

THE NATURE OF SPIRITS

BEINGS OF THE OTHER WORLD

A supplemental document for use with the shaman class



BY MICHAEL WOLF



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SPIRITS

The *Dungeons and Dragons* System Reference Document mentions “bodiless spirits, such as ghosts and specters” in its description of the Undead type. As such, in reading the shaman class, one might be forgiven for being a touch confused: what exactly are the spirits with whom shamans commune? Only the Speaker of Ancestors mentions spirits as having once been alive, and it makes no mention of them having been brought back in a state of undeath.

The word “spirit” is to blame for this confusion, as it has a multitude of definitions, some of which seem only tangentially related to one another. One might discuss a warrior’s unbreakable “spirit,” or else make plans to “spirit” the young prince away from his castle to protect him from assassins. Even within *Dungeons and Dragons* alone, the word is used with a variety of different meanings, which must be determined through context.

The aim of this document is to clear up some of the ambiguity surrounding the word “spirit” as used within the shaman class, as well as to explore the place of spirits in a campaign or setting.

The shaman and the materials surrounding it are rooted in an animistic worldview. Animism is briefly described as a type of religious system on page 12 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, and those readers unfamiliar with the concept are encouraged to review that subsection as an introduction to the concept.

“I’m a doctor, not an anthropologist!”

Animism is, of course, a complex and nuanced anthropological construct that has been used to describe many religions from throughout human history. The author would like to remind his readers that this is simply a role-playing supplement, not an anthropological thesis, and he makes no claim of authority in these subject matters. Though sources such as Joseph Campbell, James George Frazer, and Linda Ivanits were consulted at various points during the writing process, this material is still primarily a work of fantasy, and one constructed within the confines of an existing mechanical implementation of magic. While an earnest attempt has been made to reflect the role of the shaman, certain compromises had to be made.

Classifications of Spirits

The word “spirit,” as used within the material, should be understood to mean the soul or essence of a person, thing, location, or idea. Though it might be tempting to think of the “essence” of something as simply a quality that it possesses, spirits are fully intelligent, thinking beings of their own accord. Spirits are, however, incapable of directly acting in the world of mortals. A spirit might be able to cause a sickness or encourage animals towards certain behavior, but it has no ability to manifest itself in the mortal world. As a result, spirits may have to commune with shamans and make bargains with them in order to protect their interests in the material world.

The following classifications, while useful, should be understood to be descriptive, not prescriptive. An individual spirit might initially clearly belong to one classification, but then develop over time such that another more accurately describes it. The soul of a warrior who died in a great battle may end up becoming the spirit of the battlefield on which he died, rather than a simple manifestation of the warrior as he was in life. Similarly, the spirit of an ancient monument that is destroyed by an invading empire might linger as a spirit of the dead, rather than simply fading from existence. Such change is common among older spirits, and a single spirit might fit into all of the classifications at different points in its existence.

Animistic Spirits

While some religious belief systems ascribe a certain unique quality to the souls of sapient creatures, animism rejects any such clear-cut distinction. A river has just as much of a soul as a human does, and animistic traditions may refer to animals and objects as “people” in the same sense that the word would be applied to humans. Everything in the world has a spirit of its own, with the same capacity for reason, emotion, and desire. There is nothing unique about the spirit belonging to a sapient creature—the fundamental nature of an entity’s spirit is not defined by the entity’s intelligence, mobility, or ability to communicate.

That is not to say that all spirits are necessarily the same, however. Just as the different races have different talents and flaws, spirits of different types of entity are prone to different attitudes and abilities. The spirit of a tree is likely to be more set in its ways and slower to act than a wind spirit. Spirits belonging to similar entities tend to be similar in various ways, such as temperament or influence over the natural world. These are merely trends, however, and an individual spirit might have more in common with spirits typically associated with an entirely different kind of entity.

Spirits of the Dead

As alluded to at the beginning of this document, spirits of the dead may be the most familiar type of spirit to some readers. After all, the idea of a soul or spirit that exists on a non-physical level readily lends itself to the idea that such a spirit could persist after the death of the physical entity to which it belongs. A distinction must be made, however, between the spirits of the dead with which a shaman deals and the various types of incorporeal undead. Though a shaman might be able to calm an angry ghost or specter, the spirits with which she normally communes reside in the spirit world, rather than being animated by necromantic energies.

