

The Sat Nav Theory of Spirit Guides

Hello and welcome to Mediumship Matters, with me, Hannah Macintyre. Today's question comes from Courtney, and I genuinely love it. Courtney writes: “What is the purpose of our spirit guides? How should we have a relationship with them? I hear they won't tell us what to do, that they want us to make our own choices, and that they won't stop painful or inconvenient things from happening. So what is the actual purpose of their presence? I don't mean this as ungrateful, or expecting a genie in a lamp — I just don't understand what they do, or how they actually help us.”

Courtney, thank you for this — it's exactly the question worth sitting with properly.

Who your guides actually are

My belief is that spirit guides are our own higher selves, presenting as something separate so they're accessible to us — as an Egyptian, a nun, a butterfly, a fox, whatever form makes sense to receive guidance through. I know plenty of people don't love this idea, because none of us particularly wants to be guided by ourselves — we're all too aware of the slightly clueless human currently stumbling through this life, and the thought of being led by that same self feels underwhelming. But of course, in their true form, they're spirit — infinitely more connected, aware, and intelligent than the human version of us currently is.

I agree completely with Courtney's instinct: they're not here to grant wishes, tell us what to do, or smooth our path. I'd go further — I actually think my own guides add grit to my journey on purpose. So what are they for? I think they're here to cheer you on, encourage you, open you to different perspectives, and bring in the lessons your own soul chose to learn before you arrived. Delicious, if painful. They do help — but often in ways that feel, in the moment, like the opposite of help entirely.

Asking for something doesn't mean it arrives gently

First: we do have to tell them what we want. They won't hand us our purpose outright, because we're meant to discover that by actually living. What they do bring in is the education — the lessons — needed to get you there. Your soul agreed to come here to experience as much as possible, and your guides are, in a sense, the architects of that experience, good and bad. So when you say “I want to be a genuinely good medium,” they don't simply bless you and make it so. Instead, they call in the experiences that will actually build that skill — and a lot of those experiences are what I call spiritual slaps. They sting.

I don't think anyone learns to be excellent at anything, or gets a wish granted, without some real friction along the way — and yes, I know the law-of-attraction crowd will disagree, but I do think there's a genuine action component here. You can't simply want to be a great medium and show up with zero experience; you need knowledge, practice, integration. But your guides are also steering you toward experiences you don't even know yet that you'll want. When I was purely focused on becoming the best medium I could be, signing up for course after course, getting crushed by genuinely poor teachers along

the way — it felt reductive, like spirit was rejecting me, telling me I wasn't wanted on the team. What I couldn't see then was that my guides already knew I'd want to become a good teacher myself one day, and they were showing me, through all those bad examples, exactly what not to do.

The sat nav theory

I think of it like a sat nav. We put in our destination — I want my book to sell well, I want Spirit Social to work, whatever the current harebrained scheme is — but my guides don't simply route me there by the fastest path. Because they exist beyond time and space, they can see every future version of me and everything I'll eventually ask for, and they route accordingly — maximising what I'll learn and how I'll grow along the way, not minimising the drive time.

That's exactly why following spirit's route can feel like being sent down bizarre back roads, dead ends, a stressful sixty-point turn with a lorry waiting behind you, before doubling back the way you came, wondering what the entire detour was even for. What you don't see in that moment is what you picked up along that road — how it shaped you, shifted something almost imperceptible in you, that becomes part of who you are today. That's genuinely what I think guides are for. Not removing the bumps — bringing you as many of the right bumps as possible, to help you grow.

Sometimes it genuinely feels like a Grimm's fairy tale — like you made a wish on a genie, and everything promptly went to pieces, and you're left thinking, this isn't remotely what I asked for. Then you move through it, process it, heal, and understand it — sometimes fifteen years later, still slowly working out what an old experience was actually for. It rarely arrives as a sudden epiphany. It's usually just a small, quiet realisation: oh — that's why I knew how to handle this, because of that; that's why I could hold that boundary, because of everything that happened back then.

The retreat business that fell apart

Years ago, I went into business with a friend to run spiritual retreats together. A mutual friend once said, only half-joking, “brave of you two to go into business together” — so I can't even claim I wasn't warned. That friend had her own personal struggles, which aren't mine to share, but which meant, in my view, she genuinely wasn't in a position to ethically hold space for people doing vulnerable healing work — which was the entire premise of the retreats.

I was, frankly, a coward about it. I didn't speak up. I buried my head in the sand and kept asking spirit to fix it for me. They didn't. Things moved fast — we had a trademark, a registered company, a business bank account, a logo, before we'd even run a single retreat. I sat with growing anxiety the entire time, silently hoping it would somehow resolve itself, thinking about my own children and not wanting to be away from them for half the year running retreats we hadn't even sold out yet. It kept getting more complicated, and I couldn't find my voice, kept outsourcing the problem to spirit instead of dealing with it myself. Eventually, something happened that there was no coming back from. I knew, ethically, I couldn't keep holding retreats alongside someone going through what she was going through — and I had to pull out, at genuinely terrible timing, while she was already having a difficult time. From her side, I'm sure I was the villain. From mine, I'd had plenty of earlier chances to address it and hadn't taken them, so by the

time I acted, I had no real choice left. It was a horrible, complicated mess, and the wound of it, my own disappointment in myself, is still with me now.

What that experience taught me, more than anything, is that spirit guides are not caretakers who tidy up your mess for you. Processing the fact that they didn't simply fix it, that I felt genuinely betrayed and let down by that, taught me something real about how they actually work. It also forced me to find my voice — something I've always found difficult, and probably always will. My instinct is still to bury my head and hope a problem disappears. But because of that experience, I'm considerably better now at advocating for myself, more comfortable saying “I'm sorry, this genuinely isn't working for me,” and making the harder calls when I need to.

The wounded, conditioned part of me still assumes speaking up means being rejected by everyone — and yet, in practice, setting a boundary is often exactly what keeps people in your life. It doesn't always work out, of course — even in that much more recent collaboration that went so badly (which I've talked about elsewhere on this podcast), I still stood up for myself, even though the other person didn't like it. I have no regrets about that. I do have regrets about the version of me who let things slide for far too long the first time round.

Why we came here to fall

I think that's exactly how spirit teaches — the same way, every time, whether you've had children yourself or not: you have to let a toddler fall while learning to walk, so they learn to trust their own legs. I think what we all secretly want is a disempowering relationship with our guides — being told exactly what to do, when, and how, and simply following the laid-out path. That isn't what our souls actually came here for. We came here to fall, to feel what falling actually feels like — the crushing weight of loss, grief, pain, the illusion of separation — because spirit itself doesn't get to experience any of that directly. Take those things away, and the entire point of being here disappears with them.

So: spirit guides are there to cheer you on when everything goes wrong, to keep you moving, to bring in lessons you'll one day be grateful for — even if, in the moment, what you actually need is a bottle of wine and a good scream into the void. It's loving, no-nonsense support and teaching, not wish-fulfilment. Thank you so much for the question, Courtney. I hope this didn't bore you to death. I'll catch up with you all again soon. Take care.