



# THE FOUNDATION FOR SHAMANIC STUDIES

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## PASSION PROJECTS: WHAT FUELS THE HEART

*Lora Jansson*

I am a woman who is in love with Bear. This is a vital love that is fed by gratitude to Bear for all of the cures he has performed for so many people and animals I have worked with in the past dozen years. For all the gentle ways he has held me through the darkest times of my life. For all the protection and all of the unique teachings he has shared, and continues to share, with me and others. For lending me his strength and power. His wisdom, his grace, his humor is as familiar to me as the beat of my heart.

In ordinary reality, I love the way bears lumber, and I love their fierceness. I love their play and their sweetness. I love the way mother bears teach and raise their young. Having had the honor to be close to bears in Montana, I know and love the sour-earth smell of the Grizzly, the sweet and shining eyes of the Black Bear.

I love the way bears live, that they know how to hibernate, their bodies producing a morphine-like substance that allows them to alter their consciousness. Contrary to popular belief, bears do not sleep through hibernation. At times, we know they are simply altered, resting, their metabolism drastically slowed to accommodate their drift

through time. Bears, in their own way, journey.

I have learned that – in both ordinary and nonordinary reality – Bear’s love is active. He does not only say he loves a client, he cures them with his power. Even his teachings promote and encourage change so that suffering is eased, and the heart can grow to contain more love, more power.

Bear’s love does not know borders or boundaries. He will work for a tiny plant that is struggling, for countless people in Haiti or for

the client who walks into my studio with an illness.

I am a woman who is in love with Bear, and who has been taught by Bear that love is active. Throughout our work together Bear has taught me that every person who walks into my studio or my classes is adored by the helping spirits. As this has been my observation for 12 years with every client and student, I have learned empirically that every person has something unique, powerful and precious to contribute, to offer.

Given this love of mine, perhaps



*Jasper, one of the many Moon Bears rescued and brought back to life by Animals Asia Foundation, [www.animalsasia.org](http://www.animalsasia.org). Photo courtesy of Animals Asia Foundation.*

it will not surprise you to learn that I am the founder of *The Star Gazer Shamanic Moon Bear Project*, a volunteer group of journeyers who dedicate a year of their lives to working shamanically with an Asian Moon Bear, rescued from “bear farms” by the Animals Asia Foundation.<sup>1</sup>

This project started because Bear came to me in a journey and said “help.” I could not (or would not) ever resist such a request from a beloved. I know reciprocity is fundamental to my shamanic practice and my life.

In the 18 months that followed, as I tried to find out exactly how Bear wanted me to help,<sup>2</sup> it became clear that it was my responsibility to figure out the way to answer the call.

These were dark days, and that story is too long to share here, but finally what inspired the Moon Bear project was understanding that the passion in my heart for Bear could be used to work with and serve my

ordinary reality bear brothers and sisters.

The “how” of setting up a project like this is not what I really want to share with you here. It’s this: those of us who have had the privilege of receiving training in core shamanic practices are in a unique position to manifest our *Passion Projects*. All we need to do is really know, love and listen to our helping spirits, and then act on the wisdom or requests they share with us.

I know now – seven years after concluding the program – that the shamanic training I received in the Foundation for Shamanic Studies Three-Year Program<sup>3</sup> was not an end, but a beginning. It is, pardon the pun, a foundation for a lifetime of work and learning. My faculty and advisors are my helping spirits; my education is far from over. Every day there is a new teaching. It is these teachings that fuel passion.

Our work as journeyers begets

love that fills the heart like cups overflowing. We do not need committees or anyone else besides our helping spirits – the wisest council of elders any of us can have – to determine what we can do to serve. We understand we have the spiritual authority to act wisely and to serve with compassion. We are privileged to know how shamanism can change the soul of one person AND can start to change the soul of our culture. The only thing we need to do is pay attention to that which calls us, makes us feel joyous and alive, for these are the signs of passion rising.

And, based on what the spirits have shared with me over more than a decade of seeing clients and teaching, I deduce that deep within every heart there is a passion, an undeniable love that is at the core, like mine for Bear.