As animism holds that all things are alive and possessed of spirits, it follows that all things can die. Though most common depictions of the dead focus on the souls of humans and sometimes animals, spirits of the dead can come from any entity that has “died” in some fashion. This need not be restricted to simple animistic spirits, either: the spirit of a city that burns down might linger on as a spirit of the dead.

Though they can change and grow over time like any other spirit, spirits of the dead tend to be heavily defined by their deaths. In fact, a spirit of the dead can be formed from multiple “living” spirits that grow together as a result of the death event. For example, the spirit of a man who burned to death might combine elements of both the man’s “living” spirit and the spirit of the fire in which he perished. This development need not occur instantly, and the spirits of the dead from individuals who shared the same death might maintain separate existences for decades before growing into a single being.

Spirits of Places

Much as every object or creature has its own spirit, so, too, does every place. Rather than being born of a single, specific entity, however, spirits of places form from the spirits that exist within their locations. On a literal level, incredibly small spirits might be subsumed into the spirit of the place, but—arguably more importantly—the actions and emotions of the spirits living within a location define the spirit of the place.

In order for a spirit to form, a location must have some kind of significance. Whether a sacred grove or a simple cottage, the place must have meaning to someone. The importance given to the location gradually makes it into an entity of its own, with a spirit shaped by the way the location is viewed. In general, any location that has a name, including “home,” is considered to have enough importance that it might possess an attendant spirit. While spirits are often associated with the natural world, spirits of places can be found anywhere and everywhere. A city might have a spirit of its own—or several, if the districts are distinct enough from one another. In some cases, a single location might even have multiple spirits that are all associated with the place in its entirety, with each serving a different role.

Much like spirits of the dead, a spirit of a place might arise as the literal combination of multiple spirits. As previously mentioned, small enough spirits—such as the individual stones in a house’s fireplace—might be completely subsumed by the spirit of the location. However, in many cases, individual animistic spirits can be incorporated into the spirit of the place while continuing to maintain their own existences. In such a case, both spirits maintain their own identities, but anything that affects the animistic spirit affects the spirit of the location accordingly.

Spirits of Ideas

While the other classes of spirits all correspond to some kind of material entity, a spirit of an idea may have no physical signifier in the world of mortals. These are the spirits of concepts, and their domains can range from the idea of fair play to specific laws. In some cases, figures from folk stories and fairy tales exist as spirits of ideas, formed from the tales in which they feature.

While it is not unknown for a tale or concept to form its own spirit, it is very common for spirits of ideas to have begun their existence as spirits of other classifications. A great lawmaker might be remembered after his death for the peace and prosperity that he brought, causing his spirit to slowly gain the powers and attributes of a spirit of law. Or perhaps a particular house gains a reputation as a site of horrific violence perpetrated by an unknown figure, and the spirit of that location slowly warps and changes until it becomes the very monster about which tales were spun.

As these spirits are conceptual entities, rather than physical ones, they are far more prone to travel than spirits of other classifications. However, they still cannot stray too far from the lands where their ideas are discussed and valued unless they are following one or more entities that carry those ideas with them.

Spirits and Shamans

The separation between the spiritual and physical worlds necessitates the existence of shamans: intermediaries that bridge the two worlds and keep them in balance. Problems in one world can often be traced to sources in the other, and it is the responsibility of a shaman to restore order in both worlds by resolving such conflicts.

While shamans of the mortal world are our primary focus, it should be noted that, as noted before, there is nothing spiritually unique about mortal races. Shamans or shaman analogues can be found in all corners of both worlds. Dryads, for example, sometimes come into being when the spirit of a tree feels a shamanic call to the mortal world.

Calling

Spirits may call mortals to shamanism for a number of reasons. The most common reason for a calling is the death of a community’s previous shaman, with the newly-called shaman expected to fill the role left vacant by her predecessor. The spirit of the deceased former shaman may or may not participate in such callings, depending on the community’s traditions. This calling can be particularly surprising for individuals from less spiritually-aware communities, who may not even have known of the shamanic duties that had been being performed.

Shamans may also be called in times of crisis or unrest. Spirits that find themselves in great pain or danger may be forced to call a mortal to shamanism to protect them, especially in lands where the practice of shamanism is

uncommon. Spirits in such circumstances are often willing to make poor bargains in order to save themselves from whatever threat has forced the calling, but a shaman who abuses or abandons such spirits bears a stain upon his soul that makes other spirits wary of him.

Calling a shaman is not easy for most spirits, and many cannot do it alone. Even when working together, the act of calling consumes so much of their power that the spirits of an area might only be able to call a single shaman every few years. As such, whenever possible, spirits choose potential shamans carefully: for a mortal called by the spirits to completely refuse them could spell disaster.

