



The Healing Journey – Week 4

So you spent a week on the threshold, looking at the physical world, and as is predictable, a fair amount of stuff came up for folks, even as we were just looking at the physical -- a lot of emotional things, a lot of thoughts, and that's kind of the point, how all of this works together. The benefit of that stuff coming is that, before we can do anything else, we need to understand what we're dealing with. Only after we're aware of it can we start to transform it, and only after we have the ability to transform can we start looking at Intention, and start balancing that out with Intuition and Awareness.

So today, that's what we're looking at -- that this stuff comes up, why it comes up, and why that's good (though it may not seem good at the time), and what do to about that.

We talked about 2-3 physical things we can do, as well as what we see as outside problems--people, situations, and so forth. Once again, understanding that we can't change any of that until we're aware of it. And even just the physical things, small things. This alone will change things. I've experienced this once again this week myself. Telling you all these things puts it in front of my face as well, so I picked a couple things to work on. When we start making physical changes, things happen. It's not always clear why, but, if you remember back to the first few weeks, it's like having a car, that maybe you're really worked on, but it's only 95% functional. Sometimes there's just this little electric short, and once that's fixed, BING! Everything works again.

So -- emotions! The Astral plane. We're going from "on the threshold" to actually "crossing the threshold." First of all, a couple of words about the Astral plane. If you've any kind of reading on this topic, or hear people talk about these things, it's not uncommon to come across some pretty wild stuff about the Astral plane and warnings and cautions and things of this nature. What I want to say about that is to not take any of that too seriously. It's not that it's not accurate; it's just that a lot of these kinds of writings and traditions go back thousands and thousands of years when people were just learning to transcend the physical and to better things. Now imagine kind of kicking around in the plane where there's nothing but raw emotion with no understanding or control of it, where things manifest very very quickly. Because if you look at that chart we looked at in Week one of the levels of being, you notice that the things that we usually think of this as spirit aren't even halfway through

plane one, so when you get to the astral plane to the emotional plane, things move very very quickly, and imagine completely raw emotions with no control and nothing to counterbalance them out. It would indeed be a very scary place.

But the reality is that we do have control, we do have other emotions, and we do have higher thoughts and planes, and so I would let go of those fears; keep them in context. We don't have anything of that nature to worry about by exploring the astral plane the way that we're doing it. It is, however, much much faster, and this is the key in going from "on the threshold" to "crossing the threshold." It is a zone of magnified power. We want things to change; well, this is where things start to change--some in the physical plane already, but especially in this plane. So let's start looking at how we work this together.

The first point I want to make about emotions is that joy is our natural state. We really sometimes have trouble with that; it's a cultural thing I've mentioned a couple times before. You click at some "primitive" societies and they're happier. They don't work as hard; they don't face some of the same things problem that we do. It is a natural state. Steven Wilder wrote in one of his books--I don't remember which one--consider the tiger. Tigers don't get up in the morning and go, "Oh, man . . . what is it, Monday? Sigh. There's nothing for breakfast . . . I'm gonna have to get up, and every time I've got to run down food, it always runs away. . . being a Tiger just sucks, man." No, tigers don't think like that. Most things in nature don't think like that. We're kind of the exception here. We change that natural state. So, before we get into dealing with all these things, that's one key thing to remember, that joy isn't someplace difficult for us to get to and maybe one day we can attain it. It's our natural state, okay? It's we ourselves who change it away from joy.

So one of the ways, a very easy way, it theory easy, to deal with this is simply that--that one out of hell is to stop creating it, and to become aware that we do in fact create it. And once we do create it, we love to cling to it. We have several sayings--you probably have heard some of these--one of my favorites is, "If you're being dragged, let go of the rope." It's the only thing that's keeping you dragging. It's hard to do because our egos get involved, and all the sudden you've got all this drama going. And this is a good way to think of the emotional plane, the astral plane--good, bad, or indifferent, it's our drama. We're going to talk about drama in fact in a little bit, but just that first basic understanding, that one way out of hell is to stop creating it, and if you're being dragged, let go. I have a friend who says, "If you're going through hell, for God's sakes don't slow down," and we tend to do that, we tend to slow down and wallow in it. Again, I understand it's a difficult thing to do; I'm as guilty as anyone. So . . . a place to think of first.

