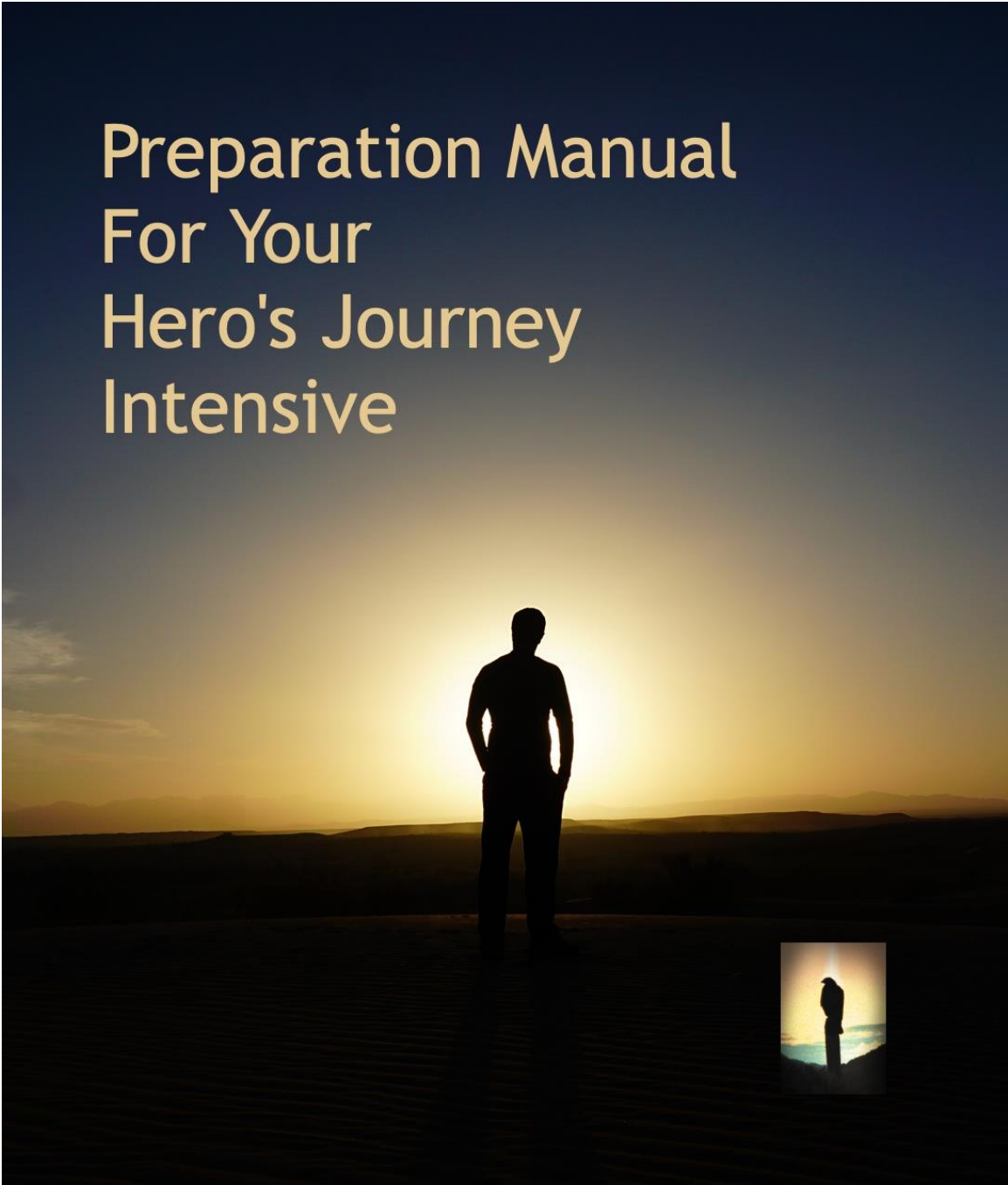


Preparation Manual For Your Hero's Journey Intensive



*"In between living and dreaming there is a third thing:
Waking Up."*

*By Michael G. Mervosh, M.Ed.
Executive Director
Hero's Journey Foundation*



PREPARING FOR YOUR HERO'S JOURNEY INTENSIVE

Ask Me

by William Stafford

*Some time when the river is ice ask me mistakes I have made.
Ask me whether what I have done is my life.
Others have come in their slow way into
my thought, and some have tried to help or to hurt:
ask me what difference
their strongest love or hate has made.*

*I will listen to what you say.
You and I can turn and look
at the silent river and wait. We know
the current is there, hidden; and there are comings
and goings from miles away
that hold the stillness exactly before us.
What the river says,
that is what I say.*



The Hero's Journey Intensive is inspired by our passion for ancient wisdom traditions, as well as the mythic teachings of Joseph Campbell. This particular journey-intensive will provide you with a unique opportunity in your life – a deeply personal experience of crossing a certain threshold in your life – one that has never quite been crossed before.

