep when the first symbol floated before my mind's eye. Within seconds, I felt the presence of one of my trusted spirit guides, standing behind me and whispering instructions into my ear. As soon as the explanation was complete, there followed another symbol and another set of instructions. This went on until I'd been gifted

with nine different symbols and a full set of instructions on how to use the set of divination stones I was to create in the waking world. During the days that followed, I began to source materials to make the 'Shaman Stones' (the name given by spirit, not me) – I gathered stones, wood, bone, antler and began creating divination sets. I took all the instructions and put them into order for human eyes, creating a user guide for the stones. I gave some to friends and family and kept some sets back for other people who might be drawn to use them.

This was certainly not the first time I'd received creative inspiration through the dream – past creations have included everything from dance staffs and drums to ceremonial rattles and pieces of medicine jewellery – but the practice of physically

manifesting dreamed objects (known as bridging the dream) is not the only way for power objects, or medicine tools to be born.

As a crafter of sacred healing tools and medicine jewellery, I'm often asked to create a bespoke piece; sometimes this can be to help with a particular issue, sometimes merely to help someone connect with their spirit guides or power animals. In these cases, I enter a trance state and allow spirit to work through me to create the piece.

Usually, I have little idea of what I'm creating until the piece is complete. At this stage, I'll often bless and awaken the piece, or hand it over to its custodian with instructions, from spirit, on how to awaken it themselves. What never ceases to amaze me, though, is how many pieces come through to be crafted

before their owner has even made contact... and every time the owner will materialise, often quite randomly, to be united with their medicine object.

Whether power objects are created by man, or by nature, the one common thread is that they are believed to hold – or enable us to connect to – special energies that can be used to support man in his spiritual endeavours.

History of Power Objects

The power of spirit manifesting through physical objects is certainly nothing new. Archaeologists have discovered many objects over the years that seem to have no practical use, pointing towards their use as sacred tools. Discoveries of probable power objects go way back to the times when our ancestors used

cave bear skulls as altars, carved tools from bone and, of course, used the walls of caves as vast canvases to depict powerful scenes. There are stories of archaeologists discovering small representations of Thor's hammer in Scandinavian graves, from the Viking ages and earlier; found in relatively large numbers, these would probably have been sacred to the owners, representing some of Thor's power – the power of thunder and lightning – making the god an ally of the human, and granting them strength, courage and protection.

Nick Breeze Wood, shamanic artist, *Sacred Hoop* editor and owner of 3Worlds gallery of antique ritual objects, explains: "At its most basic, a ritual object acts as a focus of intent so that the user or custodian of the object can enter into communication, or feel close to the sacred world. This might be a Christian crucifix or a shamanic ancestor fetish – both facilitate contact with the sacred. In shamanism, however, being an animistic tradition that sees all things as being alive and having spirit, a sacred object is far more than an aide-mémoire of the sacred worlds,

as objects are seen by those within that animistic tradition as having a spirit and a life of its own within it."

Jonathan Horwitz, co-founder of the Scandinavian Center for Shamanic Studies, agrees: "Just as people need tools to help them in their everyday lives, they also need tools to help them in their spiritual lives, and of course in traditional societies, there is no separation between spiritual life and practical life. Indeed the two are closely interwoven. The purpose of having a power or medicine object is to help the user to bring extra power – from the Spirit World – to their life and to the lives of others."

One power object most commonly associated with the shamanic tradition is the drum. Often used to facilitate a state of altered consciousness, the drum is sometimes referred to as the shaman's horse, precisely because he, or she, rides the beat in order to travel to non-ordinary realms.

Chris Lüttichau, founder of Northern Drum Shamanic Center, explains: "The drum is a very central power object, but not just any drum has sacred power. It needs to be awakened and activated first. This is often done in ceremonies with a clear intent. In some cases, however, this can also happen without a ceremony that specifically aims at transforming the object in this way. Repeated use of a drum for healing purposes would by itself make it a power object."

Of course, power objects don't need to have been crafted by man; it's not so unusual for nature to play a part in creating a power object. "A piece of wood from a tree that has been hit by lightning can also be a power object because special energy is held in that wood," says Chris, "This concept has a lot

to do with being able to recognise the subtle energies in things, and to understand how to work with them."

Howard and Elsa Malpas, founders of Warrior In The Heart Foundation, are quick to point out that a power object does not necessarily need to have corporeal form: "Not all power tools or talismans have a physical presence on the Earth plane. Part of our training is to teach our students to perform all their spiritual shamanic duties without any physical objects. We invite them to travel to their helping spirits to ask for a power tool to help them with the different aspects of their healing work. In our years of training students these are some archetypal gifts that the spirits have bestowed.

"Top on the list would be the sword – not for fighting, but for discerning the truth when doing spiritual work. Others that arise frequently are a bow and arrow, various wands, golden eggs, crystals, magic carpets and many others. These are metaphorical tools that the shaman uses in an altered state of consciousness, that hold great power and focus for healing, divination, protection and rescue work."

