

Animas Valley Institute

Soulcraft

Apprenticeship & Initiation Program

It's time for the Western world to return to a life rooted in soul and nature. The Soulcraft Apprenticeship and Initiation Program (SAIP) is designed for those ready to make a commitment to learning, co-developing, and utilizing an authentic, contemporary, Western, nature-based path to soul initiation. SAIP provides an in-depth study of soul-encounter practices and skills. This creative learning opportunity is for men and women who have been called by Mystery to serve their people as nature-based underworld guides and who are ready to say YES to their souls — the unique, individual mysteries with which we each were born. We seek trainees who have no doubt that the Western world needs to make fundamental shifts in values and way of life and that this can happen most authentically and effectively through the soul-rooted life choices of initiated adults.

SAIP is a professional development opportunity, equivalent in scope and depth to a graduate-school masters program. It is also a contemporary path to personal soul initiation and later stages of growth. You may enroll with any one or more of several intentions, including the desire to guide soul-oriented vision fasts, to lead other forms of soul-encounter programs, to develop a strong foundation in soulcraft work to weave into another professional path, and (only in partnership with one or more of the previous intentions) to deepen your own soul-initiation process. SAIP can be completed at your own pace — with a typical range from two years to six.

SAIP is rooted in an Animas seed vision of where nature-based soul work (beyond psychotherapy) might go over the next 100 years. The vision fast is only one component. The greater need in the Western world is for a full set of developmental processes and initiatory rites, commencing in early childhood, that lead to soulful adulthood and authentic elderhood — a life of joy, service, and fulfillment. We are beginning to see what the nature-based people have always known: in order to reach true adulthood, we must, after proper preparation, embark upon the terrifying beauty of the underworld journey to soul.

SAIP is dedicated to developing modern cultural formats that can help the Western world shift from a patho-adolescent emphasis on material wealth, escapism, and personal security toward a mature orientation of soul-discovery, authentic service to others, and true membership in the natural web of the more-than-human world. These goals go well beyond those of traditional psychotherapy.

Upon enrolling, you create an individualized program of study that includes eight core soulcraft™ practices and four electives. The program also supports you in your own initiation journey as you find and deepen your appreciation of your soul image, story, and powers — and your chosen means for embodying these gifts.

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The Soulcraft Apprenticeship and Initiation Program

Eligibility Requirements: (Must be met prior to applying for SAIP)

- At least one prior vision fast (ideally with Animas)
- At least one prior Animas core program (an Animas Quest, Soulcraft Intensive, Soulcraft Journey, or Advanced Intensive)

The SAIP objectives are to:

- provide high-level and deep-rooted training in soulcraft skills and practices
 - support trainees in their personal path to soul initiation and later stages of soulcentric growth
 - support the career development of people who are called to guide others toward soul
 - support people working to shift Western culture from one of the most destructive that has ever existed toward one that is rooted in the mysteries of soul and the more-than-human web of nature
- (Please note that SAIP training does not necessarily lead to employment as an Animas guide.)

Three SAIP Tracks to choose from: (choose more than one if you wish.)

- **Soulcentric Vision Fast Guiding:** learning to design and guide vision fasts with a primary emphasis upon the quest as a doorway into the underworld and the encounter with soul — including methods of ecotherapy but moving beyond them into the facilitation of soul initiation. Please note: *You do not need to be enrolled in SAIP in order to apprentice to the Animas Quest.*
- **Soulcraft Leadership:** learning to design and guide a variety of contemporary, nature-based soul-encounter experiences (retreat-center based as well as wilderness-based programs)
- **Soul-Oriented Professional Development:** acquiring soulcraft skills to apply to other professional fields including education, business, healthcare, coaching, and transpersonal psychotherapy

Core Areas of Study in all Tracks:

- Conversations with More-than-Human Nature
- Self-Designed Ceremony (Dialogues with the Sacred Other)
- The Soulcentric Developmental Wheel and Rites of Passage
- Shadow, Projections, and the Loyal Soldier
- Soulcentric Dreamwork
- Deep Imagery Journeys
- The Way of Council
- The Art of Mirroring

For each Core Area, you attend the corresponding Animas Intensive (before or after SAIP enrollment). Following Conversations with the Sacred Other (which includes Self-Designed Ceremony) and the Soulcentric Developmental Wheel Intensives, a mentor is selected to help you design and complete an extended, personalized course of study. Proficiency in these three Core Areas is developed and then demonstrated, as assessed by your SAIP Mentor. For each of the other five areas (Dreamwork, Council, Mirroring, Shadow, and Deep Imagery), you enroll in a 5-day advanced training program focused on deepening your facilitation skills.

Electives Areas for Independent Study

Beginning in the second year of your program, you study four or more electives from the following list. With the assistance of a SAIP Mentor, you develop an independent course of study for each elective. At times, Animas might offer Advanced Intensives or Specialized Courses on one or more of these topics, but generally you study on your own under the guidance of a mentor.

