CHAPTER 20: THE MYTHIC JOURNEY PROCESS: CREATING YOUR OWN STORIES TO HEAL YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known: we have only to follow the thread of the hero path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god: where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; and where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.[1]

— Joseph Campbell

In Chapter 1, I discussed how one of the field of psychotherapy's critiques about meditation and the emerging energy-based psychologies was that they lacked a depth psychological perspective and methodology. Throughout this book I have shown that there is more to energy-based psychologies than the technologies of tapping and muscle testing. The whole realm of Qigong (including breath, movements, postures, and awareness) as well as symbolic process modes of inner work can be included under the emerging "re-membering" of the ancient roots of modern psychology. Ancient sacred wisdom traditions are key elements to unlocking the treasure house that is the human psyche.

In the 1970s and 1980s, my work in integrating psychotherapy and the Western mystery traditions culminated in the development of the *Mythic Journey Process*. This process was first outlined in the last chapter of my book, *Trials of the Heart* (Mayer, 1994), and is now updated here. Among the various psycho-mythological and symbolic process methods used nowadays to facilitate healing, this method is unique in how it is not as tightly structured as guided imagery, and therefore allows one's own tale to freely emerge. However, the method also has a structure to it that provides river-banks through which one's unconscious stream of imagery can flow and be guided.

Mythology: The Key to the Door of Your Psyche

Ancient myths are becoming new resources for the human venture. Joseph Campbell's written works and interviews gave the study of world mythologies increasing respect. James Hillman, Sam Keen, Robert Bly (1990), and a vast number of Jungian-oriented authors have shown the importance of ancient myths and storytelling to bring soul to modern culture.[2] It seems that we are in an age of mythological renaissance. It is a time when the mythic "Sword of Excalibur" can rise again — a time for reviving the gods and goddesses of imagination to give meaning to modern life.

Throughout the ages, mythic stories have been passed down describing the deep inner transformations of the psyche. We've seen how these legends can show us oceans of possibili-

ties within us and help us begin the odyssey that will transform our souls. Today, with the many different religious and mythic traditions, we are in a unique position — we are able to set sail and find our own myths on an even larger ocean. We can create our own mythic journeys from all past mythic literature and our imaginations.

Our very lives are mythic journeys, and when we depart, it is not our bones that will be left, it is our stories. They are our link to immortality. Yet the importance of stories and myths have not been integrated as a formal part of our education.[3] We are told stories by our parents and teachers, but we are not trained in their deeper mysteries: their ability to soothe the soul, transform, awaken, and heal us.

To understand the essence of the healing power of myth, we must first explore its primary ingredient — symbol. A symbol is to a story what a note is to a song. Edward Edinger has pointed out that the early use of the Greek word "*symbolon*" referred to a stick that was used in a trading agreement.[4] To mark the transfer of ownership of an object from one person to another, a stick was divided in half to symbolize the sale. Just as these sticks were reminders of a greater unity, symbols today help reconnect us with something larger than ourselves.

Everything is part of a greater whole. Just as a lung is part of a human body and its identity must be understood within that whole context, so we as human beings, in order to fully comprehend our identities must connect ourselves to a wider whole. The secret of myth's healing power comes from how it helps us to create a likeness between us and an aspect of the surrounding universe. This likeness is a particular use of symbol — a metaphor.

In the *Mythic Journey Process*, we create a likeness between our current life situation and a person or situation of ancient times, and we make room for the power of imagination to enter through this likeness.

Identifying and Overcoming Our Inner Demons

Whether you are the most positive, rational thinker in the world or a traditional religious person who is against iconic pagan imagery, we all have our problems, obstacles, and demons lurking under the veneer of our lives. It is these archetypal aspects of the human condition that the *Mythic Journey Process* brings forth. By facing the particular "demons" behind our psychological problems we can deal with suffering at its root (Hillman, 1975). Picturing the form of the demon, and how we will address it, changes confrontation into adventure. The demon may turn out to be the monster of our fear. The giant may be our inertia or suppressed power. By directly facing and dealing with the demon, we can rediscover our lost selves and gain access to the treasure of our inherent nature.

Throughout time, myths recorded the numerous ways that heroes have confronted various demons. Whether it was by attacking, wrestling, or feeding them, each encounter offers us an approach to a present-day demon.

Petrifying Fear: The Story of Perseus and Medusa

Hearing a story, which contains a problem like ours helps us face our demons and feel less alone in our suffering. For example, maybe our partner continually gets angry when we come home late

from work. Perhaps we fear that the relationship is endangered because we need our freedom, or perhaps we feel smothered but are petrified to discuss it because our partner reacts so strongly.