How does one find a power object?

So, we've ascertained that power objects may take many forms, but how do you go about finding one? Well, as I alluded to when talking about my medicine jewellery, very often they will find you or, at least, their energies might pull you towards wherever they are waiting to greet you.

An important point to remember is that you can never truly own a power object – you're never more than its custodian. Many people involved in spiritual work will have stories of 'owning' a beautiful object that one day disappeared, never to be seen by them again. Likewise, many of us fear the day our most treasured possessions need to be passed on to someone else or left as an offering somewhere; at the very least, there are huge lessons here about the follies of materialism but, the bigger picture paints a story of power objects with enough energetic strength to actually communicate to us when it's their time to move on.

Of course, it is this same energy that can lead to us finding our power objects in the strangest of places. One man's loss is another man's gain, as the old saying goes.

Nick explains: "A sacred object might come to you in the strangest of ways – because it wants to come to you. You might be given it, you might find it on eBay and be the only person bidding for it, you might find it anywhere in any way – there is no end to the creative way sacred objects move about in the physical world.

"You might be deaf as to what it is saying to you and think it is just a quaint object. If you are meant to use it, it will speak to you in some way – you will be haunted by it – it will tug at you and you will want to pick it up (or be repulsed by it – both extremes can happen). If you don't get a reaction at all, you are probably

just part of its cunning plan to move around the world, and your role is no more than a pack animal and home maker for it during the time it stays, before it moves on to its next custodian."

Sometimes, power objects can be gifted through natural means, such as a bird dropping a feather for you to find, or a stone being washed up on the beach. In all cases, whether your power object is created, gifted or found, what's most important is taking the time to tune in to the lessons it has to teach you.

"When we talk about power objects it's important to understand that they are not just symbolic," says Chris, "They actually hold within them spiritual power. In our world where people's understanding of things has become more and more rational, this may be difficult to comprehend. A rational approach can remove a human being from a more direct and energetic experience, and with that a deeper, more expanded and true understanding.

"Native Americans, who wore certain herbs and plants in their hair, had a deep, inner knowing of how the plant worked. Maybe they had been guided to wear it in a vision or a dream. They felt and were aware of the effect the herbs had on them, and they knew how to work with this power. Shamans and medicine people today still do exactly the same."

The symbolism of the power object can be hugely significant, says Chris: "An eagle feather, as an example, can be a power object, and it can hold significance for you on many levels. It may remind you of the mountains and their spiritual power, as well as the eagle, the



Charms depicted power animals from dragonflies to fish can be worn daily.

sun and the Great Spirit. The mountains point upwards towards the sky, towards spirit. The eagle is the bird that flies closest to the sun. The sun is the bringer of light and life. The sun brings the light from the Great Spirit, and the eagle is in this way the messenger from the Great Spirit.


"So the feather connects you directly with the highest power. A big part of the power in such an item is in the understanding you have of it. What does it mean to you? What does it symbolise? What does it evoke in you?"

Caring for your power object

Some power objects require great care, others do not. The best idea is to tune into the energy of the piece and ask what it needs to remain clean and bright. If you have shamanic journeying skills as part of your spiritual tool kit, you might want to journey to the spirit of the piece and communicate directly, otherwise, try meditating with it and see what comes.

Chris has this advice on caring for your power objects: "The first thing in the relationship is respect. Such objects are animated, meaning they have soul within them; they are alive in the broader sense of the word. One of my Native American teachers sometimes talked about the fact that many modern day people have dead-matter-thinking. These things cannot be understood by dead-matter-thinking. You begin to create a meaningful relationship with the article. You find your own ways of working with it. You may feel that it's best not to let other people touch it. Maybe it needs a pouch or a bag that becomes its home."

He adds: "It's important to keep it clear and bright, and there are many different ways to cleanse it. For some it may be to leave it out in the sunshine for some days, letting the light work on it. Others may put it in running water. Or you can burn incense or herbs around it, what we call smudging. Saltwater is good, too, for cleansing certain items.

"You will know when it's clean energetically, you can feel it. Power objects often help and protect us, and consequently they can pick up energy that is not beneficial, so it is essential to cleanse them regularly." Build a relationship with your power object and you both benefit. 

More information

Taz is happy to consider medicine jewellery and power object commissions on an individual basis; her handcrafted 'Shaman Stones' are £14.95 plus p+p per set. To find out more, as well as details of forthcoming workshops and Taz's next year-long training course (beginning in 2012), call 07920 461040 or sign up for her newsletter at www.firechild-shamanism.co.uk. Taz can also be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/FirechildShamanism and Twitter at www.twitter.com/TazYellowWolf.

Quote 'Kindred Spirit' to get 10% off Taz's 2011 workshops or £50 off her next one year shamanic training programme, starting in 2012.

SHAMANIC EXPERIENCES

Howard and Elsa Malpas:

This is a story about how a spiritual power tool can come into your lives and can just as quickly leave again.