It may mew like a cub, and you may have to listen hard to hear it. Or perhaps it is a roar, a call that you

The *Star Gazer Shamanic Moon Bear Project* began when Lora Jansson, FSS Three-Year Graduate, was asked by Bear, one of her helping spirits, for “help.” Her response was to contact Animals Asia Foundation (AAF; [www.animalsasia.org](http://www.animalsasia.org)), an organization dedicated to saving Asian Moon Bear from lives of torture in “bear farms,” which can be found throughout different parts of Asia. At these farms throughout China, many bears are kept in captivity, each in his or her own coffin-sized cage. The bear farmers cut through the bears’ skin to get to the gall bladder where they insert a crude hose; the bears are not anaestitized during this butchery. The bile is then milked for as long as the bear lives; some bears can endure this torture for decades.

Jansson’s project is aimed at offering shamanic work to the Moon Bears who are rescued by the AAF and brought to their Rescue Centres in China and Vietnam. The shamanic work is provided by a network of volunteers, most of whom trained with the FSS, who “adopt” a bear for a year to provide essential shamanic help for the bear. A critical first step is to obtain the bear’s permission to work on his or her behalf. The shamanic workers journey, sometimes several times a week in the beginning when many of the bears are close to death, and then write reports about their journeys, which Lora sends to China. Throughout the year, the journeyers especially note information that the vets and workers might need to help the bears.

Lora feels certain that any seasoned shamanic journeyer with a passion could use the Moon Bear project as a model to create his or her own group project to help other beings. She is happy to talk about how to get started. For more information or to volunteer to become a shamanic bear worker, contact Lora at: [lorajansson@earthlink.net](mailto:lorajansson@earthlink.net).

feel driven to answer, but just don't know how to put into action quite yet. No matter. Explore it. Feed it.

The passion to serve may look "shamanic" (as in doing something to serve a helping spirit like Bear) or it may look like an ordinary-reality problem with no obvious shamanic interface – battered women, homelessness, environmental challenges, starving children. But as we know, everything has a spirit, which means that shamanic work can be appropriate and applicable to any and every challenge we – as a species – face. If you are passionate about it, it is calling to you. If you are a journeyer, you can find a way to serve through core shamanism.

To answer the call, name your passion, feed it, grow it until your heart no longer has the capacity to contain it.

Michael Harner would most likely say (if I may be so impertinent as to guess): "Journey on it."

As Bear teaches, love is not only emotion, but action. This is how ideas are born and come into the world. It is as natural to act on that which you love as it is for Bear to feast on honey. Or, to put in another way – passion is the fuel; the project is why the fuel exists.

*Lora Jansson is a shamanic practitioner and teacher in Bainbridge Island, Washington; she is a graduate of the FSS 7th West Coast Three-Year Program in Advanced Initiations in Shamanism and Shamanic Healing. Please contact her at [lorajansson@earthlink.net](mailto:lorajansson@earthlink.net) for more information about the Moon Bear Project or becoming a bear worker. She is also happy to advise on starting your own shamanic "Passion Project."*

## NOTES

1. Articles by Lora Jansson about the project: "Shamanic Healing in Service to Life," *Shamanism Annual*, December 2008, Issue 21, pp. 29 – 30; "Update on the Moon Bear Shamanic Project," *Shamanism Annual*, December 2009, Issue 22, pp. 33 – 34. "Certainly," Jansson says, "almost all of the shamanic volunteers who work with the Moon Bear Project originally learned about it through FSS publications. My gratitude to Michael Harner and the entire FSS is enormous."
2. Every journey to every teacher, no matter how I phrased my divination question, was answered in much the same way: you need to answer this question yourself. This was, in itself, a huge teaching for me about the importance of true partnership between journeyer and helping spirit.
3. FSS *Three-Year Program in Advanced Initiations in Shamanism and Shamanic Healing*. Visit: [http://www.shamanism.org/workshops/calendar.php?Wkshp\\_ID=22](http://www.shamanism.org/workshops/calendar.php?Wkshp_ID=22).