This type of journeying is a kind of 'rite of passage' – it takes you further into yourself as a man. This week-long experience may be unlike anything you have previously encountered. This is also a 'passage' that is taking place during an ongoing global pandemic, something none of us has known before in our lifetime.

Your journey intensive will also open your interior towards past experiences in your life that have both shaped you and limited you. We do this so we can face the present

moment in completely new and fresh ways, with others as active, living witnesses to the stories we share about the lives we have lived.



Introduction

As you begin reading this preparation guide, consider that the journey is already beginning for you as well. (It actually started with your attention to an inner calling, something inside that pulls you towards a larger and more meaningful life.)

You will be taking leave of your daily life, setting it completely aside for one week's time. You'll be letting go of things that are most familiar and best known to you on the surface of your life. You will begin crossing threshold after threshold into the unknown - again and again - separating yourself from everything you have already done, and what you already know.

You will enter new territory that invites the unknown to come forward inside yourself. Along with it, you face the unrealized potential for your own life, lying in wait to be lived, already there within you.

You can be assured of having adventures and ordeals along the way.

You will have important encounters with men in your small ally group, and you will experience unforeseen synchronicities as they unfold right before you. You are likely to encounter a newfound inner strength, precisely when challenging circumstances arise that make this strength necessary, in order to move forward with your life.

You will be surprised by the life-renewing encounters and essential conversations that take place. They will be beyond your mind's capacity to imagine from where you are right now.

If you are daring enough to open to the unknown, you will find a sense of 'life itself' coming forward to meet you, and a 'coming alive' happening within you. This force of life can become ignited as a loving and sustaining power, capable of bringing new life and new action into fruition.

Finally, you will be tasked with returning to your daily life and your familiar circumstances with new perspective, and with a fresh differentiation from the world around you. You will have the challenge of bringing your aliveness to the things and the people in your life that matter to you – and facing things that need to change.

The journey ahead will be an inevitable, remarkable, and unforgettable passage.

Let's get ready.



The Call to Adventure

*One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice...*

- Mary Oliver

Joseph Campbell said that those living in the Western world have both the freedom and the obligation of finding out what their destiny is. What must we do if we want to find out what the deeper meaning and purpose is for our life? And what is it that seems to be stopping us?

- *Have you become over-attached to the security and sameness of what is familiar?*
- *Have you become overly concerned with how you will be provided for, or how you will be able to make it in the world? Have you lost sight of what you have to provide to the world?*
- *Have you become more hesitant or afraid to go out beyond what you have already learned or accomplished?*
- *Are you afraid of repeating a failure, or afraid to face what you've failed at over and over again? Do deep-seated, unspoken insecurities still haunt you?*
- *What is it, exactly, that keeps you from going deeper and further into the unknown, beyond the world you already know?*

In a busy, overwhelmed, conflicted and distracting world, you may not ever really have to go for the real and lived adventure of *your own life*. As an adult human being, you are free to ignore this life or avoid this life. You can refuse to answer the call to the one true life awaiting you.

An inner calling always takes you out beyond the world you have known. It gets you moving, has you searching for a new way, offers you a new direction, gives a new focus – or perhaps a new skill, or a new resource coming from within the depths of yourself.

There is something within us all, something that makes you want to do the necessary inner exploration – doing what it takes - to find what you alone have within you, and in the end, to make use of what you find within, to be of service to life.

In his book *Pathways to Bliss*, Campbell poses this question: “*What is the great thing for which you would sacrifice your life? What makes you do what you do? What is the call of your life to you – do you know it?*”

How can you align, right now, with a new beginning? Learn to let go of self-serving fantasies and childlike wishes that require nothing of you. Turn your attention towards a deeper sense of waking up inside to something that has grounded-ness and gravity, something that will spur you towards fresh action.

Bill Plotkin has this to say about what happens when you hear the call to a new life:

1. *It is not an avoidance of responsibility, but rather a facing of something difficult, something unknown and even frightening that summons you.*

Far from feeling like an opportunity for escape, a call feels more like a compelling need to face an important challenge, to walk out into the night and toward a storm. You have a profound sense that *something essential is waiting for you in the midst of a wilderness* and your one true life depends on your being willing and able to find it.