A mythic analogy to this situation can be found in the tale of Perseus and Medusa, where we are Perseus, and Medusa represents our angry partner. In this myth, Medusa's face was so horrifying that it had the power to petrify into stone the people who dared look at it. Using the example above and reading this story, we may see that maybe we are not dealing with our own personal neurosis, but with a wider, universal issue — the petrifying fear of a powerful figure. Instead of feeling alone and isolated, we can feel linked with those ancient heroes who struggled with monstrous embodiments of the same forces with which we are now coping. What once felt like neurotic suffering becomes an adventure as we explore how our problems were dealt with in the mythic past.

In order to save Perseus from being turned into stone, Athena, goddess of wisdom, gave him a shield to reflect Medusa's image. By looking into the shield instead of looking directly at her face, Perseus was able to approach Medusa and behead her. We might look to the myth of Perseus and Medusa and wonder, "What in my life could function like Perseus's shield?"

We can reflect on our situation aided by the distance our own inner shield gives us. Let's imagine that we realized that in the past we felt petrified of hurting our mother or being rejected by her when she disapproved of and limited our behavior. We gave in to her demands as a child in order to survive. And perhaps we developed a pattern of constantly giving in to others' demands for fear of hurting them or being rejected by them. Metaphorically speaking, we may have turned to stone inside, acceding to the demand, but with a stiff upper lip, resenting the restriction. A pattern may have developed to withdraw in other ways in our relationships.

Reflecting on our partner's image in the mirrored shield, we might be able to understand his or her issues better. Perhaps our partner was feeling a loss of control in the relationship or wasn't feeling needed or cared about. Reflecting upon what caused the anger rather than reacting to it, we can "behead the monster," i.e. diffuse our reactivity.

Reflecting in such a way in the midst of seemingly monstrous emotions requires the proper implements. Perseus was given an adamantine sickle and winged sandals by Hermes, and a helmet of invisibility by Pluto. We must learn what these implements mean and learn how to use them so that we are prepared when we meet the Medusas in our life. In the above example, perhaps the sword's parrying ability would be useful in its ability to point to the real issue, slice through the mire, and to find the truth of the underlying feelings.

Perseus's sickle was adamantine (made of the hardest stone). Today we know that the hardest stone is diamond, but any stone that is very hard has sustained years of pressure by the earth's forces. If it is a diamond, it has become clarified. Perhaps the myth is telling us that we must be patient in regards to the hard-to-bear forces in our situation. There is a purpose behind the pressure — to create something that is clear and of great value. The image of this sword tells us that we must combine the qualities of hardness (not being weak about the "hard truth") with the softness of a sickle's curve. On the one hand, we cannot passively cave into our partner's demands, we must be strong in our assertion that there is more here than meets the eye. But the soft lunar curve must also be present in the discussion, reflecting on both

partners' underlying issues. A straight-edged sword approach will not do. If we point our sword in a judgmental way, the mythic solution will not be found.

The imagery tells us that at a certain point in exploring our different viewpoints, Hermes's winged sandals might be useful to guide us into the underworld to see our own issues — our feelings of being smothered and our partner's difficulty with feelings of neediness.

Discussing these feelings can give us winged sandals that transport us to the upper regions, as Hermes's sandals transported Greek heroes to that place of compassionate perspective. This takes place only if we are able to keep our ego under the "cap of invisibility." If we are enraged by our partner's neediness, or we withdraw in anger, the hero's goal will not be accomplished.

In one version of the myth, after Medusa was beheaded, Pegasus the winged horse emerged and as he ascended, he kicked a mountain top from which sprang one of the fountains of the Muses. Indeed, when two people work through issues such as these, a wellspring of creative energy is released. We may learn to humorously dramatize our issues or be awed by the insight they bring. Love may be reborn.

Remember that Perseus's quest was for Andromeda, his beloved, who was chained to a rocky cliff. Medusa's head and the weapons that he accumulated in his quest were used to free her from the dragon. Often it seems that our beloved is chained to a rocky cliff and that the relationship is tottering on the edge. Ultimately it requires a quest like Perseus's to rescue the feminine in us, and in our partner. The feminine symbolically represents that lunar quality of inner reflection that must be rescued from the hard rock of rigidity.

Myths record the tests and trials of the human spirit. They are keys to the psyche's secrets, which are brought to life by our imagination. Just as it takes a combination of factors to create a rainbow (light, water, and a person at the proper angle), so do myths provide illumination when we see a story from a particular angle. There is no one correct angle from which to interpret a story, each angle produces its unique vision that is meaningful to us at a given time.