One of the things that helps me deal with this if I find myself in that state is that I remember this really humorous comic. I think everybody's probably heard the footsteps in the sand story, right? There's two sets of foot prints in the sand, and then there's just one set, and the guy says, "What was happening? How come you left me, God, when I was walking through these hard parts?" And the story goes that God says, "Where there's is a single set of footprints, that's where I carried you." Somebody did a comic of this event, and in the next

panel God says, "That long furrow over there? That's where I dragged you for a while." It reminds me to keep a sense of humor about things and I stop taking myself so seriously. So if joys are our natural state and were just getting in our way, why do we do? There actually is a positive purpose to this, and this is really the beginning of understanding Initiation. We're going to start talking about that process today, so let me stop really briefly just for questions before I get into this.

This is not a new issue for humankind. It goes back to the very beginning of Western civilization, the thought in Western civilization, and probably others--I just am more familiar with ours--and going all the way back to Greek theater. Now, Greek theater is dedicated to the god Dionysus. Dionysus is a satyr--he's half mad and half goat. This is important; it's not simply some random myth, because it reflects our nature as half rational and half passionate. And it's important that we are that nature, you know--I don't think anyone of us would want to be, say, Spock, all logic and no passion, and we also wouldn't want to be entirely passion with no reason whatsoever, that we have this dual nature.

Greek theater is divided into two main types, comedy and tragedy, and these have nothing to do with happy and sad. It's a different way of carrying a message. The word comedy means loosely "home-song," a song about all of us together, the human condition. When you look at a Greek comedy, in fact, any comedy since then, you will see things that address the common problems in human nature. So not things that are typical of that person or that person or that person, but problems that we all share.

A good example in movies is romantic comedies; now it's easy to say, "Well they all have the same plot." In one sense they do because we all face those same issues. It's not something that is different and unique for one person and then in a complete change for someone else. But in the sense of Initiation, comedy is about the inexhaustible joy of life invincible. The inexhaustible joy of life invincible. Why? They always end happily. But, how do they end happily? We don't solve these problems. They end happily because someone or something, or in the Greek tragedy it's one of the gods, comes in and solves it for us. There's some piece of information that comes up and sets it up. Somebody else opens the door for us. We're not capable of giving out of that situation by ourselves; we need outside help--but, that outside help always comes...after a while anyway.

Now, tragedy. Tragedy in Greek is literally "goat-song," a song for the satyr Dionysus. In terms of Initiation, tragedy is about shattering forms and attachment. Shattering forms and attachment. One of the things that happens when we leave the comfort zone and cross the threshold is that those old forms and those attachments are not simply left behind--they're gone. And the reason they're gone is because they never existed in the first place (but we didn't know that).

Now, the tragedy has a really interesting form that centers around not everybody, but around a tragic hero. And a tragic hero is somebody who is, in the Ancient Greek sense, somebody who is noble and good, but not perfect--in many ways a superior human being, somebody

who may be beyond us. And the reason they're superior is largely because they go on this journey that most of us never take. Now, the reason the tragic hero is not perfect is that the tragic hero has a tragic flaw--something to which the tragic hero is usually blind. Probably the best example of this ever is Oedipus Rex, where Oedipus is a truly great king, a truly smart king, has done wonderful things for the people of Thebes, but he's arrogant, and when people question him, he reacts defensively and violently. And his arrogance extends from his kingdom to the gods; you don't challenge Oedipus--he knows everything. This is his problem. He's brilliant, but he knows it, and his arrogance that his downfall, but he's blind to this.