2. *It has paradoxical features – like déjà vu, where you know you belong to it, even though you have never before encountered it and can't really explain it.*

Joseph Campbell said the call feels “*profoundly familiar to the unconscious – though unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality*”. Christopher Bollas calls this ‘*the unthought known*’ - a wordless awareness of one’s most important lived experiences that is indescribable in words, but that nonetheless influences one’s thought and behavior throughout one’s life.

3. *You have the feeling that the chapter of your life that you had just been living is suddenly, somehow over, whether you wanted it to be or not, and usually, not.*

What was formerly meaningful becomes ‘strangely emptied of value’. What once brought you motivation and fulfillment no longer does, and there is a strange dis-orientation that happens inside, as if you are suddenly adrift. This has nothing to do with determination, desire or will. This is an indication that a new orientation is needed, and must be heeded.

4. *The call is almost always unexpected, and sometimes even unwanted.*

Yet you will feel summoned by destiny, as if your own future has just grabbed you by the collar and is tugging you forward. This disturbing feeling is what moves you beyond your fate. You will feel summoned forth, pulled forward, in ways that feel unexpected but compelling. It doesn’t make sense to the ego, but to the soul there is a strong feeling of it just being right.



Crossing the Threshold

*Gamble everything for love,
If you're a true human being.
If not, leave this gathering.
Half-heartedness doesn't reach into majesty.*

-Rumi

A meaningful adventure cannot be entered into through the typical mental thinking that happens in your head. If you try to approach this upcoming journey - one worthy of your true self - with your old and familiar mental reasonings influencing you, you will fail in your endeavors miserably and quickly. You will begin to talk yourself of taking this leap of faith.

The gamble Rumi speaks of in his poem is really no gamble at all, but it does involve a sense of *risking something worthwhile*. You must be able to see that seeking security, in the end, becomes your final danger. The need for the security of familiar routines will lull you back to the sameness of things that *don't really work*.

The reason something in you would seek out a hero's journey is because some part of you recognizes that 'security seeking' is on the low end of the evolutionary scale. In fact, it is often the counter-force to any type of transformative endeavor.

It goes without saying that there are definite times and places to play it safe in life. There are times for being perfectly rational, times to go along with the conventions of life. But these times will not be memorable, they will not help to define who you really are. Only the tasks of re-vitalizing your life, of writing into your own story, of living into your own personal myth, can do that.

The toll to be paid, the reward to be gained, comes when you *finally* cross the threshold into the unknown, and risk a meaningful adventure. The potential lying in wait within you can help you cultivate an authentic, wholehearted, loving presence. During any worthy adventure, sometimes you will be required to become more yielding and tender-hearted, and at other times, to become more resolved and fiercer, to stand your ground.

If you lack these complementary capacities, you are likely to turn back in the face of any stark threat to your sense of security, especially in the heat of emotional intensity, and during encounters that make you look inward, and dive more deeply into yourself.

THRESHOLD GUARDIANS

*In this high place
it is as simple as this,
Leave everything you know behind.*

*Step toward the cold surface,
say the old prayer of rough love
and open both arms.*

*Those who come with empty hands
will stare into the lake astonished,
there, in the cold light
reflecting pure snow,*

the true shape of your own face.

– David Whyte

There are inner guardians in the psyche that will challenge you whenever you want to move past all that you already know. They require you to *'get to know your heart, get real, be a vital human being, live from your own experience and truth, or go back from where you came - go back home to the safe and familiar ways of thinking'*.

Whenever you are caught up in the mental grasping of abstractions and conceptualizations, you can't pass through to the depth of your own realness of your own soul. You are someone who has simply confused the menu with the meal.

On this particular *Journey Intensive*, we are asking you to leave behind the man you already know too well. Let go of all your accomplishments and failures, all your ways of identifying yourself that are no longer life giving. None of this will be of use where you are headed.

The familiar habit of revealing certain details about your personal history can easily limit you or pre-define you – things that we refer to as "credit card information" - so upon your arrival to our West Virginia basecamp, *please keep these ways of standard socialization to yourself*. We have other ways we'd like to get to know you.

So please refrain from immediately revealing your age, your occupation, your home place, or other usual identifying information that would 'pidgeon-hole' you in any way to yourself, or label you to another. You will also be asked to symbolically surrender your attachment to linear time.