Communing

Even though she serves as a bridge between the mortal world and the spirit world, a shaman does not perceive both worlds at all times. Instead, a shaman must commune with the spirits by fully entering the spirit world and leaving her mortal body behind. Time passes oddly in the spirit world—a shaman who appears to have been in a trance for only a few minutes may feel as though she spent months among the spirits, or she may feel as though she was gone for only a few moments after a trance of half an hour.

While in the spirit world, a shaman perceives all of the spirits around her—animistic spirits, spirits of the dead, spirits of the place, and spirits of ideas—that can commune with a shaman of her calling. Even those spirits with which she cannot commune are visible to her, though they are often hazy and indistinct. However, not all spirits will necessarily deign to speak with her: while animistic spirits will almost never refuse to commune, spirits of the dead may have reasons to deny a shaman audience, and spirits of places and ideas might be too proud to commune with a wandering shaman.

For the most part, communion between spirits and shamans is intended simply to reinforce the relationship between a shaman and the spirits to which she is called, as well as to inform the spirits of the presence of a shaman in their midst. While spirits are aware of events in their immediate surroundings, they rarely have any knowledge of events that are not directly related to them or their signifiers. While a spirit of a location will know much of what has occurred within its territory, it may be unwilling to divulge details out of proud stoicism or out of loyalty to its more permanent residents.

On rare occasions, a spirit might initiate communion with a shaman when she is not in a trance. Spirits rarely attempt such an extreme step, as it takes a great deal of power to do so, but may find themselves with no other choice in dire circumstances. In such a case, the spirit projects its consciousness into the mortal world, using the shaman as a more literal “bridge” and clinging to her to maintain its presence. Such a spirit appears only to the shaman, and usually only for long enough to issue a warning or plea.

Bargaining

While spirits often grant their power to a shaman simply as a reward for the work the shaman already does, it is not uncommon for some spirits—especially those with larger or more complex signifiers—to require some kind of service or gift before they are willing to work with a shaman. Though a shaman can usually rely on simpler animistic spirits to supply her with her normal powers, ignoring or insulting a powerful or influential spirit can sometimes lead other nearby spirits to refuse the shaman’s requests. The spurned spirit might be exerting its will on such spirits, but their refusal might also stem from a suspicion that the shaman might not use her power in their best interests, either.

In most cases, bargaining with spirits is not a particularly difficult task. Spirits’ needs in the mortal world are often straightforward, and usually linked to some kind of damage or threat to their signifiers. However, spirits of ideas or spirits of artificial locations sometimes have more complex needs, and may not be able to clearly convey the exact task required of a shaman. For example, the spirit of a castle might feel some threat to the monarch who lives within its walls, but it won’t necessarily be able to explain to the shaman that the king’s brother is planning to kill him and usurp the throne.

For the most part, spirits deal in the currency of power, granting shamans their strength in exchange for the shaman’s service. However, in some cases, a shaman requires something more than the powers that spirits grant to her. She might require a specific service or boon from a spirit, or she might be seeking an end to some ill that a spirit has inflicted on the mortal world. In such cases, it is common for spirits to require a greater task than they would normally ask of a shaman. Some spirits have even been said to take some of the life force of those who request greater boons from them, drawing power from them in a reversal of the normal relationship.

“Well, according to the rules...”

Astute readers may note that, aside from a few 1st-level calling features and a handful of invocations, nothing in the shaman class has any rules for communing with spirits, much less making bargains with them. While the section on Spirit Magic makes it clear that a shaman must commune with spirits in order to prepare her spells, nothing governing that interaction is included. The simple fact of the matter is that, much like a warlock’s otherworldly patron, the exact extent to which spirits show up in a campaign is wholly up to the Dungeon Master. While one DM might be happy to explore the spirit world and its inhabitants, another might have a different type of story in mind and might not wish to be forced to work in such scenes. Moreover, such interactions, once outside of the purview of basic class mechanics, realistically ought to be handled through roleplaying and Charisma checks, rather than a set ability that has a predetermined effect. After all, spirits are not all equal in power or influence, so the results of such negotiations should vary wildly from spirit to spirit and from situation to situation.

Obeisance

As the sources of a shaman's magic, spirits can withhold their boons should a shaman refuse to aid them.