In the *Mythic Journey Process*, when we feel lost, we can create our own stories and use the symbols that arise from our inner vision to help us find the way into the cave of our unconscious. Here we can meet the demon, wrestle with it, and find the jewel of our own Self.

Focusing and the Mythic Journey Process

The *Mythic Journey Process* is a way of harnessing the ancient power of myth to work through modern-day problems. It combines elements of the Focusing technique with archetypal psychology.

Eugene Gendlin is a modern-day hero in the field of psychology who researched the factors that produced change in the psychotherapeutic setting. In his study at the University of Chicago,[5] Dr. Gendlin analyzed tapes of different therapies to discover what factors were present in successful therapy. The Focusing process (Gendlin, 1978) was developed from this research. Gendlin proposed a way to develop our body's felt sense as a guide to new meanings and fresh perspectives on life's problems. He found that a felt energetic shift ("felt shift") occurred when a person found new meaning for a life problem. The *Mythic Journey Process* adds to Focusing the richness of symbolic language.

The *Mythic Journey* exercise consists of starting with our bodily felt sense of a chronic physical or psychological problem, and then telling a story about this problem, transposing it into ancient times as we did with Medusa. While the story is being told, we continually refer to the bodily felt sense, noticing how it changes along with the development of the story. We can reach a point where the story begins to tell itself and experience a felt shift and new meaning regarding our problem.

The *Mythic Journey Process* is a modern-day embodiment of the ancient mythic journey to the underworld. Just as the mythic Greek hero Theseus used Ariadne's thread to find his way into and out of the underworld labyrinth to free the captive children from the monstrous Minotaur, so do we use our bodily felt experience as a thread into and out of our psychological underworld to liberate the energies of our inner experience. The steps of the Focusing process become guideposts along our path.

In Focusing's first step, called "clearing a space," we find a friendly relationship to a life issue by saying, "Everyone has their stuff to deal with and here's mine. If I had a friend, I wouldn't be hard on him for having this to deal with." Since we are often harder on ourselves than we would be on a friend with the same problem, we need to find a relationship to ourselves that is like the relationship that we would have to a friend with a similar problem.

Dr. Gendlin also found that an important factor in successful therapy was a person's ability to use his or her body's felt sense to create movement in therapy. In his book, Gendlin (1978), gives an example of a traditional couple (pp. 45-50). A wife at home cleaned the table. A man returned home after getting a job promotion and, in his excitement, knocked the milk onto the table that his wife had just cleaned. The woman became aware of her bodily feeling of anger and began the Focusing process. She "resonated" the word "anger" against the felt bodily sense of the issue surrounding her husband's promotion. She then stopped for a moment and said, "No, that's not quite right. I'm not sure what I felt, but it's not quite anger." For some people this can be a difficult moment, "I don't know what I am feeling." In Gendlin's Focusing process, we learn to trust an unclear "felt sense" and wait for something to emerge. While staying in touch with the unclear feeling of "a hole in my stomach," the woman above realized, "It's not so much anger; what's getting me the most is the void I feel about being left behind in my life." At this point she sighed and there was a "felt energetic shift" in the way her body carried the problem. (We can see here in Dr. Gendlin's work the phenomenological core of a primordial energy psychology.)

In the Focusing technique, our bodily felt sense can be used as a guiding light. We can imagine that the woman might be guided to express her feelings to her husband and be comforted, or she might look for a way to develop her life further.

The healing role of the body has long been recognized in mythology. Modern-day students of mythology, however, often fail to give the body due respect. Body feeling and archetypal image are mutually interdependent systems; they are isomorphic translations of each other into that other medium. Without the interweaving of body and myth, healing is not complete.

The insights gained from Gendlin's Focusing technique, coupled with mythology, can be an important next step in mythic voyages. Many of the subtle elements of the Focusing technique are integrated in the counseling setting, but to delve into these elements in depth goes beyond the scope of this section.[6]

Prelude to the Mythic Journey Process

The inner journey in the *Mythic Journey Process* parallels journeys to the underworld that have been spoken of by the earliest healers of the psyche.[7] Shamans and temple priests of the mystery schools have spoken of it as a journey into the body of the earth or into the dark caverns of the unconscious. Myths suggest ways to prevent us from getting lost.

As modern people we can use Focusing on our experience and felt sense in combination with the *Mythic Journey* to follow Theseus's path. We can join these methods to serve as our thread through the psychological underworld to find and liberate the energies of the natural child within.