Keeping track of the time will only pull you into the familiar dance you have with *measuring everything* - by time increments, by accomplishments, by the ego constant demands and wishes - and distract you from a larger dimension of experience, the kind of 'timeless' space of the 'here and now', that offers immediacy and freshness to our living. That is the doorway we are looking for, and that we plan to pass through, over and over again.

- *We will focus on being attentive only to the moment that unfolds before us and between us. We do our best to leave everything else behind.*

The Spirit Of The Unknown

What is being asked of you now, before coming to our basecamp, is to practice entering into the *spirit* of the unknown -- acknowledging the presence of the great Mystery of life, and to reflect for a bit on what it means to live beyond the usual - surrendering to the potent and inevitable uncertainty that is to be found there.

This begins the first of many symbolic letting go processes that are required for a worthwhile hero's journey. You might better recognize how tight your stranglehold might be on controlling your environment in any given moment, in service of feeling comfortable and "secure".

- *When you have a clear awareness that you are literally "stepping off the paved road", going where there is no clear path, you allow a certain alertness and "immediacy" to enter into your present moment existence.*

This is what begins to bring you alive to the world around you once again. Without crossing this threshold, without this relaxing of your habitual mental thinking, you will tend to live 'a life of quiet desperation', says Thoreau.

We are all quite capable of living, for months and years, in a kind of life-sapping sameness of routine, falling asleep in the safety of bland, lifeless caricatures of manhood that are culturally sanctioned and reinforced. You can be easily seduced by yourself, as well as the world around you, into taking up a path that is so well established, that your senses will no longer be stimulated or re-awakened.

Crossing the threshold from your everyday world into the non-ordinary time and space of a *Hero's Journey* means entering an arena of **uncertainty** that comes with any true adventure. Fortunately, during this prolonged time of a threatening global health pandemic, uncertainty is precisely what we all have to learn to live through.

Within this arena of uncertainty, you can actually discover yourself in a new way, and

make new meaning for your life. You can risk entry into a new way of being that is more life-giving and sustaining. You can reconnect to the potency of your own masculine self – all by traveling this path that leads to the 'as-yet-unknown' in you.

- *New life is an inevitable outcome from any courageous act of surrender.*

Don Juan said it well to Carlos Castenada: *"The path of the heart requires a full gesture, a degree of abandon that can be terrifying. (But) only then is it possible to achieve a sparkling metamorphosis... and there is just one simple thing wrong with you - you think you have plenty of time."*

To prepare you for a deeper threshold crossing into your upcoming journey, *you need to reflect on six questions*. Take some time and make some space to think about them. Wonder about them for a while, don't just immediately start answering them. Listen closely to your heart and not your head; let something simmer inside. Then gradually put together at least two full typewritten pages summarizing your reflections.

Your authentic response to each of The Six Questions is to be emailed to us Friday, July 9th, well before the arrival point for your Journey. Your thoughtful responses will help us connect with you more quickly and allow us to be more effective in our interactions with you.

Use each question as an arrowhead that points the way to some of the more obscure truths that lie within the depths of your being. You may want to write more about these in the *Personal Journal* you are required to keep and bring along with you to the Journey.



The Six Questions

1. What Brings Me To This Particular Journey At This Exact Time In My Life?

- *What events of significance are presently taking place in your life?*

What kind of transitions are you facing right now? What specific details of your lived experience feels important for us to know, and important for you to be talking about? What is it that makes taking this type of journey feel important or necessary for you?

2. What Is It Within Me That I Need To Understand or Know Better?

- *What are you seeking to discover, change or heal within yourself?*

What particular aspect of your humanity still feels small, broken, foreign or alienated to you? What do you long to know better about yourself? What kind of passage do you feel in need of right now?

3. What Is the Greatest Obstacle Or Threat That I Am Currently Facing In My Life?

- *What is it within you that is holding you back most from living the life you know you need to be living?*

What is the specific obstacle, what is the particular fear - that keeps you from getting more into life, or that makes you avoid your life? What desire do you have, that you resist or run from the most? What is a specific example of an insurmountable challenge that you are currently facing in your life, if that indeed is the case?

4. What Is My Greatest Strength & How I Am Willing To Bring It To This Journey?

- *Pinpoint and name one character strength that you know you have in you.*

Speak to a strength or character trait within yourself that you know you and others can draw from and rely on when life becomes difficult. Can you give a specific example of how you are presently making use of this strength in your life? How would you be willing to use this strength to be of service to your fellow journeyers?