However, their role as the source of power also means that they often must provide "payment" before a shaman can render her services. This inherently disadvantageous position is the reason that some spirits insist on obeisance: by showing obeisance, the shaman shows that she is willing to cooperate with the spirits' desires and that she shares at least some of the spirits' values.

While it can be tempting to draw a parallel between the obeisances of a shamanic calling and the tenets of a paladin's oath, there are several important differences between the two. Most fundamentally, a paladin's oath typically takes the form of a code of conduct, while a shaman's obeisances are ideas to be valued and honored. Moreover, while a paladin must uphold all the tenets of his oath, many shamans only adhere to a few of their callings' obeisances. Finally, while a paladin who breaks his oath must seek atonement or become an oathbreaker, a shaman who stands against obeisance can gain the trust of spirits—and thereby their cooperation—in other ways.

As all spirits are distinct individuals, they do not necessarily always embody all of the traits honored by the obeisances of their associated callings. A fire spirit might revel in destruction, for example, rather than valuing the creative act like many fire spirits do. However, as the purpose behind a shaman's obeisances is simply to gain the trust of spirits, rather than to emulate them directly, such spirits are still likely to grant their power to a shaman who shows obeisance. The meaning behind the shaman's actions remains, and the honor deference shown are more important than whether or not the spirit shares the values in question. Such a spirit may, however, be more likely to grant power to a shaman who stands against obeisance, and permanent relationships between such spirits and shamans who stand against obeisance are common.

Devotion

Most wandering shamans do not form permanent relationships with individual spirits. One who passes through the same area often might become more familiar with the local spirits, but, unlike a cleric or warlock, she remains unbound by any ongoing obligation. Even shamans who stay in the same area and serve a community are not truly beholden to any of the local spirits, and may even openly argue with them.

Some shamans, however, find themselves drawn to an individual spirit. Often, shamans who stand against all of their obeisances may find it easier to deal with a single spirit that knows them—especially if the spirit also doesn't value the concepts honored by the obeisances—rather than having to earn the trust of strange spirits every day. That is not the only reason that a shaman might choose to devote herself to a specific spirit,

however, and some choose to devote themselves to the spirit of a sacred location, the spirit of a particular idea, or even the spirit of a fallen loved one.

A shaman who draws power from her devotion to a particular spirit differs in many ways from other shamans. She does not need to earn the trust of her spirit every time that she communes with it, as their previous dealings have usually established a working relationship. As many spirits are bound to specific objects or locations, she must carry a token of the spirit in order to commune with it from a distance. This token is usually crafted with the spirit's assistance, and is either drawn from the spirit's signifier or else bears some mark of the spirit's involvement. The spirit that serves as the object of a shaman's devotion is also atypical, often gaining strength as its shaman spreads its influence outside of its normal range. Such a spirit might be more reluctant than normal to bargain with other shamans, as it can rely on its devoted shaman for its needs.

Shamanic Callings

While the nature of shamanic callings might imply that spirits can be easily divided into six groups, things are not quite so clean in practice. As intelligent beings, spirits are as complex and individual as members of the mortal races. In truth, while a shaman's calling determines the spirits with which she can commune, many spirits are capable of communing with shamans of multiple different callings. While the spirit of a campfire may only be able to commune with speakers of flames, the spirit of an ancient sword—mined from the earth, shaped by the forge, and wielded by generations of heroes—might be able to commune with speakers of ancestors, flames, and stones.

Speaker of Ancestors

Though a speaker of ancestors is usually associated with the spirits of the dead, ancestral spirits spring from more sources than the literal ancestors of those who still live. An heirloom that has been passed down through the generations might host an ancestral spirit, and the spirit of a noble family's estate is likely one that will commune readily with a speaker of ancestors. The spirit of a herd of animals that has long served to sustain a tribe might appear to a shaman of the ancestors in times of need. Even the spirits of systems of nobility and royalty or an entire kingdom might commune with a speaker of the ancestors, so long as the proper deference is shown.

While ancestral spirits are not necessarily spirits of the dead, their basic nature connects them to death and the past. More than other spirits, they are keenly aware of the passage of time. However, the vast majority of ancestral spirits accept the nature of death, rather than attempting to resist or prevent it. Though they may condone its use for a greater purpose, these spirits view wanton necromancy as a violation of the natural order, especially when used to create intelligent undead.

The spirits that commune with a speaker of ancestors take a variety of forms, according to their exact nature. Commonly, the spirits of the dead will appear as they did in life, perhaps wearing traditional or formal regalia. Heirlooms might appear as either the one who originally drafted them, a shadowy figure wearing or wielding their signifiers, or other forms appropriate to their material existence. The spirit of a family or clan often takes the form of a totemic or heraldic creature associated with its name, or sometimes the object or creature from which the family's name is drawn.