The *Mythic Journey Process* starts with a grounding exercise that helps clear a space where we find our center, our inner pillar. Using a Taoist breathing technique, we can experience the *Tan Tien* center below the navel. When the breathing meditation is done properly[8] this center can become a pillar to return to when fear is encountered in one's inner labyrinth.

The Mythic Journey Process

The *Mythic Journey Process* begins with a breathing meditation combined with Focusing's "clearing a space" step, and an imagery exercise.

> *Notice your exhalation ... the pause ... and how the inhalation comes naturally from this pause. After a few cycles, notice how your body feels different and notice the way you have settled down to be in contact with the ground under you. Are you held off the ground in any way? Feel how being with your breathing cycle can help you let go to the ground under you, so that you are simply here.*
>
> *If there is any residual tension in your body, just notice it in a way that establishes a compassionate, friendly relationship to it. If a friend of yours had a similar tension, you'd find room to accept him, in spite of the issue. Find this relationship to any tension in your body, letting the natural breathing facilitate the friendly relationship. During the following process, when something arises that you want distance from, just breathe this way and return to the relaxed place, your inner pillar.*
>
> *One way to combine the breathing meditation with searching for an issue is to imagine that as you breathe out, it's like letting go of some of the tension in your body and lowering a bucket into the well of your Self, deep beneath the surface tension that you may be carrying at this moment. The bucket is tied to a secure pillar at the top. As you breathe out and lower it, you come to a place where your breath pauses before you take in the next breath. As you pause, it's as though the bucket is waiting for something deep within to fill it, some issue that stands in the way of you feeling all right. As your breath comes in, the bucket rises. It may take quite a few exhalations (lowering of the bucket) until something from deep within you comes into your bucket.*

The first step of the *Mythic Journey* consists of finding an issue and an associated bodily felt sense of this issue, just as in the Focusing technique. For some people the body sense comes first, for others the issue emerges first. If the body sense comes first, do you know what this body sense connects with in your life? If the issue arises first, do you feel where this issue lies in your body? You might start by proclaiming, "Everything in my life is completely alright," and noticing what issue(s) arise(s) to contradict this. With each issue that emerges, you establish a compassionate, friendly relationship to it. Create enough distance so that you can say, "I recognize you're there, but I'm not going to work on you right now. Maybe I'll come back later." Imagining yourself somewhere else in the room, feeling the way you do when you are with this issue, is one way to clear a space.

Give yourself time to notice, as issues pop up, how they affect the subtle barometer of your body. It is from your body's reaction that you'll know which issue to choose to work with. As you approach this "friend" you can get a felt sense of the issue.[9] For further aid in getting the felt sense, sometimes it helps to say, "I could feel completely fine about this whole thing." The voice inside which says, "No I couldn't feel fine about this," is the felt sense.[10] What's this sense all about? Wait for something to come up from the felt sense. See if you can distinguish between trying to think about it, and just having something emerge from the sense itself. It may be a word or an image or a sound — trust whatever comes for you. To get a "handle word or image" for this felt sense of the issue, just wait as if you are a fisherman by an ice hole. You can't rush a fish onto the hook. Just wait for what pops up from your body's sense of the issue as a whole.

What word or image seems to resonate with the sense of what this issue is all about? You'll know that you have something that resonates by the response that your body gives — the way its movement is facilitated when something gets to the crux of the matter.

What's the "worst thing about this issue" for you? At this point it helps to actually write down the issue on a piece of paper along with the bodily feeling you've noticed. Note bodily feelings in parentheses. For example:

Issue:

Body sense: (Write this in parentheses)

Handle word/image:

The worst of it: Ask various questions to the felt sense, such as: What's the worst of it? What's the crux of this issue?

Then the mythic dimension begins.

The Mythic Dimension

The first part of the mythic dimension of the *Mythic Journey Process* is to take your issue and the associated bodily felt sense, and create a story about a character in ancient times who had the same problem. Begin by writing, "Once upon a time ..."

There will be three parts to the mythic dimension. First, describe the problem you are facing in mythic terms — where does this mythic character live in terms of terrain and surroundings, etc. How did this problem come about? Was it created in a relationship with a young prince or princess's mother and father, the king and queen? Use your own characters and imagery. (The second two parts of the mythic dimension will be illustrated in the following case example.)

A key element is transposing the felt sense of your own obstacle into mythic terms. What created this problem in the character's life? Was a curse or spell put on you? For what reason? By whom? Give an actual face or name to the "demon," and write it in capitalized letters to personify it, i.e. Fear, Blame, Self-doubt, etc. Naming or "facing" the specific demon is very important (Hillman, 1975).

