**The Labyrinth of the Soul**

Often there is the assumption that initiation involves success. This is not always so. Sometimes our greatest learning comes through our failures. Failures are also initiations. This process is reflected in myths and tales. In the "Tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table," Sir Gawain and Sir Parsifal fail before ever achieving the Holy Grail. In the meantime, much growth and maturity has been attained.

In most myths and tales of initiation, there are different stages to pass through. These stages involve separation, which leads to a process of making changes in oneself, and then finally synthesizing what has been experienced. In the course of the adventure, there is separation or loss of the ego. In many myths, this occurs during a descent into the underworld. Mythic heroes have been swallowed by monsters, slid into bodies of water, and fallen into labyrinths. All of these force a transfer of attention in the individual. He or she must focus entirely on something new and pressing.

In mythic dream work and meditation, we are stimulating this separation by entering a new realm where the old rules no longer apply. The individual, having entered into this new realm, must make transitions on all levels. Situations and events must be faced differently. In our dreams, the repercussions are instantaneous. In waking life, there is usually a time delay.

This transitional stage is often symbolized as crossing over thresholds, passing through doorways, or facing obstacles. It is during this stage that the mythic hero and heroine confronts the guardians to those thresholds, the negative forces of the unconscious. It is a time of overcoming the powers of darkness within ourselves. We may succeed or not, but if we use our failures, eventually the success comes. It also creates a transformation of the ego.

In the course of the transition, the labyrinth strips away the ego. We see our fears closely. This is often reflected in our nightmares. In nightmare scenarios, the individual finds that he or she is answerable to no one but the self and can rely on no one but the self. It forces one to draw upon great inner resources. A death process occurs, so that new life must be drawn forth.

In our myths and tales, the individual is assisted by a guardian, a teacher, a spirit, a god or goddess, or even a spirit

totem. Guidance is given, and if followed, new power is attained. As often as we may feel alone, there is help if we are willing to look for it. We are never without guidance, but we must draw upon our own resources as well.

During this stage, the characteristics for success are developed. Courage, humility, and purity of heart are essential,

but so is the need to be true to your nature. Dream alchemy helps us to discern our true nature and helps us unfold it in the outer life circumstances.

In the third stage of synthesis, the hero or heroine applies what has been learned. It is this application which moves us forward. Being true to ourselves enables us to have what we need. This is why we must apply our dreams to our waking life. They help us to synthesize its circumstances and connect us to our true nature and patterns.

Although the next meditation is long, it follows many of the old patterns of the heroic myths of initiation. Once you become familiar with it, it will not take as long to perform in meditation. It is powerfully effective in stimulating an awareness of old patterns that need to be changed. When used with the mythic dream work process, it will stimulate dreams showing where adversaries need to be met and where outworn patterns still exist in your life.

As you begin to relax, you allow the mythic doorway to form before you. As you step through the doorway, you find yourself at the foot of a tall mountain. The sun is high in the sky. On several large boulders snakes have emerged to sun themselves. You move cautiously around them, giving them ample distance. Several raise their heads as if to examine you. You flinch instinctively, as the sight of them touches a primal nerve.

You begin to search for a path that will lead you to the top of the mountain, for this is where yo must go. You are not sure why, but you know it is one of those things in life that must be done. As you look for a place to begin your climb, you discover a small opening, half-hidden behind some scrub bushes.

You stick your head in slowly, feeling the darkness with your hand first. You remember the snakes, and you can't help thinking that this would be a wonderful home for many more of them. There is barely any light, and you dislike the idea of going where you cannot see. You then remember the other cave - that other opening where you first met your totem. You relax at the thought. Perhaps this will lead you to yet another companion. Maybe this is the way

to the top.

Summoning your strength and courage, you squeeze into the narrow opening, as if entering into the womb of the mountain itself. The passage is tight and close, and you are not sure how far you will be able to squeeze through. Still you continue, forcing yourself to move, lest you panic.

Before long, the passage widens and opens into a large cavern. Hanging from the four walls of this internal womb are four torches. Their lights dance, stirred by an air source you cannot locate. The air is moist, and there is the sound of dripping. At the back of the cavern is a small pool that has formed from the eons of moisture that accumulates here. The pool is pitch-black, and even the light of the torches reflects off it, revealing nothing.