Speaker of Dreams

Those shamans who are called to dreams are often among the least understood by outsiders. The spirits of dreams do not necessarily exist within the sleeping mind, but instead encapsulate those spirits that are born of ideas, stories, and art. The spirit of a tapestry or sculpture might commune with a speaker of dreams, as might the spirit of a library. A wood that has become the subject of folk tales might host a dream spirit, with its exact nature depending on the types of tales that have become attached to its signifier. However, many of the spirits that commune with a speaker of dreams are spirits of ideas, without physical signifiers. The spirit of a rumor or scandal might seek a speaker of dreams to confirm—or obscure—the truth of its subject, while a spirit of honor might ask a shaman to expose the dishonorable nature of a well-regarded knight. As mortal minds are fickle, so, too, are dream spirits, and they can change nature almost overnight in the wake of particularly significant events.

Though dream spirits dwell, like all spirits, in the spirit world, their relationship to the mortal mind grants them an additional window to the mortal world: the dreams for which they are named. In the absence of a shaman—or even sometimes to communicate with one—spirits of dreams will sometimes appear to mortals while they slumber, weaving themselves into the sleepers' dreams. Recurring dreams are often the work of such spirits, though their reasons are often difficult to discern without more direct communion.

Of all the spirits, those associated with dreams take the most varied and bizarre forms. While the spirit of a piece of visual art often takes a form inspired by its signifier, and the spirit of an archetypal story-figure takes the form most commonly associated with its role, more abstract ideas often take the form of chimeric beasts. These chimeric forms usually combine traits from different animals associated with the spirit's signifying concept: a spirit of pride might bear the antlers of a stag on the head of a lion, for example. The spirit of an institution or ideological movement might draw some of its traits from the name or iconography of its signifier. Unfortunately, the nature and variety of spirits of dreams makes generalization improbable, and these strange spirits can possess truly alien—even disturbing—forms.

Speaker of Flames

A speaker of flames can commune with more than just literal fires, and spirits of fire can be found in many more places than some might think. Most metal weapons and armor were shaped in the heat of a forge, and can commune with a speaker of flames as a result of that experience—as can a great deal of metal jewelry. A fireplace might be home to a fire spirit that spends most of the day dozing before awakening to heat its masters, and many house spirits have an element of fire to them. Even some tree spirits, such as those belonging to the eucalyptus, might be eager to speak with a fire shaman. Those who died in conflagrations or were burned after death might also appear to speakers of flames, transformed by the fires that divided their lives from their deaths.

Unlike many animistic spirits, the life of a spirit of a flame is not necessarily tied to the fire that serves as its signifier. If a fire burns itself out naturally, rather than being extinguished by outside forces, its spirit may simply slumber, rather than die. Such a spirit lingers in the area where it last burned, waiting to ignite once more. It is not clear what determines whether or not a fire spirit lives on after its flames burn out, nor what determines whether or not a newly lit fire will birth a new spirit or serve as the vessel for an existing one.

Animistic fire spirits often appear as cunning or agile creatures, such as foxes, deer, or falcons, and usually possess some feature reminiscent of flames. House spirits might take the form of jovial, elderly mortal figures, with hair like fire and mischief twinkling in their eyes. The spirit of a forge or smithy often appears strong and powerful, with metal worked into its form, and may either look like a beast of burden or the smith that works in its territory. Spirits of objects that were shaped in the fire might appear in many different forms, depending on the shape and purpose of their signifiers, and often appear to have just emerged from the flames. Ideas associated with fire, such as passion and creativity, might have spirits that take the form of chimeric, fiery beasts, or else more mortal-like forms that flicker and waver as if seen through a haze of heat.

Speaker of Stones

Though they are named for the stones, shamans of this calling commune with all the spirits of the earth, be they rock, soil, or metal. Whether worked or unworked, the spirits of these materials remain connected to the earth, though their experiences may have changed their perspectives. Plants and trees also commonly possess earth spirits, as they grow in it and return to it. Most mortal settlements possess a number of earth spirits, both in the materials from which they are built and from the land upon which they stand. The dead buried within the earth may also commune with speakers of stone, and the spirits of long-standing laws and institutions may have an element of earth to them.