Now the hero, the tragic hero, faces a dilemma. The situation here is not fair; there is no way for the hero to win. Both choices are terrible. It's not going to end well. Period. No chance. But, in the process of addressing that dilemma, in making those choices, in going through this tragedy, something is gained. The hero acquires new knowledge that can be shared with us, with humanity generally. And this happens when the hero is humbled. In Oedipus's case, he's blinded--well, he blinds himself, but he has learned. And this is what tragedies are about. All these all these things that the hero goes through--you would think at the end the hero would be very bitter, you know? It was never fair deal. But no--the hero accepts his fate graciously. Why? Well, for one thing, this is a superior human being, by definition, but the reason the hero accepts his fate graciously is that something really valuable comes of this. At a very high cost, perhaps, in the case of a tragedy, but something very valuable.

In particular, in terms of initiation, what happens here is that this hero has to face his or her own demons. So in the case of Oedipus' story, why did it have to happen this way? If you go through the play carefully, it didn't have to happen that way; it's largely Oedipus making decisions. The word "pan-ic" comes from the god Pan--a satyr, half man, half goat. These demons are twofold--yes, the demons are danger. But demons also bestow magical power. There is real power in these demons, and this is the mystery, the real mystery of tragedy in initiation. Aristotle talked about one of the most important parts of a tragedy as catharsis, this release of emotions, but not a catharsis in the way "I had a good cry and now I feel better," but really losing this attachment, releasing, taking something that was inside and letting it go--a very different meaning to that.

So the big mystery of these demons, the big mystery of Initiation, is that these demons come from ourselves. As soon as we crossed the threshold, we enter what Campbell calls the Road of Trials. Now that doesn't sound so appealing, but the road of trials is a journey of discovery, and we cross the threshold, Campbell describes this as the belly of the whale. In other words, the hero goes inside himself or herself, goes inside to be born again. That's the purpose. Self-annihilation: that sounds pretty scary. But the purpose of this self-annihilation is not destructive, but to be born again, to be created. The negative context of this is the ego resisting this. It's a journey of discovery, and at the end of the discovery lies things of real value.

Next up is meeting the goddess, which is a very good thing.

The first thing that happens on the road of trials is that even though demons come from ourselves, we are not alone. We have allies. We think of this in terms of myth, and again I courage people not to dismiss myth as mere stories, but understand that these are stories we tell over and over and over and over again in the same form because they ring so true for us; they reflect us. We don't go on these journeys alone. The first thing the hero does, even if the hero is initially some sort of a loner, is to hook up with some buddies. Get some help! Maybe they're already friends, maybe they aren't, but the hero does not go on this journey alone in initiation. None of us should or need to do that as well. One of the purposes of gratitude is to allow us to accept this grace, instead of saying "No, no I've really got my own way," is to say, "Wow, thank you, okay, yes. I'm willing to accept this help. I am grateful." There's a little bit of humility that comes with this. But that's the first thing, is to recognize that we do have help. And this is the role of gratitude.

This process of fighting these demons then--it's not so much that it should be something that's scary as it is of understanding that the purpose is that we're discovering our opposite our own unsuspected self and assimilating it, so instead being half-people, we actually are absorbing all of ourselves. That journey of self discovery. Just the simple things we done so far, we've found that we've learned a lot about ourselves, and we're starting to become whole selves. What sometimes is a scary part is that everything is fluid and ambiguous and moving, but that's what we want, remember, that we can't change things, we can't grow, until we can change and be fluent. And the only thing that's scared, the only thing that has a reason to be scared, is the ego itself. So, the Meeting with the Goddess then. You know, Nature is good. It's bountiful. To go into this not alone, that's ego, but to go on this with the understanding that we do have help and balance and to make good use of that.

The next then we run into, the problems we run into next after the first thrills of getting underway, is that yes, as you correctly identified already, the adventure develops into a journey of darkness and fear. But--this again is coming from inside us. Campbell calls this "the woman as temptress" section, meaning that we spurn the flesh that we've come from. So who are the ogres that are attacking the hero? They are "reflections of the unsolved enigmas of his own humanity," as Campbell puts it. Reflections of the unsolved enigmas of his own humanity.

