

ANCESTRAL MEDICINE

[Home](#)[About](#)[Media](#)[Offerings](#)[Practitioners](#)

Animism and Earth Ritual

What is Animism? Animism is a way of approaching life that emphasizes relationships. The term has historical baggage from white, Western academics who misunderstood and judged indigenous cultures; however, many are reclaiming the term in helpful ways. Drawing from the work of Graham Harvey in my framing, animists see the world as full of persons, both human and other-than-human, and prioritize living in conscious and respectful ways with others. These others include: animals, plants, mountains, metals, fire, bodies of water, spirits of wind and weather, deities, ancestors, star people, nature spirits, and many others.



Consider animism on a spectrum. If you look down on people from other backgrounds and see nature as a resource for humans to exploit, you're not very animist as your relational sphere doesn't extend beyond living humans who are like you. If you appreciate humans of all sorts, connect with companion animals, and respect many wild kin as also intelligent and worthy of respect, then you're more animist. If you also deeply bond with other forms of life and dialogue with plants, animals, and other unseen forces, then you're more animist yet. The wider your field of meaningful relationships, the more you fit the description of an animist.

[Translate](#)

Animists are Relationship-Oriented. One way to think about animism is to reference what we know about human relationships. Social toxins such as misogyny and white supremacy hinge upon seeing other-than-male, and other-than-white people as less than full persons, less worthy of respect. To heal these and other intra-species troubles we need both policies that enact equality and justice as well as healing for the confused supremacy-based perceptions that give rise to the bad behavior.



Many humans tend to devalue and objectify our other-than-human kin in similar ways. The global ecological crisis sources largely from the tendency, especially among modern industrialized nations, to see the rest of the natural world only in terms of human desires. When we see things rather than people, resources rather than relatives, we are no longer accountable to the rest of life. Conversely, when we view animals, plants, and others as extended family, we are more likely to relate with them in ethical ways. Contemporary animists, myself included, often feel passionate about humans coming back into conscious dialogue with our other-than-human kin as this shift toward a more relational approach calls for a decrease in ecological devastation.

Animism and Earth-Honoring Traditions. Many Indigenous peoples tend to be animists; however, it's difficult to generalize in any way about the world's 350 million or so Indigenous peoples. There are also many millions of humans, myself included, who are not Indigenous but who view the world in deeply relational ways. People who identify with revival forms of "shamanism" and "shamanic practice" often look to Indigenous traditions for inspiration and align to varying degrees with animist values. Modern Pagans



draw inspiration from earlier European and Mediterranean cultures and often align with animist values. Animism is not a religion per se and many Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, etc. could be described as animists based on how they relate with other-than-human kin.

For years I used the term “earth-honoring” to refer to animist views and traditions; however, animists are also sun, moon, and star-honoring. Most people who could be described as animists have no need for an academic term to describe their worldview. I’m an animist, but I don’t introduce myself that way at parties. Remember that animism is a generalized approach to life that is learned rather than innate, meaning folks of any age or background can learn to inhabit more relational ways.

Animism and the Ancestors. A common way folks extend the relational field is by honoring their family and cultural ancestors. Nearly every culture on Earth has some form of ancestor reverence, and we can learn to relate in direct and nourishing ways with our family ancestors. This also supports us in relating well with people whose ancestries are different from us.



Learning to relate well with family ancestors is also a great place to focus a calling to animist teachings as our lineage ancestors are advocates for healthy families and much-needed cultural healing. We all have ancestors who lived as earth-honoring people during their time on Earth, even if it’s a thousand years or more along any given lineage. By coming into relationship with our wise and loving ancestors, we access tremendous vitality and support for fulfilling our potential on Earth. Ancestral healing also benefits our living families and calls in blessings for future

generations. For more on ancestor reverence and ritual see the [ancestors page](#).