Case Illustration: A Critical Perfectionist's Mythic Journey Process

For example, one perfectionistic patient's issue was an intense criticizing that led to attacking his partners. The following *Mythic Journey Process* was written at a key point in "George's" long-term therapy.

> *Issue:* My difficulties with relationships
>
> *Body sense:* (Clenched jaw)
>
> *Handle word/image*: Anger. He imaged his "demon" to be a serrated sword. Then this patient, who we'll call "John," proceeded with part one of the mythic dimension and developed the felt sense of this demon into the following story.
>
> *The worst of it*: No one is good enough; I'll never find anyone with whom to have a long term relationship.

Once upon a time:

> *The Serrated Sword of Criticism was given to my father's father many generations ago when he was down and out. He sat on a mountaintop praying for power and the ability to support his family when a mountain demon came to him and gave him a serrated sword with a mountain emblazoned upon it. He said that the cuts made with it and the blood on it would proportionally increase the sword's power and would help him ascend the mountains of earthly life to be great, admired, powerful, and respected. He was told to make a family crest of it, and begin practicing with his own family.*
>
> *Indeed, great power and admiration came to this family of swordsmen and women through the generations. Though wounds occurred and blood was let increasingly, the Sword's power was the key focus of the family. Applause was given at the family dinner table for the great swordplay of the day, whether it was against the bulls killed for dinner or the other swordsmen defeated. Even family wounds inflicted, were respected if done in a skillful way.*

The second part of the mythic dimension of the *Mythic Journey Process* describes how impossible it seems to defeat the demon, and the problems it has caused. What methods have you tried that haven't worked to defeat it? Transpose these methods into mythic terms. For example, John added to his story:

> *Although our royal family attained a castle on a mountaintop and much power in the world through our fine discriminating cuts, the prince's life was not a happy one. As great a swordsman as he was, as admired as he was, he was alone most of the time.*
>
> *The problem was the sword, the very one that had given him such pleasure in his youth, the one for which he and his family had been admired for generations. When it was handed down to him, it went out of control. Each time it would become unsheathed, it would cut anything he looked at in a discriminating way. It cut all of his lovers to bits. The prince tried to break the sword, but many generations of power made it unbreakable. He tried to get rid of it at an Eastern religious temple; he denounced it, and tried to bury it. But he felt impotent without it, and had trouble climbing the castle steps if the sword was not in his belt. (slumped chest, feeling of being defeated)*

Accentuating how impossible it seemed to defeat the demon brings out the "soulful dimension" (Hillman, 1976) and can help prevent Pollyannaish solutions. Again check back with your body's felt sense and note it in parentheses here.

Concluding part two, make a statement that addresses, What is the specific nature of the impasse? What is the specific obstacle or demon the character is dealing with? How, specifically, do you feel knowing that nothing can be done to deal with it? This is "exploring the resistance" mythically. For example, from John's story:

> *The prince felt that he could not give up the way of the sword for he was too good at it, and it was too much a part of his nature. Yet, at the same time, he could not live with it. There seemed to be no end to the loneliness and the guilt that the prince felt over cutting up his lovers. The Critical Sword seemed all-powerful. (Depressed, hollow feeling in my chest.)*
>
> *The prince used his discriminating insight to see where the power of the sword came from. He relaxed and sensed the presence of the old mountain demon above him. Above him and to the right he noticed a demon called "Smug-faced Pride."*
>
> *It added an electric glow to the sword each time the prince said, "Look at what an adept swordsman I am." Upwards and to the left the prince was able to sense the presence of another demon, "Needy-faced Expectation." It added a desperate, angry, war-like hacking motion to the sword each time the prince said to others, "If you aren't the way I want you to be, I'll cut you up to fit into the 'right' mold."*

The third part of the mythic dimension begins with writing the words, "Then one day ..." Then one day, what happened? Let some solution to the impasse come to you. Give it time. If no solution arises in you to break the impasse, then think about who could deal with this demon? Imagine some heroic figure, animal, or mythic creature and see what happens when it meets your demon. Use your creative story-writing capacity to let the story tell itself. Continuing his story:

> *Then one day, while the prince was depressed and looking into a mountain lake, he began to reflect upon whether he wanted to be a swordsman if it meant having no love. (Something lets go in my chest area; a sense of openness comes there as I sigh.) At that moment a Maiden of the Lake[11] appeared with the golden sword Excalibur that had been thrown back into these waters many years ago.*
>
> *Tears came to his eyes as he explained that he could not go on being a swordsman if there was no love in his life, and yet he could not give up his family's path either. He asked for her help.*
>
> *With compassion, the Maiden of the Lake taught him the one movement that the mountain demon had neglected to teach his forefather many years ago. She instructed him to feel with his heart before he was about to use the golden glowing sword, and caress it as if it was a beloved from whom he was asking guidance. Then he was to look at the polished mirror that the sword's metal became, reflect as he was doing in the lake when he met her, and ask for guidance on how to use the sword in the service of love and truth.*
>
> *As the prince followed her instructions, he noticed that as he held this sword in front of him, a ray of light came from his heart and bounced off the sword. His eyes could direct it, but only when they were reflecting inward with clear intent. "This light," the Maiden of the Lake said, "had the ancient power to transform anything that he wanted to heal."*
>
> *The Maiden said that this was the true power of the sword that had been lost through the ages. She explained that before the sword was used for fighting, it was used for directing energy to points on the body that were in need of healing. She told him stories of how her teachers of the Golden Age used this sword in daytime to bring the healing power of the sun, and at night to bring the powers of the stars to earth. All this was done with the same meditation that she had just given him — using the powers of reflection and the power of the heart's glow.*
>
> *With the Maiden of the Lake before him, the prince felt his heart's desire to be a healer and he reflected upon the mountain demon above him. A light went to the demon and transformed him into a beneficent mountain spirit whose purpose was to help others to climb to their own heights. (A feeling of fullness in my chest.)*

As he reflected on the electric light around "Smug-faced Pride," this conceited demon changed to a healing ally. The smug expression changed to a smile like the Buddha's as he realized that "skill" is not one's own, but is borrowed from the powers of the universe, the stars, the sun, and the earth.

As the prince reflected upon "Needy-faced Expectation," he realized that much of the world's and his own suffering came from this demon's misplaced needs for power over others, for false security, ego recognition, and worldly success. With the sword's light on this demon, a new power came to the sword — a compassionate understanding of human foibles. A new form of sword dancing came from this transformed demon which gave the prince's movements a heartfelt, gentle, slicing motion, as when a person cuts a flower for a loved one, and in the cutting wants the flower to suffer as little as possible. As when the sword-masters of ancient times had cut a field of wheat with deep appreciation for the forces of nature that went into producing the growth of the plant, so would the prince try to appreciate that which went into the growth of all that he was to use his sword upon. The prince vowed to make it his new practice to have tenderness when he used his sword to point out the places that became un-centered in his own and other's everyday life.

When the prince returned home, he created a new family crest with the Golden Glowing Sword of the Heart over the Critical Serrated Sword. The Maiden of the Lake's sword had the power to stir the prince's compassion. In the future, when the Critical Sword came out, the Maiden's sword was there to help remind the prince that its sharp power was to be put to a healing rather than a destructive use. This was not easy work, but at least now the prince knew what the work of his kingdom was. When the old sword arose, his work was to reflect on it with the heart meditation that he had learned, and thereby bring love and compassionate understanding to the kingdom. (Open-hearted glowing feeling in my chest, and hope through my whole being — a feeling like I've found what my life work is.)

Your story does not have to have a happily-ever-after ending. Simply note your actual sense of the issue and transpose it into mythic terms. Sometimes "time" is an important force to integrate into the story. Remember it took Moses forty years in the desert to complete his destiny. What is the destiny, the purpose for which your character is going through his or her trials and tribulations? Sometimes this dimension of meaning and purpose can contribute to a felt shift.

After you reach a place in the story where it feels complete for the moment, notice your body's felt sense and note it in parentheses at the end of the story.

Bring the adventure of this character back into your own life now. Reflecting on his or her quest, what can you learn form the character's adventure? How does your own path feel different now?

Reflection on the Mythic Journey Process

Many people experience new meaning emerging from their story and note that, at a certain point in writing, they find the story writing itself. Some report that it is as if something was overtaking their writing and giving them a solution. It is unimportant whether one calls this, in ancient Greek terms, a muse, our higher Selves, right brain function, the healing mind/energy of the universe, or intuition. The felt energetic shift that happens and the new meaning and perspective born on a blocked life issue help us to heal regardless of what one calls the source of healing.

When people are stuck in a critical part of themselves, as was "The Prince of the Serrated Sword," there are a variety of ways to create a shift in life stance. Tai Chi *Sword Dancing* practice, or Western psychotherapy and its symbolic process methods, when combined with Gendlin's Focusing, all can go right to the crux of the psychological problem, and can create a felt shift in a person's life stance. All are paths that lead to learning to wield a sword with compassion.