You move to the center of the cavern and slowly turn around, examining the area. There are no other tunnels except that through which you have entered. Occasionally the lights shimmer off of the rock formations, hinting of the wealth of minerals within the veins of the mountain. This is obviously not the way to the top, and with a sigh you move to go back to the tunnel.

Before you can take your first step, the ground beneath your feet gives way. It drops out from beneath you, and with a sharp intake of breath, you feel yourself falling. You tumble downward, rolling, spinning and spiraling down. There is no way to stop. There is nothing to grab on to. You are powerless.

With a thump that knocks the breath from you, you land on your back. You gasp for breath, your head still spinning. You close your eyes, trying to shake the dizziness. You slowly open your eyes, moving each part of your body gently, checking for any serious damage. As your breath returns, you sit up. You realize you are a little bruised, but no worse for the wear. You stand slowly, stretching your muscles and planting your feet upon the ground. You stomp the ground, testing its firmness.

Satisfied, you glance upward. Ten feet above you in the rock face is the opening through which you plummeted. Amazed that you are unscathed, you look about you for the first time. Around you are seven openings, three on the right, three on the left, and one directly ahead of you.

On the walls between these openings are paintings and scripts that you do not recognize. There are images, symbols and designs that are familiar but which you do not understand. There are designs of spirals, reminding you of the mazes you puzzled over as a child, slowly drawing a line that connects one point to a treasure in the center. The difference now is that you are in the center and must work your way to the outer.

You puzzle over which tunnel to take. It is then that you hear the sound. It seems to roll through all of the tunnels until it pours over you. A chill runs through your spine. You know that you are not alone in whatever labyrinth this is. A bellowing pours forth louder through the tunnels. It is closer. The temperature rises, and you know that whatever it is, it is coming with fire. It seems louder from that tunnel directly ahead.

You jump for a tunnel to your right, running blindly into it. It winds and turns so much that you cannot see what is ten feet ahead. Then you hear the bellows again. They are more distant. You slow your pace, relaxing. you have chosen a path that leads away from it.

Ahead of you is an opening. You jump from the tunnel, and your heart sinks. You are back where you started. You have exited out a tunnel opposite of that which you entered. Then the bellowing comes again, and then it turns into deep laughter, mocking you and your efforts. The sound carries strongly through the front tunnel.

You choose another of the side tunnels. You begin to run its length, as it winds and turns. You pray that you will not exit back where you started. You remember an old dream, one in which you tried to run and your legs would not move. You can feel something gaining on you.

This tunnel feels warm, and there is a smell that is familiar and nauseating. You continue on in spite of it. Around the next turn is a light. You burst from the tunnel to find yourself back to where you started. The bellowing continues, jarring every nerve and fiber of your being. You begin to understand. All of the tunnels lead you back to where you started. They are not exits. They only repeat themselves. Running into them leads nowhere. If you want out, you must face the tunnel directly ahead – and whatever is in it.

In response to your thoughts, a mist pours out, blocking your view of its opening. In the midst of that mist, an image appears. It is your totem, your guide. A sense of relief washes over you, and within your mind you hear it speak: "When we do not change old patterns, we repeat them. Same situation, different players. Different tunnels, same results. When we quit running away, we grow. We must make our choices from that which is best for us, not

out of fear. You can continue running into the old tunnels, and you will avoid that which you fear. You also lock yourself into that which limits and prevents your dreams from being fulfilled.

"We never face more than we can handle. Our fears are delusions that must be overcome. The longer we avoid them, the more powerful they become. It does not matter which path you choose, as long as you choose from the heart - not from fear."

(at this point, some individuals may wish to stop the exercise for the day and continue it the next day. Stopping at this point will stimulate revelations about some old patterns that need to be confronted. It may also stimulate an awareness of when these old worn-out patterns first originated. if you choose to stop at this point, simply visualize the mythic doorway forming as the image of your totem dissipates. Step out through the doorway and close it behind you.)

You stand before the front tunnel. You are tired of running. It seems as if you have been running your entire life. With a deep breath, you step into the tunnel. It winds around and around. It spirals up and down. You can no longer tell which direction you are heading. The further you go, the hotter the air becomes. The tension grows. The beast has grown silent, as if acknowledging the fact that you are answering its invitation.

After a time, the tunnel widens and opens into yet another cavern. It is cathedral-sized. A stream runs through the center of it. Rock formations of all types and colors watch stoically, waiting. There is a hint of fresh air, and as brief as it is, it refreshes the mind and the body.