Many years ago, we had been to a concert at Covent Garden and were catching a late night tube train back to our home in West London. In high spirits after having a wonderful evening, we arrived on the underground platform to the beckoning of what sounded like a Hammered Dulcimer being played, to the rhythm of the trains as they clattered in and out of the station. Sitting on a low stool, playing wonderful music on what turned out to be a homemade stringed instrument, was Michael. Shaven-headed and with a huge scimitar-like feather hanging from one ear, he observed us, smiling with his one tooth proudly visible and his gentle shining eyes immediately captivating us. We struck up a conversation and Howard, being a musician himself, said: "Would you like to come back home with us and play some music together?" As if he was waiting for us, he nodded. Back we all went to our home, where we had a wonderful time getting to know this amazing man and playing music together. It seemed he spent his life as an unofficial and unpaid social worker, caring for the homeless and chemically dependant people in his locale of North London.

He spoke with a steady wisdom and we felt we were in the presence of a very special man. Next morning, we said our fond farewells and, some hours later, he phoned and said: "I need to come and visit you again." He arrived later, saying "I have a gift for you."

He produced a bundle, which he unravelled before us, and in that bundle were a series of amazing spoons, like we had never seen before. Some looked very old and some looked very shiny and some were very ornate in silver and gold. He beckoned Elsa over, telling her to choose a spoon: "Take the one that sings to you." Elsa took her time looking at them all and then picked up her choice, which was rather tarnished and looked as though it could do with a good clean. Michael nodded his approval and those amazing eyes glinted.

Soon he was gone and we were left with the spoon, which we polished up, only to find it had many strange markings from many cultures on the handle, including ankhs and crosses with a heart shaped bowl. We were told by friends that it was called an Apostle Spoon. We felt it was a true blessing and a message for us, so we created a small altar for it in the corner of our living room. It seemed to feed us, as a spoon would, on a spiritual level and reminded us of the awesome synchronicity and deep connections we all have with each other. It also beckoned us on to be more like Michael – full of power and simplicity. It was our most treasured possession for many years, and then one morning we woke and it was gone. We wondered where it would turn up next.



Chris Lüttichau:

Once I was driving through southern Sweden early in the morning, and suddenly I got an impulse to turn off the main road and follow a sign to a zoo. I stopped by the park and went in and, because it was so early, I was the only visitor. Then I noticed a woman who was feeding an eagle inside a big cage. I walked up and she told me that the eagle had been shot and had seven lead pellets from a shotgun in his body. The pellets had been removed and the eagle was now slowly recovering. The intention was that he would be released back into freedom when he was able to fly properly again, she said.

He was a magnificent bird, and it felt like an honour to be in his presence. Before I left, the woman gave me a tail feather which the eagle had dropped that morning. This happened about 20 years ago, and to this day I use that feather almost every time I do healing work. It's a main power object for me.

The following year I went back to the same zoo park, and the eagle wasn't there any longer. He was flying free again.

Nick Breeze Wood:

Because sacred objects have a life of their own, and operate between the world of spirit and the world of matter, some pretty odd things can happen around them sometimes. They can vanish – that seems to be a fairly common thing. I remember Lakota grandfather Wallace Black Elk telling me he had lost several sacred pipes that had vanished during pipe ceremonies he was performing. "I don't know where they are," he told me, "Maybe they are up in the sky as replacements."

Some objects can make you ill and great care should be taken around them. This is particularly true of objects that contain a powerful spirit, such as fetishes. I was recently given a Mongolian shamans *ongon* (spirit fetish) and did a shamanic journey to meet the spirit of the *ongon* and ask what it needed and how it was to be kept. My spirits gave me instructions about it, but said the spirit of the *ongon* was no longer there. I was talking to a Mongolian shaman about the *ongon* a little while afterwards, asking him about some of the symbolic design it had upon it, and he told me it had belonged to a very powerful shaman who had removed the spirit from the *ongon* before the *ongon* had been passed onto me.

Objects can also attract unwelcome human attention. I was, for many years, the warden of a Quaker meeting house and one of the regular users of the meeting house in the week was a mental health support group. One day, a woman client of the support group knocked on my front door. I opened it and she pushed past me into my house, through a series of rooms to the back of my house, and there, without any pause at all, firmly sat on my altar (and several sacred objects resting on top of it).

I used all my skill to coax her off the altar and back to my front door, dealt with her situation and, after sending her on her way, cleaned and tidied my altar.

I was once asked to make a sacred object for a Native American ceremony being held for the buffalo in Yellowstone Park in America. I made the object, did my own ceremony here for them, and packed it up and posted it. When it arrived in the USA, the cloth streamers tied to the object had changed colour.

If you work with sacred objects you are bringing the spirits in really close and your life will turn upside down in unexpected (mostly good) ways. Sacred objects are doorways to the spirit worlds: through them we can pass through to the other realms, and in turn the spirits can pass through into this one. At the threshold of the world a great mystery can occur and the more you work with these objects and the spirits the more that mystery manifests in both subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle ways.