So let me give an example of how this works. When I did last week's homework the first time, one of the things I recognized that I didn't know going into this, when I looked at the column of what part did I play in this, even if it's small, and I looked at the part as well of in what way are these people struggling, what are their challenges, I saw ego versus ego, right down the page, all the way down. And that was the source of most of the conflicts on that page, my ego versus somebody else's ego. That was an important piece of knowledge. The other thing that we find out is what are the hero's ideals? "Ideals are symptoms of the grasp we have of life" (Campbell). How well do we understand life? Ideals tell us that. When somebody shares their ideals with you, they are in the sense telling you how well they

understand life. The point is this, that our conscious views of what life should be do not equal reality. Right? That's where we started talking. What happens is that we perfume our faults, and we blame the outside, and as long as we do that we're going to be stuck in darkness and fear. As long as we do that, we're going to be fighting battles. And we're going to be doing that in an ongoing way with no solution ever. So this awareness, this understanding of where am I pointing to the outside, and starting to ask ourselves how was this reflecting the inside, how is this reflecting what's going on with me, is absolutely crucial. Absolutely crucial.

So, some of the things that we did last week--the point of that of looking at these things is to prevent this meltdown when we meet these things abruptly, which is what happens if we don't go consciously into the journey, so that we don't have a big meltdown. Then the next step is moving from the goddess to Atonement with the Father. This is kind of a difficult thing to understand at first, but this is the beginning of real understanding, so I beg patients for a little bit. In Atonement with the Father, justice and wrath are blended with mercy and grace. We think of mercy and grace as being qualities of the Mother, in the traditional sense, while justice is the traditional role of the Father.

How can I explain this? When we're growing up, there's Father and Mother, and the child sees the Father as an outsider, that the bond with Mother has to loosen up before we let this outsider in. And then we grow up in a home, and there are things that happen in our home, and things that happen outside the home, these are the Outsiders, the people we have to be careful of, strangers. And then our community, a comfortable place, and people outside the community are the Outsiders. Or a country, and so forth.

So, the Father is at first the Outside, and is also a bit of the Disciplinarian, so to speak, but there are important reasons for this. When we're children, all this is fine, but when we grow up, one of the childish things that we hang on to is an inappropriate balance between justice and wrath and mercy and grace, because we tend to want "justice for you, mercy for me," right? You have to understand me, but YOU should get what you deserve, when the truth of it is, thank God we don't get what we truly deserve, or life would be one heck of a mess. It's reflective of our own ego. Just as we're hesitant to accept true justice and wrath for ourselves, we're all hesitant to accept the true mercy and grace that is our natural state, going back to the Goddess.

So one of the first things we want to do, with gratitude, is going back to the daily spiritual practice. A large part of this is not just to identify the process, but now, going one step further, to expect it. That it is OK that we are loved, that we have grace, that it is OK that we have allies, that we not only don't have to, but shouldn't, do this alone. And to accept, and to appreciate, and to make good use of this help, and to let that be.

At first, it seems like the Mother is the protective force against the Father, but in the end, the Mother and the Father reflect each other. The Father has the role of preparing us for the outside world. And things we can get away with at home aren't going to fly in the outside

world. When I was a kid, I'd mouth off to my mother all the time. But the time I was old enough to live on my own, my father made it clear to me that it was time for me to make my own way in the world, that they had reached their breaking point. You know, this is the role of the Father.

And the reason here isn't so much a punishment, but a very appropriate lesson. Hence the term "Initiation." Let me give an example. There's a wonderful myth of the Sun God, at one point, and he has had a child. He loves this child, and says at one point, "I'll give you anything you want." His son immediately asks for to take the chariot of the sun across the sky himself. In the Greek myth, the sun is a fiery chariot with flaming horses and all that. Immediately Dad regrets his promise; being a god, he can't go back on it, and as you can imagine, this is a disaster. The son is in no way ready for this. The horses don't listen to him, the sun goes up and down, scorches the Earth, then vanishes into the Heavens--it's a mess, and finally the other gods have to intervene. This is the problem if we're only given mercy and grace, if we're only given what we ask for. It's not that it's denied to us, but sometimes we simply aren't ready yet. It's not that we won't be, but we need to be ready for this, right? Imagine your very first job, whatever it was. Now imagine your very first job had been as CEO of a corporation. It would have been a disaster--you weren't ready for that. It takes time to prepare for things. This is the role of the Father. The Father is kind of a gatekeeper in this way--not to exclude, but to make sure that we are ready before we move on.