5. How Do I Need To Be Supported During My Hero's Journey Intensive?

- *Tell us honestly how you feel about receiving opportunities to get direct support from others.*

In what ways are you open to being supported, and in what ways do you have difficulty being supported? Does support feel foreign or untrustworthy to you? Do you feel in any way unworthy of being supported? Is there a specific way that you would like us to support you during your journey?

6. How Do I Need To Be Challenged On My Hero's Journey Intensive?

- *Tell us honestly how you feel about being encouraged and challenged to go where you haven't gone before.*

In what ways are you open to being given challenges to grow by others? In what ways do you have difficulty with perceiving being challenged? In what specific way

would you like us to consider challenging you during your upcoming journey?



Entering the Forest

*Stand still, the trees ahead and bushes beside you are not lost.
Wherever you are is called 'here', and you must treat it like a powerful stranger...*

- David Wagoner

Now that you have committed yourself to this upcoming journey, and as you cross the various thresholds that take you to 'a point of no return', it is important to understand that an important 'un-doing' process will start to take place. You will need to let yourself experience a type of shedding or letting go; this must begin to take place in some way within you, whether you want it to happen or not.

As you enter the unknown, you will start to find yourself in unfamiliar circumstances in your life, and in unfamiliar positions with those around you. During this phase of the journey, you will temporarily lose your perspective and your grounding. You'll have certain 'misadventures'; you'll find yourself caught up in growing irritations and distractions. This is all a necessary part of the journey process.



FACING OLD FEARS

Also be aware that you can be easily led astray by your oldest and most familiar fears during your preparation time. It is normal to suddenly feel lost or 'unlike yourself' for a while. You will even be literally losing and misplacing things from time to time.

You will invariably feel a sense of disorientation at any point where you go beyond what you are most familiar with. Again, this is a normal part of the journeying process, it is to be expected, and it can't be avoided.

When any old fear resurfaces, keep in mind that your fear is just like those gargoyles that sit above the entrances to all the ancient holy shrines and medieval gothic churches. You have to face them and walk past them in order to be worthy of entering any place of wholeness, or any sacred or holy ground - whether this is within you, or in the world at large.

Old fears will start to question your abilities, your better judgment. They cause self-doubt to arise, challenge your courage, and urge you to 'turn back' to the familiar that

you can be sure of.

You will tend to be stalked by these oldest fears whenever you begin to sincerely renew yourself, as fear will cling most desperately to your old identity and try to prevent its being shed. Your fears will manifest and cloak themselves in the form of old and familiar resistances.

Resistance to any kind of change is to be expected, and it manifests in a multitude of ways. You might re-experience old feelings of lonely isolation or painful alienation; you might even feel further away than ever from your connection to *'a path with heart'*.

In these challenging moments, taking on this upcoming journey might seem foolish, misguided or suddenly unimportant. For instance, the journey planning might start to feel like too much of a hassle or an ordeal. You find yourself saying, "*Why am I doing this to myself*", forgetting for a moment that you are doing this *for* yourself.

Whenever resistance shows up, you will not unsurprisingly also encounter obstacles that seem to reflect your inner fears - life (or the lives of those around you) begins to feel as if it is falling apart – rather than falling together in a new and unfamiliar way. This is when you are most vulnerable to self-protective retreat, withdrawal or avoidance, reverting back to security seeking and to the most familiar of ways that, in the long run, don't work anymore.

Once again, remember that these fears and resistances are inevitable, and an integral part of any hero's adventure. Thoreau says, *'Not until we are genuinely lost do we finally have the opportunity to find and understand ourselves'*. Do your best to go easy on yourself as you face any undoing, disorientation and resistance.

Naming your fears out loud is important to do. If your nervousness or anxiousness starts speaking loudly to you, give these fears a voice to another you can confide in and trust. What is speakable becomes more manageable.

Deep resistance is often a strange kind of sentinel or guardian, offering confirmation that you are approaching your true, life-affirming path. It's a sign that provides you with a test, because your new path is not yet revealed to you.

So what our inner gargoyles are really saying is "*bring your fears with you*". Compassion, attention and support from others *will be there for you as well*, each step of the way — beyond your ability to foresee or fathom - as you go forward toward the new life awaiting you.



Allies and Synchronicity

*"You know, the jackass doesn't have much sensibility.
But even he gains spirit from the company of his own kind.
But when the jackass crosses the desert alone,
how many more blows it takes to get him there.
Now this is what this poem says to you –
if you're not a jackass, don't cross the desert alone!"*

- Rumi

"If you follow your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in your field of bliss, and they open doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be."