- Trance Dance and Rhythms
- Soul Poetry
- Animal Tracking and Nature Observation
- Signs and Omens
- Art of Soulful Romance
- Traditional Ceremonies and Nature Festivals
- Ceremonial Sweats and Saunas
- Storytelling and Personal Mythology
- Journal Work
- Symbols and Sacred Objects
- Sacred Speech and Silence
- Symbolic Artwork
- Confronting Your Own Death
- Befriending the Dark
- Wandering in Nature
- Art of Being Lost
- Developing a Personal Relationship with Spirit
- Self-designed elective (with approval)

Additional options for electives are:

- any additional mentorship co-designed by you and a SAIP mentor and approved by the Program Director and Coordinator
- any Animas program not already required as part of SAIP if this program is approved for you by the Program Director and Coordinator
- any non-Animas program approved by the Program Director and Coordinator (i.e., any program that will significantly enhance your skill specifically as an underworld/soulcraft guide and that addresses skills not covered in current Animas programs)
- a group training guided by an Animas guide, organized by the guide or one or more trainees, in any of the elective areas listed above (this would be in lieu of an individual mentorship)

Personal Soul-Initiation Mentorships

In addition to cultivating the skills of nature-based underworld guiding, SAIP is committed to trainees' personal soul development. Programs, trainings, electives, and mentorships all contribute to the trainees' personal development. In addition, personal soul-initiation mentorships are often recommended and/or trainees may request them from an Animas guide.

SAIP Program Coordinator:

The Program Coordinator oversees your course of study and administers the Soulcraft Apprenticeship and Initiation Program. He/she supports both mentors and apprentices with issues and concerns, tracks progress, and is responsible for fine-tuning the program. The annual SAIP program fee supports the work of the SAIP Program Coordinator.

Minimum Required Training Components to Complete Program:

- A total of two Soulcraft Intensives and/or Soulcraft Journeys

- Attendance at each of the annual 5-day Residential Gatherings
- Advanced Intensives that cover all eight Core Areas
- Mentorships or Advanced Trainings in all eight Core Areas and four elective Independent Studies

Minimum Required Training Components Each Year for all Tracks:

- Two Animas programs (selected among Advanced Intensives, Soulcraft Intensives, Soulcraft Journeys, and Vision Fast Apprenticeships; see our current Animas Course Catalog)
- The annual 5-day SAIP Residential Gathering
- Two Mentorships and/or Advanced Trainings – either in Core Areas or electives

SAIP Residential Gatherings:

- Five days long, in Durango, attended by trainees and mentors, and open *only* to them.
- A unique opportunity for advanced training and personal soulwork with Bill Plotkin and the soulcraft mentors within a community committed to soulcraft and cultural change.
- One Residential is offered each year.

Mentorship Program:

- Three of the Core Areas and each elective have one or more eligible mentors. Mentors oversee your study, experiences, and growth in that area – through assignments, journaling, conversations, and activities.
- Two or more mentorships can be undertaken concurrently.
- For each Core Area Mentorship, the Animas office supplies curricula outlines to the mentors and trainees. The outline includes objectives, suggested activities and resources, and requirements of trainees. Mentors follow a set of general Animas mentorship guidelines.
- All mentors are also Animas Guides (see their bios on the back page of our current course catalog.)
- Trainees, mentors, and the Program Coordinator work together to make appropriate matches between mentors and trainees. A brief application is required for each mentorship.

Additional Requirements for the Animas Quest Track:

- At least one personal vision fast *during the course* of the SAIP (either with Animas, an approved quest guided by others, or an approved self-guided quest)
- At least three Animas Quest apprenticeships (pre-requisite is your own vision fast, not necessarily with Animas).
- Although not required to complete SAIP, we strongly recommend that you do not guide quests until you obtain proficiencies in camping skills (including leave-no-trace, wilderness travel, and survival), wilderness first aid, orienteering, search and rescue, and emergency communications. Animas does not offer comprehensive training programs in these areas, but we are happy to make recommendations.

Additional Requirements for the Soulcraft Leadership Track:

- A total of at least four Soulcraft Intensives or Soulcraft Journeys (at least one of each)
- Acting as a clan leader or assistant clan leader (after qualifying) on two or more Soulcraft Intensives. Doing so qualifies toward the total of four listed in the first requirement above.

Additional Requirement for Professional Development Track:

- At least two electives on applying Soulcraft to your profession.

THE OPENING OF EYES

*That day I saw beneath dark clouds
the passing light over the water
and I heard the voice of the world speak out,
I knew then, as I had before
life is no passing memory of what has been
nor the remaining pages in a great book
waiting to be read.*

*It is the opening of eyes long closed.
It is the vision of far off things
seen for the silence they hold.*

*It is the heart after years
of secret conversing
speaking out loud in the clean air.*

*It is Moses in the desert
fallen to his knees before the lit bush.
It is the man throwing away his shoes
as if to enter heaven
and finding himself astonished,
opened at last,
fallen in love with solid ground.*

— David Whyte