Animism and Spirits of Place. In addition to ancestral healing, a major focus of my teaching is helping others relate well with the many beings who are local to our homes and everyday lives. Our more ancient ancestors were, by necessity, ecologically literate people who maintained conscious dialogues with the animals, plants, rivers, weather, and other forces upon which their lives depended. Earth reconnection is learnable, nourishing for our spirits, and an essential part of our humanity.



Over the past two decades I've guided hundreds of place-focused rituals, largely in the San Francisco Bay Area and now at times in the Southeastern United States. Examples include: rituals to feast the mountain spirits, peace tree ceremonies for ancestors of place, five week-long wilderness quests (co-led) near Mt. Shasta and day quests in the Bay Area, grief rituals to welcome returning rains and salmon, healing rituals at mines and areas of ecological desecration, leadership of five conferences featuring diverse earth-honoring teachers, and extensive ritual to honor local animal and plant relations. As I get increasingly anchored in the Southeast, my public teaching with the others is here: **Practical Animism Online Course**.

Animism and Personal Healing. All spiritual traditions have their sweet spots and specific contributions to the collective wisdom of humanity. One strength of animist perspectives is respect for diversity including skills for working with many types of relationships. Just as there are many different sacred and necessary forces in the world around us, there are also many beautiful and diverse kinds of people. Practically speaking, this means that not everyone



Translate

needs the same thing, not everyone has the same sacred role in community, and no single approach is right for everyone.

This also means that individual healing calls for folks to be appreciated in light of their unique destiny, personal medicine, and specific soul-level gifts and challenges. Treatment of suffering follows from kind and accurate perception of one's uniqueness. This is also the foundation for solid spiritual mentorship. Effective human-to-human care considers not only the degree of alignment with personal destiny and the influence of important human relationships but also of family ancestors, local Earth energies, and other unseen forces. These relational values inform my approach to mentorship, community ritual, and any type of healing work. For more on individual work with a mentor in ritual arts, consider the **Ancestral Healing Practitioners**.

Animism and Human Relationships. Although we can relate in potent and joyful ways with nature spirits, ancient ancestors, and strange old gods, our most important relationships, even for animists, are often with other living humans. As anyone striving to be an emotional grown-up can attest to, these are also the relationships that tend to bring the greatest challenge and potential for nourishment.



A few animist values include: honoring sacred difference with respect to each person's path of destiny, giving reverence to the spirit forces that surround your beloved human folk, finding shared forms of reverence and praise, and making sure to draw on community support while also protecting your close relationships from envy and jealousy. To further engage perspectives on animism and earth

reconnection see the archive of free resources on the **media section of this site.**

Testimonials

"Daniel's presence in my life is a wonderful blessing! I'm benefiting greatly from his workshops. Such honesty and integrity in a person/teacher is a rare find! His knowledge and leadership skills amaze me as he gently guides the class to discover valuable information within ourselves! Working with Daniel has deepened my spiritual connection to Life and to my homeland. I prayed for a teacher to come to help me to teach others, and I believe he is an answered prayer!" -Cheryl, Caretaker at Watersong Peace Chamber

"Working with Daniel and learning practices for tending and healing my ancestral lineages has been life-affirming, grounding, and rewarding. I feel more supported, guided, and self-aware. Daniel's down-to-earth approach is super accessible, and he is one of the most genuine, kind teachers I have come across in my alternative learning pursuits. I highly recommend him to anyone who wants to feel more connected with their own inner wisdom, the Earth, and a healthy human experience." -Ela, Office Administrator & Healing Arts Practitioner

"I highly recommend the earth medicine training to anyone who is questing to increase their awareness of themselves in relationship with the land we live on and with the spirit that resides in that relationship. I can't even begin to show the appreciation I feel for having had the chance to immerse myself in such an intense experience, and Daniel as a caring, knowledgeable, artistic, highly creative group leader/teacher, designed a program that was able to nurture and tend to our needs as humans." -Lorie, High School Teacher

Sign Up for Newsletter



Online Course Log-In

Troubleshoot online course
access here.

Translate