- Joseph Campbell



Because the shadow side of the hero believes that he has to do everything by himself, that he should also be able to do any task well by himself, you are likely to not factor into the equation the importance and impact of allies and helpers that you will meet along your journey. You may also not be able to imagine ways of receiving synchronistic support just as you need it most, a feeling of being in a peculiar alliance with the intangible world of spirit.

If you are being true to the pursuit of your own calling, the universe will at times provide you with numerous sequences of coincidental events that open up doors and opportunities that previously weren't available to you - or you didn't previously notice them. Such is the surreptitious nature of synchronicity. It requires you to get current and pay attention *right now*, not dwelling on well-worn stories or familiar wounds from the past - all that will limit you and stop you from going forward.

Even now in these days of preparation, you may suddenly happen upon a particular awe-inspiring event with peculiar circumstances that surprises you - emerging from the chaos and confusion in your life. Watch for this occurring in your days ahead, now that you have committed to going forward with your upcoming journey.

During the *Journey Intensive*, you will also have direct opportunities to examine your way of relating to the support and accompaniment of other men as *allies*. You will have the chance to experience the powerful and life-sustaining ways of *mutuality* among

kindred people - the strongly felt sense of a shared and desired connection that supports the life of all. These will be building blocks for a sense of belonging and worth.

Of course, you can also experience how directly helping others keeps you from a spiral of self-preoccupation that feeds inadequacies and fears of failure whenever you are being tested by life.



The Belly of the Beast (Initiation & Surrender)

*There is an unknown territory, a mysterious area where
the presence of death does not equal the end of life....*

*The point is to be able to undergo a little death
in order to find the genuine thread of one's life.*

- Michael Meade



Any intensive experience that pulls you deeply into the unknown can become an 'initiatory experience'. These are life-altering events that fundamentally transform you as you go through a kind of metamorphosis of being. You will begin to feel a profound letting go taking place, that happens beyond your will to make happen, or you will to stop it from happening.

You feel like you are losing something important, something that you have been deeply attached to, and you descend, being taken deeper into your own interior world.

But you will also simultaneously feel like you are also finding yourself, as you are entering into a wondrously new and more evolved and integrated way of being, as *you are woven into an essential part of something that is more than just yourself.*

You may be approaching your upcoming Journey by being propelled by the overwhelming force of your desire. You may be hesitantly coming to this Journey, having had enough of your old ways, but with no faith in a new way yet. You may be presently more determined than ever before, and feel ready to make a shift out from an old, fixed way of being that is not in service of your future.

INITIATORY ENCOUNTERS

A deep initiation, or a 'belly' experience, can occur at any given point in your *Hero's Journey Intensive*. It may happen during one of our wilderness experiential elements, or during one of our evening council circles. It may come during a time of deep solitude, or in a conversation or encounter with another man, of a kind that never happened before. It may happen through a rich and meaningful dream sequence during your journey.

A surrender into '*the belly of things*' can happen at any random moment when you are caught 'off guard', when your ego has relaxed. But it can also happen through an acquired discipline of '*living fully in the present moment*' – in any moment that you in which time slows down, and you remain fully present and attentive to what you allow yourself to be immersed in.

- *An initiation experience is likely to be intimately linked to an encounter where you feel yourself being swallowed or enveloped by an inner or outward challenge.*

The "beast" represents a part of the psyche that is coming forward to be awakened, digested, or refined - and then, transformed. In ancient times, it was said that beasts represented the sacred, that presence which, ultimately, does not want to be controlled by us.

The experience of being consumed by an old fear is like getting *swallowed* into the belly of the beast. You then have to learn what it has to teach you there, and then find your way out of it, without seeing the way in front of you clearly.

An entry into 'the belly of the beast' may also come about by being overcome by tremendous love and support, *surrendering* over to a new and larger territory of unifying one-ness, and then finding your way back to an individual sense of yourself that is in good relation to *a much larger sense of participation in the world* – a new type of relatedness.

Regardless of the method or form it embodies, the initiatory experience of ego surrender engages us in a dynamic face-to-face encounter with long sought after parts of our greater self, or true self, far beyond the ego's ability to predict or control.



MAKING A SACRIFICE

In many of the ancient mythological stories of the journey, the hero figure is often required to make a great personal sacrifice. The act of sacrifice, and of surrendering the self over to something greater is a sign of honorable intention, demonstrating that the journey is not purely for your own personal benefit and gain-- *but that your gain is to be for the benefit of all life.*

Making a personal sacrifice is often necessary for higher consciousness to awaken. The act of sacrificing something of value often brings us in direct contact with grace and mercy.