Spirits of stone are unusual in that their signifiers can be broken into multiple pieces without changing their basic nature. While many objects can be sundered, doing so usually renders the object obviously broken. A stone, however, might break into two pieces, both of which possess more or less all of the qualities that the stone did before. In many cases, such an event does not kill the original spirit, but births a new one in the piece that broke off. However, if a stone is split perfectly in half, the original spirit may die and give rise to twin new spirits, each sharing the memories of their “parent.”

Animistic earth spirits often appear in the form of slow, but powerful creatures, such as bison, bears, or turtles, and usually look as though they have been carved from stones or gems. Spirits of farmland and agricultural concepts often take the form of the most common local livestock, usually with plant life growing on their hides. Earthen spirits of the dead often possess petrified features, or else have some of their flesh replaced with fungi. Ideas associated with the earth, such as laws and aesthetic principles, usually possess a less wild appearance than other earth spirits, with carefully-sculpted stone features or well-tended and pruned foliage.

Speaker of Waters

Shamans that speak for waters are commonly seen communing with rivers or lakes, but those bodies represent only a portion of the spirits that speak to such shamans. Ice and frost contain spirits of water as well, as do rain and mud. Mortals often bring water with them, spreading it through their lands to nurture their crops, and so water spirits can be found in most settlements. Plants and trees contain an element of water that allows them to commune with speakers of waters, much as they can with speakers of stones. Philosophical concepts may also possess watery spirits, and the spirits of the drowned might seek out shamans to give them rest.

The nature of many bodies of water can make it unclear where one spirit’s territory ends and another’s begins. Rivers run together and eventually flow into lakes or oceans, and floods can cause ponds to temporarily merge into other nearby bodies. Moreover, whether or not an entire river is the domain of only a single water spirit can vary from locale to locale, seemingly arbitrarily. Water spirits themselves either delight in frustrating the ability of mortals to learn about them, or—though they would never admit it—also do not know the mechanics of their domains. It is possible that many water spirits blur the line between animistic spirits and spirits of places.

Animistic water spirits often appear as aquatic or wise creatures, such as whales, crocodiles, or owls, and may possess features formed of water, ice, or steam. Spirits of ideas associated with water often appear to be floating in water, drifting gently in invisible currents, and often wear voluminous robes or other flowing clothing—even if they appear in the forms of beasts, rather than mortals. The spirits of the drowned often have ghastly, bloated

appearances, and may have some features replaced with coral.

Speaker of Winds

Spirits of the wind and air can be found wherever the open sky stretches overhead. Some even lurk deep in caverns, hidden from their kin or trapped beneath the earth. Smoke and fog carry their own spirits with them, and may squabble with the spirits already present. Spirits of ideas such as ambition and exploration may also commune with a speaker of winds, whispering to her of all that she could aspire to be. Those that die of dehydration, starvation, or exposure might linger on as air spirits, their emptiness blown about on the winds.

While all animistic spirits are bound to the location of their signifiers, the air is not tied to any one place. Air spirits travel far more than most other spirits, even spirits of ideas, carried from one place to another on the wind. It is rare for a shaman to encounter a given air spirit in the same place twice, and such an event usually indicates that the air spirit is looking for something.

Animistic air spirits often appear as avian or speedy creatures, such as eagles, cheetahs, or camels, and never stay still, even while communing with a shaman. Such spirits may also be formed entirely of wind, visible only by the dust that blows through them. Concepts associated with air often appear as empty clothing or armor—usually of the finest quality. Spirits of the dead that commune with speakers of winds often appear emaciated and hollow, and may demand sustenance from the shamans that speak for them.

“But what about...”

The world is a truly vast place, even when it’s a work of fiction. Trying to codify every possible spirit in an animistic system would be a foolish endeavor. These examples should be understood to be just that: examples. Their primary purpose is to illustrate that a shaman of any calling—be she a speaker of ancestors, fire, or waters—can commune with spirits of all four classifications. It might be tempting to only ever have the spirits of the dead appear to a speaker of ancestors—and, indeed, there is nothing wrong with doing so! However, to think of that as the only possibility available would be unnecessarily limiting. Should you choose to explore the spirit world, either as a player or as a Dungeon Master, it is important to keep an open mind. If it is unclear what calling might be able to commune with a given spirit, always remember that the answer could well be “all of them.” The most important thing, as always, is to have fun while telling a good story. If that means that a river spirit needs to commune with a speaker of flames, find some inventive way to add an element of fire to that river’s domain. Perhaps the river is fed by sulfurous springs that give the water a peculiar smell and imbue its spirit with a fiery streak.