

Honoring Coyote Medicine

by Valerie Frances Nunnelly

In 2005, I traveled to the Inyo Mountains in California, a high mountain desert wilderness just north of Death Valley. I was returning from a nine day vision quest, a spiritual journey that was the culmination of more than a year of prayer, study and careful preparation. My body was tired, dirty and weak from the fast. My soul . . . exhilarated. I had long ago learned to listen to the voice of Spirit, and as I quenched the thirst of the desert flora with my remaining water, I heard Spirit tell me, "Hold some back." As I drove through the searing Death Valley heat, I discovered the reason.

A coyote stood in the middle of the road. As I approached, he walked head first into the wind and dust. I pulled the SUV over and studied the coyote carefully. His back leg was injured, and he appeared haggard, weak and exhausted. My mind told me not to interfere with the natural course of the wildlife in the Valley. My heart knew the coyote needed my help. I got out of the SUV and the coyote made no attempt to run as we sized each other up in the heat, wind and sand. The coyote continued to observe me as I removed my drinking cup from my pack and filled it with the water I had saved earlier. I set the cup down a few feet from the coyote, and he drank. Finally, with one long meeting of our eyes, he was gone.



and humorous ways, helping us balance work and play, and to laugh at our own mistakes. It is said the coyote sang humans into creation. Coyote is cunning, enabling him to survive in extreme conditions. He adjusts to his

situation, rather than fleeing from it. Coyote medicine teaches us to forgive our own shortcomings, and to love ourselves in the process.

I carry coyote medicine to this day. Coyote last appeared to me in September during an Inipi Ceremony in Colorado, but I hear his song each night from the pine thicket behind my country home. I listen closely to his song of creation, and watch for mysteries that are about to unfold in my life.

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Animal guides or "power animals" are an essential part of shamanic healing, and we all have at least one. Power animals, also known as totems or animal spirit guides, are compassionate spirits that reside within us, filling us with personal power (hence the name). They reflect who we are, and represent those qualities that we need to function in our daily lives. They act as our guardians, protecting us from illness caused by spiritual intrusions and negative energies. They are our teachers, our advisors, our healers and our champions.

My encounter with the coyote in Death Valley was no accident. He was there to teach me. Coyotes are natural teachers, but coyote medicine is Heyoka (sacred jester), so he teaches us in bizarre

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