So, there tends to be this father versus son for mastery meme, but it's really this, the preparing. Probably the best myth for this of all is the Norse myth of Thor. Thor was the son of Odin, King of the gods, and Odin is ready to pass on his kingdom to Thor. But Thor, while in many ways very competent, is arrogant, and overconfident, and a hothead, and he ends up being banished without any of his godlike powers. At first this seems like a horrible punishment, but he's returned later. The point of this "punishment" is to purge him of infantile and inappropriate behavior. To divest us of this flawed humanity in us so that we can be representative of the better things inside us. It's not punishment. It's rather an impersonal cosmic force, how we move from that to mastery.

So at first yes, it's scary. It's horrible. It's like the open soul has to go beyond terror to grasp how the tragedy of ruthlessness is validated in the Majesty of Being. We just are not ready for something like that. But it's like this--like the tragic hero, the ordeal was borne, and as we get to the other side of it, we have the blissful manifestation of the Boon of the Presence of what we've learned. And I think if you think back--I can think certainly of many--if you think back, you can think of things you went through, though you weren't aware of it in these terms, some very difficult trials, but on the other side of it, things were better. When it was over, you were different. You were better. You came out with new knowledge. As Campbell says, you are "somebody who has seen something" surpassing anything that's been said by justification.

Typically, we're trying to justify our actions. Instead, having seen and experienced something that makes such a justification kind of silly and pointless, we have something that is much, much higher. This is the purpose of Initiation. And Atonement, which we usually think of as punishment--you need to atone for your sins, right?--is actually at-one-ment. This is how we become at one with the father, at one with this process, how we understand the true love that's present, that this is the reality. The price then (why not just be happy and joyous), is this understanding. We want new things; this is the process that brings us to new understanding.

So. That's a lot. I've a little more that's not quite so heavy that kills more appropriately/traditionally with emotions, but I want to kind of sketch out the process and kind of get a feel for that.

It's very, very real, whatever we're going through. I can remember a few years ago--it wasn't anything more serious, logically, but a conversation with someone near the end of a relationship. But at the time, I remember thinking of it as walking through a wall of fire--and I was not happy about walking through a wall of fire, I can tell you that. It was a very, very scary thing. So yeah, I get how real these things are to us--whether they make logical sense or not, that's not really the point. And the reality of logic is that people do things for emotional reasons more than logical reasons. It's great when they work together, but we tend to do things for emotional reasons.

It doesn't so much help in the moment, but a good way to look at that dichotomy is in the Course in Miracles: there are only two emotions, love and fear. And so there are only two motivations--we are either acting out of love, or we are acting out of fear. And it's useful to stop and say "Which am I doing now?" And if I'm acting out of fear, what would have me work out of love? And if I don't think I'm afraid, and I'm not acting out of love, I can stop and ask myself "What am I afraid of?" And what I'm afraid of is that I'm not facing something, so I don't know what I'm afraid of. But yeah. You're right--it's very common. I was listening to a friend just last night talk about some things going on in his life that are threatening his marriage. And he's a rational person, he's just explaining it, he's not laying blame on anyone, but at the same time, as an outsider, I can see what's hard to see as an insider, which is that as he's telling me all the story, and it all makes sense, I'm keeping it to myself but I'm thinking, "This can't be the whole story." And probably, right now, she's telling someone her version of the story that sounds very different, and probably one of her friends is nodding and saying "Yeah, yeah," and thinking "That can't be the whole story."

So this brings us to this week's homework.

