

The Healing Journey

LEARNING TO FOLLOW OUR INNER VOICE

Reordering the Past

When mid life dawned on me at age forty-nine, I decided that if I was going to find my next creative niche and a life-style suitable to pursuing it, I needed to review the books, papers, sacred objects, and old furniture that I had accumulated and decide what should come along with me into my future. I had to sort, reorganize, and toss. As I bravely committed to doing whatever it took, I didn't have a clue that it would turn into a journey of its own, and such a long one. I am nearly finished sorting and tossing; though in order to finish I must frequently renew my commitment to follow through.

In the beginning, my instinct was to orient to this massive remake by seeing it as a sacred healing journey. The first time I heard the word "journey" in my youth it seemed quaint and old-fashioned, conjuring up visions of covered wagons, high mountains and deep canyons. But I grew to like the way it challenged the concept of efficiency and invited labyrinthine living.

Treating the responsibility of putting my past in order as an adventure of unfolding discovery takes away some of the drudgery; I found that how I view what I have already done has a lot to do with what I think is possible in the future.

I chose the word "journey" to help me overcome a nasty tendency to apply inappropriate judgments to past events. Because focusing on *journeying* rather than *questing* has brought me deeper insights in the past, I reminded myself as I sorted to forego questing for clues that would assure future success. For me this has been a critical distinction. Journeying, though sometimes hard to define, has provided its own clues which can be obscured by too much striving.

When sorting the past, I was soon reminded that I did not always shun striving. Among my possessions there is ample evidence of such desires. But among them exists also the evidence of my own personal spirit. To reconnect with those memories is to find a friend, to bond with my soul rather

than being oblivious to it. It feels like starting all over again, reclaiming independence and possibility, not allowing wishful thinking to overtake my efforts to break through.

The Power of Art

As I worked through my accumulated goods, I came upon drawings from childhood that I had retained through many relocations. They reminded me that art has been my companion for many years. Though a dabbler myself, I have always included in my life the work of others more seasoned in their crafts. I realized that to journey with them has reconnected me with the richness of their art, often created with limited time, energy, and emotional resources, just as mine were.

In particular, art depicting the cross-cultural Female Divine has called to me most of my adult life. To live with these works of art, both ancient and contemporary, is to be in "conversation" with their creators; the works themselves are messages of intimacy from those who have followed their own visionary journeys. These luscious renderings call me to a community of seekers who have felt in touch with the same truths and emotions I have experienced.

Story as Medicine

The power of stories is central to my spiritual journey as well. Stories and symbols have been the bones that have carried me into rhythm. They have aided me in finding solutions to emotional dead ends. During this retrospective period, issues arose that became major events in my makeover because they taught me first-hand how stories can alter situations. For example, we are told that being aware of change as adventure is essential to living fully and gaining necessary perspective on death. This is not the easiest lesson for me when change means losing someone or something I love.

I learned this pointedly when my father announced that he was terminally ill and appointed me the keeper of his spiri-

tual power of attorney because of my work with goddesses. The story of the Yoruban Orisha Oya, who is the Winds of Change, came to him while we were chatting in the hospice. "Oya has been here," he stated matter-of-factly. Imagine that: My father seeing Oya because of a tale I once told him. This reference to a story from Africa acted as a turning point. Accepting his death now made more sense to both of us. Oya alerted us to our mutual journey, his passing from his physical body to pure spirit. As a result, we were able to find ways to help each other through this difficult passage.

Attitude about Possibilities

By taking time to clear away what is spent and reorder what is kept, I am also getting a fresh feeling for the soft demarcation between imagination and reality and how attitude has a great deal to do with what happens. Imagination is a prelude to magic. If we can see something in our mind's eye, we can sometimes manifest it. We can certainly feel it more deeply. I have come to believe that by virtue of the times we live in and the happenings in the world around us, we are all firmly placed in the magic realm now and must approach reality from that vantage point. This grants us many powers that often go untapped because we do not believe we have them.

At times of stress and lack of confidence, I have allowed disbelief to weaken my resolve. But this process of sorting has also reminded me of decisions well-made. I was uncovering joys and sorrows, realities to face that I had managed to bury, but most of all there were new discoveries that updated my memories of the past and jogged creative rearranging of my self-perception.

It has allowed me to reevaluate my memories and loosen my negative judgments about how I handled past situations. Useful ideas have emerged which will stand as my mantras for future decisions, bringing my understanding of the magic embedded in everyday life into sharper relief. Here are a few:

- ❖ Be able to change course when I see the storm coming.
- ❖ Enjoy the luxury of an easy crossing.
- ❖ Respond, without being submissive, to a superior force.
- ❖ Accept my gifts and limitations without fears or regrets.
- ❖ Expand when I feel hopeful.
- ❖ Release when I feel desperate or spent.

Listening to Our Guiding Voice

Another characteristic of my journey is the ever-present internal guiding voice. This voice resists conscious direction and does not try to be in charge. Perhaps this is the voice of personal destiny. But can developing my individuality still be important when pressures to conform are ever-present? Even though this concept of destiny sounds too ancient to successfully contend with the dehumanizing forces of this post-modern age, this voice tells me my individual life *does* matter.

Over the centuries, I know that the Goddess has repeatedly risen up in the consciousness of people who have heard Her call, especially when Her existence, as it is today, is officially denied. As then, it is now; She calls, I respond. I call, she re-

sponds. We talk. She tells me there is work assigned especially to me, and no one else. She reminds me that I will discover it when the time is right.

During the process of traveling through these piles of reminders of my first fifty-five years, Her calls intensified, stimulating me to let a few of my own calls resound loud-and-clear back to Her. She has framed Her responses in ways that make me know She is paying attention to my future. She emphasizes frequently the value of nurturing myself. I have found that these patterns of calls and responses are the way of Nature and my antidote to depression.

The Return

Now that I am approaching the final stages of my sorting, tossing, and reorganizing, I am feeling an internal shift which will manifest externally in its own good time. By reflecting on my past exchanges, I am beginning to sense my future possibilities. By sifting through all "my stuff," I am seeing and feeling the past with new eyes, ears, and heart. I see so many strands that should be woven into the texture of my future life. Will I do this?

I realize that in order to be able to do the work I envision, I have to plunge into it with a good pinch of *will*, just as I did when I was younger. Will was a large part of my journey then; but age has brought a certain fatigue and remorse. However, age also grants its positive lessons. Earth-cosmos-centered spirituality, practiced over time, has brought me the ability to be more satisfied with gradual fulfillment.

Seeing the meanders of my own journey, I note that many times I have allowed myself to come to the center of things, stand in the labyrinth and then move out again to the peripheral places. This is a process of returning into the world to meet others and share what I have gained on my journey.

The return is one of the main purposes of journeying, but it happens only when the time is right. In these times, when the forces of war and conflict have left the wisdom of peacemaking and mutual support in the dust bin of wishful thinking, I have come to accept that my task upon returning will be to offer an *alternate worldview* which does not accept the inevitability of hatred and violence. Now, in the current pregnant moment resulting from this sojourn to look my past in the face, I realize that the future will be full.

As I have journeyed through diverse cultural traditions that honor the female divine, I have gained a fresh view of how the spiritual universe operates. Called again to the knowledge that it is worth the effort needed to communicate these perspectives, the ways to do this will arise. After all, this is what the Mother of Us All, The Spirit of Nature, offers to her devotees: an opportunity to open to the beauty of creation and proclaim peace on earth a realistic possibility. ©

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