In this example of a *Mythic Journey Process*, the prince had to find a new life practice to change his "critical serrated sword way of being" to be a compassionate coach of his own and others' limitations. As we saw earlier Dr. Jung knew that body and archetypal image are two ends of a spectrum and healing can enter from the infrared or ultra-violet end of that spectrum. Or as the ancient Taoist alchemist would put it, intention (Yi) follows energy (Qi), and vice versa. So, "working on our life energy" involves working on all psychospiritual and bodily facets of ourselves. A person's life stance at a given moment, and the energy that goes along with it, does not change through the medium of the body alone.

Case Illustration: The Passive-Aggressive Ostrich — Healing Trauma and Withdrawal

In the middle of my five-day Bodymind Healing Qigong workshops, participants do a *Mythic Journey Process*, and then have the option to incorporate a Tai Chi or Qigong movement that helps to anchor the felt shift that oftentimes takes place at the end of their mythic journeys. So, I invite readers of this book to do the same. Perhaps some Qigong animal form, sword dance, or some other posture or movement of your own choosing will help you to embody the shape-shifting that may take place in your *Mythic Journey Process*. If you are so inclined, I invite you to do the movements in this book, use your own movements, or go to the more complete set of movements from Volume I, which has an accompanying Bodymind Healing Qigong DVD. Though Tai Chi, Qigong, or other movements are not necessary for the *Mythic Journey Process*, they do help to bring out a somatic dimension, which has the capacity to increase the method's transformative possibilities. In this sense, Volume I and Volume II of this work form a circle — like two uroboric dragons biting each other's tails and feeding each other, so does the Qigong emphasis in Volume I feed the psychotherapeutically oriented bodymind healing practices emphasized in Volume II, and vice versa.

The combination of these different facets of BMHP can be seen in the example of "Roberta," a young female student who had a pattern of passive-aggressive behaviors at significant times in her life. Roberta was engaged in psychotherapy with another therapist to work on her passive-aggressive tendencies because they were getting in the way of her intimate relationships,

particularly with her husband. She also did the *Mythic Journey Process*, Tai Chi, and the animal forms of Qigong with me, as part of her Bodymind Healing Qigong certification program. Here we can see how the *Mythic Journey Process* can combine to help heal trauma, and enhance a healing experience of shape-shifting from one life stance to another.

Issue: My husband's aggressivity and my withdrawal

Body sense: (Anxiety in my stomach)

Handle word/image: Ostrich hiding my head in the sand

The worst of it: I feel like a weakling not being able to stand up for myself

Roberta's *Mythic Journey Process* activated memories of her running away from severe stressors in her teenage and young adult years, including a rape. This "running away" produced a belief that, "As soon as you sense danger, it's better to immediately leave." In her *Mythic Journey* she pictured and felt the demonic forces as Attacking Giants crushing her chest, closing off her ears, making her body tense like taught metal, which resulted in her running away from these feelings like a "Fearful Ostrich." Through her *Mythic Journey Process* she realized that this was an overreaction to many things that were not as dangerous as the rape of her youth. Her excessively reactive pattern resulted in her not listening to her husband when he was giving constructive critiques; instead, Roberta often withdrew with passive-aggressive behaviors such as threats to end their marriage. In her *Mythic Journey Process* her favorite movement from Hua Tao's set was *Crane Opens the Door to the Heavens* (see Volume I). This movement is used as a non-forceful way to split the force of an aggressor. As Roberta got in touch with an image of herself doing this posture, she felt a noticeable felt shift in that her stomach loosened its tight grip and she realized that her husband was often trying to be helpful. We discussed how one of the crane's powers was to peck and differentiate the good food from the bad and spit out what was distasteful. In alchemy this is called the *seperatio* phase (Edinger, 1985).

Roberta realized as her mythic quest that she must assert to her husband what she didn't like about the way he expressed himself rather than withdrawing. She later told me that in her psychodynamic therapy she was learning affect modulation skills to not be overly reactive and express herself appropriately to each occasion. Roberta reported that doing the *Crane* movements were helpful in showing her how to keep her heart open, yet appropriately defended, when needed. Last I heard, her marriage was better and the occurrences of "ostrich behavior" were much less long-lasting. Roberta said that now she almost always caught herself when the body feeling associated with the Attacking Giants came up. She used her anchor of touching the backs of her hands together in the *Crane Splitting* mudra (see Volume I) to find her Crane power, and differentiate what was harmful with what she could deal with as she cleared the way for her heart's grounded expression.