By parting with something of real value, we can make room to receive the new way - and return home with a clearer and vital connection to our true inner treasure. This kind of ritual is deeply memorable. It changes us on a fundamental level; our lived experience is that we will never be the same.

THE GIVEAWAY

During your *Hero's Journey Intensive*, you will pay tribute to this act of humility through the ritual of *The Giveaway Ceremony*.

The giveaway acknowledges the importance of active participation in a generous circulation of energy, of entering into the wonder, the mystery, and the renewing vitality that is 'bestowed' upon the giver, which also goes out to the receiver.

With a genuine giveaway act, the boundary blurs between the giver and receiver and they become indistinguishable. In these moments, the giver, the receiver and those who are witnesses to the exchange - all experience a deep and abiding well-being in body and mind.

Any thought, behavior or material substance that stays with us beyond its time, begins to weigh us down and diminish our vitality. This *holding on*, ultimately rooted in fear, and an over-investment in sameness, limits our creative and generous self-expression, and reduces our capacity for new manifestations.

To remain alive and vital, we must be willing and able to continually outgrow ourselves, and give of ourselves in ways that are ever renewing of ourselves. We practice the art of surrendering into the natural ease and joy of this process, giving from a place of inner fullness, and not giving in order to get. The paradoxical lesson we learn is that the giving itself *is* the receiving. Living the adventure of an authentic journey moves you forward and brings you alive.

In choosing the gift you will offer to *The Giveaway Ceremony*, be guided by your deep desire to be vitally alive, and free to live from authentic self-expression. Take the risk of letting go of something of significant value that has *stood still* for too long in your possession.

Choose something that has, at one point in your life, gifted you abundantly with its beauty, meaning and significance. Choose something that may likewise do the same now, for another.

Let your choosing take you to the edge of your comfort zone - unlike choosing a book, for example, that might be easily replaced. Choose something that matters to you, so that giving it away creates a fresh void in your life – a space for new vitality that is seeking its way to you.

It is essential to prepare for this ceremony by giving significant time and thought to the object from your personal life you will give away. If you are stymied, *we suggest you make a list of five personal items of value that you think you could never part with* - and pick one from that list.



Discovery of Your Boon

"Ah, dear friend, need I say, but to the brim my heart was full! I made not vows, but vows were then made for me. Bond unknown to me was given, that I should be singing greatly, a dedicated spirit. And on I walked in blessedness which even yet remains."

- William Wordsworth

The boon is about receiving *'the pearl beyond all price'* for a meaningful and worthy navigation through your hero's journey adventure. It is the discovery of an embodied sense of *vital life force energy*, often co-arising with penetrating insight, awareness and irony.

The boon will be accompanied by a sense of surprise, wonder and awe. It will feel as if you have received or discovered something *'beyond belief'*. It has the felt sense of right place, right timing and a deeply peaceful state of being, a sense of wholeness beyond all human comprehension.

This inner discovery is an experience that is very intimate. It is like that of a deeply personal visit from a divine presence that cannot ever be anticipated or described, yet could not in any way be ignored. It is as if eternity itself has bent down from above to enter you, as Campbell says, down in the field of time - which can only be found in the *here and now*, in the incarnate world, a fully lived experience of the moment.

Perhaps this is how eternity awaits us all. The boon is not something to wish for only once before you die. It is something to journey for, again and again, while you are still living. The boon will become apparent to you, as you are awakened enough by living into the Hero's Journey myth.

BEING CAPABLE OF THE UNEXPECTED

What brings forth the boon for each of us? Genuinely and wholeheartedly going through all the prior stages of the journey does this. Then the boon is inevitable, although it is always unforeseen, unexpected and unknowable in advance. The boon is always a surprise to you when it arrives, and it is always a joy to experience.

Through the gradualness of surrendering, and the letting go of your ego's hold on the experience of living, the soul finds its way to shine forth – not on your terms, but only in accordance with your ability to respond to the call to adventure, and by the subsequent experience of a deep mystery working its way into you, and unfolding through you.

We can't ever guarantee how, or even if, this will take place for you, but we can assure you that the less you try to make it happen, and the more you let go of your will – the more likely it is that it will come for you.

The boon seems to emerge in just the right time and in its own way, yet it will be deeply rewarding and meaningful to *you* whenever it arrives. The dawn is often right after the darkest hour, right after the deepest exploration of the unknown. You don't have to understand or even believe this process; you just have to be available to experience it.

