

# VISION QUEST PROCESS -- DETAILS

For best results, vision quests should be pursued with an appropriate sense of the sacred and ritual boundaries. They are usually done under the guidance of a shaman, mental health professional or some other teacher or elder, especially if a young people are involved, or if the seeker's psychological obstacles are severe.

## PRIVATION

Two basic variables are employed in vision quests. The first is *privation*—doing without the supportive circumstances of ordinary life. The basic ones are 1) work activities, 2) leisure activities (perhaps including the ability to move around), 3) food, 4) water, and 5) sleep.

***The Power Spot.*** Most modern vision quests usually only eliminate the first three of these. You go to a quiet, undistracted place in order to be *only* with yourself—no books, wristwatches, electronic devices, or anything. For domestic or for shorter wilderness vision quests, you stay in that place—a circle perhaps 10 feet in diameter—since walking around would provide distraction. (In order to relieve one's self, a specific place is agreed upon for that purpose ahead of time, perhaps 100 feet away.)

***Fasting.*** All religious and mystical traditions practice food and sometimes water deprivation on certain occasions. Partially because digestion itself requires energy, after the first six or seven hours, for most of us hunger pangs fade and we

experience an unusual, subtle clarity which is conducive to prayer and introspection. This is what distinguishes a vision quest from simply “time alone,” and helps to invite the spiritual element. Most people can perform a two- or three-day food fast without difficulty or health problems.

***No Distractions.*** It is important that *nothing* be brought along. Journals are a possible exception. If you enjoy writing prose, poetry, doodling, or drawing pictures, then I would advise against it! The journal becomes yet another way of not really having to be with yourself. (If you want to write, play a musical instrument or what have you, that is not a vision quest, but rather a *retreat* for artistic or self-exploratory purposes.) However, if you are not in the habit of using pen and paper for anything, then it would be okay to bring a journal, since using it might be associated with something new for you.

Practically speaking, there are two levels of vision quest privation. The first would be not letting yourself have anything, as above. The second, for longer vision quests, typically involves the ability to at least move around, if not also have a journal and maybe small amounts of food. In wilderness environments, the “walkabout” both relieves tension and sometimes provides the setting for powerful experiences.

***Spiritual Connection.*** Classically, the place you go to do a vision quest is in nature somewhere, not only because you everyday distractions would be gone, but also to more easily connect with a deeper sense of meaning and spirituality. The resulting experiences tends to be more profound, having nothing necessarily to do with the person’s cultural background, but

everything to do with the uniqueness of that individual, with his or her specific path through life.

## PATIENCE

The second variable is *patience*. Vision quests are done for extended periods of time. This is so that the seeker's normal psychological routines and defenses (worries, daydreams, dwelling on problems, etc.) can exhaust themselves. As a result, sustained self-inquiry begins to take place at deeper levels. As the hours drag on and your mental routines drop away, new insights invariably occur, very often concerning the more meaningful problems and dilemmas of your life.

***Intentional Discomforts, Surrender, and Faith.*** A person in reasonably good health may choose to impose further privations on themselves, and for more extended periods. Not having tarps or cushions to sit on, being willing to endure rain if nature decides to bring it, avoiding as much sleep as possible by trying not to lie down—all these are examples of options one might consider. Again, this is done to further weaken physical and psychological defenses so that a “breakthrough” from within might occur. Especially important to these added elements of discomfort is an attitude of openness and acceptance: surrender to whatever God/Fate/Destiny decrees that the seeker should experience.

(Going even further, physical trials might be added on to force the seeker to find internal resources he or she did not know were there. This is still done during puberty rites in some indigenous societies. Subjects might have to carry something, swim for a distance, run a gauntlet of spearpoints, or something similar.

Naturally, this always involves supervision and oversight by a number of teachers or elders who are present at the time.)

*Demons... and Safety.* For most people, being “all alone with my mind” for an extended period is challenging only in the context of the boredom mentioned earlier. For some however, frightening thoughts and images may present themselves, to the point where personal safety demands that the vision quest be terminated. Should this be the case, a mechanism is always provided for the seeker to contact supportive personnel standing by.

## DEBRIEFING AND INTEGRATION

After the isolation phase of the quest ends, it is always appropriate for the seeker to discuss his or her experiences with an elder or supervisor or some kind. What was learned? Are there things causing even more confusion than before? Although it is rare, sometimes questions and issues manifest for the seeker that require immediate discussion or assistance.