Case Illustration: The Desperately Grasping Parrot — Healing Abandonment and Neediness

The power of "naming," even without any internal martial arts practice, can be an important part of shape-shifting into another life stance. The significance and healing attributes of a mythic name can be seen with "Mary," a woman in her mid-20s who was in therapy for the guilt and desperation she felt from hanging out at various places looking for the man of her dreams. She described her disappointments going home each night without a man. She realized that the rejection she felt was similar to what she felt from her single mother who would often abandon her to go out on dates when Mary was young.

Issue: Finding the right man

Body sense: (Hole/emptiness in my heart)

Handle word/image: Needy, grasping for someone who isn't there

The worst of it: I'll never find a life partner

In doing her *Mythic Journey Process*, Mary took her "needy" felt sense and imagined being a huntress in ancient times. Her demon was a "Desperately Grasping Parrot" who would try to hold onto desired objects with its weak claws. The grasping claws though, would frighten its prey away. It would chatter, parroting back cliches that it had learned in order to impress, but all the chatter only frightened away all the beautiful, wild creatures of the forest.

> *The young princess was originally given the parrot as a present by her mother, the queen, as she abandoned her to go off for greater adventures than could be had with a young child. (Hole in my heart, emptiness.)*

Mary's single mother actually did go out on dates quite often in Mary's formative years, and Mary traced her first memories of this sense of neediness to these times in her early life. She learned to talk incessantly whenever her mother was there, to fill up the silence. She would try to say all the right things, parroting what her mother might like to hear so that her mother might stay with her more.

In her *Mythic Journey Process*, the curse was that the parrot would emerge out of her needy stomach each time Mary went hunting for someone to love. The parrot drove everyone away. The healing intervention came for her "one day" in her *Mythic Journey Process* in the form of the Greek goddess of the hunt, Artemis, who was her favorite Goddess in mythology.

> *One day, when the princess was depressed in the forest because she had not caught anything, Artemis appeared and offered to teach her the secrets of hunting ... how in primordial times the Master Huntress knew that love was something that came from our connection to the whole world. (A sense of rising excitement and a sense of purpose.)*

As if straight out of classical mythic literature, Mary was describing *anima mundi*, soulful love of the world. She was expressing, in her own terms, the classical idea that at a certain point in our evolution, we as human beings transposed this *anima mundi* into *anima personalis*, a love for one human being, hopeful that this one person could contain her love for the world and universe. A large task indeed!

> *Artemis taught the maiden how to hunt by enjoying all that was around her. If no deer came to her, she could still feel love for all surrounding life — the way light bounced over the meadow, the colors at sunset, and her relaxed position against the tree while she waited. Artemis told her that it was only in modem times, when the cult of true hunting decayed, that hunters would be devastated if they returned home without a deer. In primordial times, through the quality of waiting, the Priestesses of the Temple of Hunting always returned home with something of value. Upon hearing this, the princess (stomach opened and relaxed) and her pet parrot were both stilled as never before. (A melting sensation in my stomach.)*

A few months later, Mary related how she sat watching the interesting variation of light shine on the table plants at her favorite local bar. She described a new sense of "life as practice." Though feelings of loneliness still arose, she said that her "hunting" now had a felt sense of adventure to it. A new context emerged, one of practicing the ancient art of "true hunting." She became more aware of her desperate, needy chatter and began to practice being a "Stilled Parrot Who Enjoys the World While Waiting" — her new symbolic name.

Many people who do the *Mythic Journey Process* find a new name for themselves. As in ancient initiatory rituals, it offers a new identity, and a new life stance for the person. It defines a new path and a new practice in one's life.[12] The new name is much like the new name that Native Americans receive in their initiatory rituals in that it holds a power which links the person to a transpersonal purpose, a path to a sacred life, and a destiny worth pursuing.

The *Mythic Journey Process* is a way of responding to those who might ask, "Where are our heroes today? Where are those mythic adventurers who were able to deal with the archetypal demons of their age and open a path for fellow sufferers?

Perhaps, if we follow Ariadne's thread into our own underworlds, our stories, like hers, will be placed in the night sky; they will be like the crown of Ariadne (the Corona Borealis constellation) that Dionysus put there to immortalize her as a guiding light for lost souls to find their way. By opening our mythic imaginations, each of our life stories can become a guiding light for humanity. For who are we but stars in the making, hoping to shed light on the darkness of space and thereby give new life to ourselves, our planet, and to fellow travelers everywhere.

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