Here's what I'd like you to do. Take a look at last week's assignment, when we wrote down the things that were bugging us and so forth, and, just as I described earlier, consider: Do you notice any patterns (as far as your involvement)? Where do the same kind of things come up repeatedly? And then, after you find your patterns, ask yourself: In your tragedy, what are your tragic flaws? These are things to which you're otherwise blind, but if we really

look at the reality, we can say, "Wait...I'm seeing some things I'm not usually aware of that's getting in my way." So that's the first part. Notice your patterns, and ask yourself, what are your tragic flaws. Now if you can't see them--this is why last week I suggested you share this with somebody you feel comfortable with. Once you share this and explain it to somebody else, you will notice more, and if you don't, they will. So other people can really help with this.

And that's the next part of the homework--don't fight your demons alone.

Who are your allies? Really give this some careful thought. Not just your inner qualities-- you know, "I have these strengths." Strengths are good, but that's not what I'm talking about here. Go ahead and put those down, but those inner qualities, those strengths we have, just help us to deal with things. They don't change anything. We need somebody outside of us, outer allies, to help us change. This is one of the key benefits of a relationship, any kind of relationship, with anyone, is that we have an extra set of eyes. That other person will see things that you cannot see, or don't want to see, or both. So--where do you have patterns, what are your tragic flaws, who your allies? If we fight these demons alone, were going to get the same results. We've been fighting them alone a long time. So who are your allies. We don't understand if we just look from the inside; we need outer things.

If you don't have allies, recruit them--from bringing in your friends with what you're trying to do, to talking it out with friends, the Facebook group. In the case of in a severe problem sometimes people have, calling in appropriate professionals, bringing in appropriate coaches. I've recently hired and I talk to regularly some business coaches because they can see things that I can't see and have ideas that I just don't think of. I need help with these things. So these are things you can recruit. You could refute fellow travelers right in the Facebook group (that's largely what it is) as allies on this journey. But ideally, fellow travelers should be people who would been there before, been where you are going. In the case of The Healing Journey, that would be me. But it's kind of the difference between, for example--if a college student has a problem, nine times out of ten the college student will ask another college student who doesn't know any better the answer to the question, versus something like, from my personal experience, why does AA work so well? It's because you go talk to other people who understand what it's like to be an alcoholic, and who have the experience of getting sober. So instead of saying "You guys does don't understand," there's a bunch of people who will say that we've heard enough of your bullshit--we understand just fine. Those are real allies saying things that nobody else in our lives can get away with. So fellow travelers, as they are indeed--travelers who've been someplace.

Ask for help includes spiritual help, okay? Literal spiritual help if you're comfortable with that at this point, but if you're not, the daily spiritual practice, what is the truth, that part from you. Coming back to that truth is a part of getting help. That's part of your resources, that's part of having allies, even if it's not in any way a traditional spiritual path, because that focusing on the part of truth as you yourself have defined it keeps you from being delusional. It keeps us from believing our own stories, which we tend to do. So look

for patterns, find the tragic flaws, who your allies, inner but especially outer allies, and recruit them if you don't have them. Really give some thought to this. Include your daily spiritual practice as part of your help. Then when you do look at all this, you know, atonement does have its original meaning, as well as at-one-ment. If you want to be at one, you do have to atone. The odds are, once you really start looking at this carefully, you'll realize where there are places where you messed up, and you wronged somebody, and you really in a sense owe them some amends.

Here's where we want to get our ego out of the way and accept the humility to go and make that right to the extent that we need to do that. It's not a question of whether the other person deserves it--this is for you. To the extent that we hang onto that is the extent that we will be held away from ever resolving that. Now, this isn't something to do this week--this is something to put on the agenda. Go slow. Don't run off and do that by yourself. Do it with help. Do it during its own spiritual time. And that spiritual time will come by itself. I'm not going to go find some college girlfriend that I inadvertently wronged at this point in life; however, I run into her in Dunkin' Donuts, OK, maybe it's time for a conversation. Those sorts of the things. So just really be open to that. Find those patterns, what are your tragic flaws, who your allies, include your daily spiritual practice. Bring gratitude and the goddess with you, accept mercy and grace. You are deserving of that--well, none of us are, but you are as deserving as anyone. And moving from that arrogance to a practice of humility. Making amends where we owe the, not expecting anything back, just simply for our own good, moving past those inner demons into at-one-ment.