The poet R.S. Thomas can bring this notion forth better than we can:

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realize now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying*

*on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

- R.S. Thomas



The Return Home

*"In loving the spiritual,
you cannot despise the earthly.
The purpose of the journey is compassion.
When you have come past the pairs of opposites,
you have reached compassion.
The goal is to bring the jewel back to the world,
to join the two things together.
We are not there until we
can say "yea" to it all."*

- Joseph Campbell

The return home is likely to be the most challenging part of the journey for you. Integrating the journey takes time. Months, at least. Integration happens on its own time, but you will also need help and support to see to it that a proper 'digestion process' takes place. Ultimately, any initiatory journey you take has to be digested slowly and over time, and then, it spontaneously starts being lived from *within* you.

You will find yourself being presented with the opportunity and the challenge to bring back something of significant value to your family, friends, community, work, and way of life. The gift of your boon, which returns home with you, is the larger and more awakened *presence* that you will have discovered in the passage you made through the adventures and ordeals on your *Journey Intensive*.

This new presence in your being will uplift all conditions of your life at home, and it will orient your heart more fully toward what you have to offer to the world around you.

- *This dynamic meeting between the enlarged world of your own presence, cultivated within the sacred time and space of the hero's journey, and the ordinary world and the life that you left behind, must be given considerable attention and care upon your return.*

After all is said and done, the uplifting of the everyday world is the ultimate purpose of the Hero's Journey.

As previously stated, this phase of the journey requires your full attention in order to reap the full harvest of your efforts. Otherwise, the rewards and benefits of your Journey Intensive can quickly recede out of your awareness.

We strongly recommend that you clear some free time for yourself immediately after the intensive. This is not easy to do, but it is one reason why we end on a Saturday instead of a Sunday. If you are currently employed, and if it is at all possible, consider taking Monday off work as well.

Some participants find that bringing their Hero's Journey Intensive experience into some personal sessions with a capable counselor or therapist is a considerable help in the re-incorporation process.

It is also helpful to keep the awareness and movement of your journey alive by continuing to journal about your ongoing hero's journey at home, as well as staying in touch with fellow Journey participants.

- *The Hero's Journey Integration Program also provides a deeply supportive and sustaining container for keeping the hero's journey process alive at home. It is done through monthly online sessions with your Ally Group and your Group Facilitator.*

Remember that it will take a number of months, perhaps even a year or two, to fully integrate this upcoming experience into your own new way of being. It will be of immeasurable help to imagine the time and effort leading up to and following this Journey as being integral to the Journey itself.



~ OTHER PREPARATIONS ~

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

If you are not currently physically active, it is recommended that you start dedicating at least a half hour of basic physical activity each day, and more vigorous activity at least three times a week. Do some type of aerobic activity such as brisk walking, jogging, or yoga.

Movement – actively engaging and moving your body through space - will be an essential factor during the weeklong intensive, a necessary counter-balance to being sedentary in group councils held each day. It is important that you get yourself outdoors and get moving regularly in preparation for our intensive week.

Choose something manageable that you could enjoy. Enroll in a class if you need the motivation and support. It is best to choose an activity that integrates movement with conscious awareness. Start now, so you continue this movement practice to support your integration, immediately following your completion of the Journey Intensive.

- *Transformation must take place in and through the body if it is to be of any effective use.*



READING

Here is a list of books that can support your preparation for the Hero's Journey Intensive. None are necessary, but they may be helpful in providing some inspiration and focus for your preparation.

Primary Recommendations:

- *The Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living*, By Diane Osbon.
- *Pathways To Bliss*, by Joseph Campbell.
- *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*, by James Hollis.

Additional Recommendations:

Perhaps just choose one or two that stand out to you...

- *Nature and the Human Soul*, by Bill Plotkin.
- *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, by Joseph Campbell.
- *Fate & Destiny*, by Michael Meade
- *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor*, by Joseph Campbell.
- *Sacred Manhood, Sacred Earth*, by Joseph Jastrab.
- *Who Do We Choose To Be?* By Margaret Wheatley
- *Iron John*, by Robert Bly.

You can also do shorter reading by going to our website, to the *Inspiration* section, and reading the Hero's Journey essays written by Michael Mervosh. You will find one for each stage of the Journey. www.herosjourneyfoundation.org

Finally, above all else:

*Stay as close as you can to your desire for a life that is
vital to your true nature, and likewise
could enliven the whole of life.*

*Make preparations for your journey as if
the quality of your future life depends upon it.
Because it does.*