Across the cavern on the other side of the stream is an opening. Through it you can see the outside world. To get to it, you must cross the width of the cavern. As you take your first step, the beast moves out from the shadows.

It is massive, its shape blocking all light, filling the cavern with shadows and forms of darkness. You draw back,

flinching at its appearance. The smell is sickening. It notices your reaction, and bellows out a laugh that shakes the foundation of the cavern.

"I repulse you, do I?" Its voice is deep, grating and hollow. It laughs again, mocking and derisive. "Does a parent find its child repulsive?" You look at it puzzled, not understanding, and it laughs once more.

"Yes. You are my father and my mother. I am your creation. I am your nightmare. I am every fear. I am every hurt. I am every anger. I AM YOU!"

As you look into face, it changes. You see images, reflections of your past. You see all of the hurts others caused

you. You see all of the times someone said or did something to hurt you. You see all of the times you said and did things to hurt others so that you would not be hurt. You remember all of the times others said "NO" and told you could not do or be certain things.

You see how you believed them. You see all of the times you gave into you own fears and the fears of others. You see all of the times you did not follow your own heart. You see all of the anger, jealousy, the pain, the fears of this lifetime and more. You remember all of the times you were not loved, and the times you did not love. You see all of the times you blamed yourself for not being lovable enough. You see all of the times you blamed yourself for that which was the fault of others and for that which was beyond your control. And then you see the beast again before you.

The beast glares at you, its eyes flashing with anger and pain. You do not flinch. You do not even fear. Now you feel sorry. Your heart begins to ache.

"When we do not use our feelings and grow from them, they will grow their own way. That is what you see before you." You turn to the voice, and you see your totem beside you, looking upon you with love and speaking with your mind. "That which we do not transmute and use must go somewhere. Growing and evolving requires that we love ourselves in spite of ourselves and our life conditions. It requires that we take responsibility for that which we have created by commission or omission. We must face it and love it without thought of compensation. We must learn from it, so that we do not repeat it. Only when we can face and love our shadow selves can we cross the threshold."

The totem disappears, and you are left facing the beast. "I am so sorry." It roars in response, "I do not want your pity!" A tear rolls down your cheek as you begin to feel the pain of this beast. It moves threateningly in response.

"You will not hurt me any more, nor I you," you speak firmly. "Together we will change what has occurred and we will create a new you." It bellows again, its force making you step back.

"Yes, I am still afraid, but I will never let my fear stop me again. I came to face you, did I not? And I know that each time I face any fear, the heart within you will soften. And each time someone loves me, I will share it with you. You are that part of me that needed the love, and at times found it unavailable. And each time I love someone, it will be our love that is felt. For you are a part of me and I am a part of you. You cannot destroy me and I cannot slay you, but together we can change who we are. When I cross that threshold, you will cross it with me. No longer will your soul be locked within this labyrinth of darkness. No longer will my soul be locked within the maze of life's repetitions. We will share the rainbow promise of our dreams."

A spark of sunlight pierces through the veil from the outside and touches the stream. This bit of sunshine sends a ripple of rainbows throughout the waters. The beast pulls back and cries out from the depth of its soul.

Mist and fog gush forth as the fires of pain are released, filling the cavern and cloaking you. As the fog dissipates, you are outside the cavern, again at the base of the mountain. You are standing at the narrow opening through which you first entered. You step back from it, not even questioning the reality of your experience. You breathe deeply and freely. You have touched a part of you that has not been acknowledged in a long time. It is as your ability to feel fully is being re-awakened.

You step back, climbing around the boulders. There is but one snake left. It raises its head in greeting, and this time you do not pull away. The fear is gone. As the snake lays itself back down, it begins to writhe and wiggle shedding its skin before you, its lidless eyes never leaving yours. You understand that it must see all things at all times, and you begin to realize the significance of the mythical snake wisdom.

As the last of its skin is shed, you watch as the snake moves off the boulder. As your eyes return to the shed skin, it is gone. In its place is a small caduceus wand. It is the wand of healing through wisdom and greater awareness. You gently pick it up, and stroke the snakes that wind to the top.

"We shall share the rainbow of promised dreams." The hollow voice of the beast is heard within your mind. It is gentler. You understand that the wand is its gift to you for the gift you have given it. Holding the wand close to your heart, you step from the mountain to the mythic doorway you created. At the doorway is your totem companion, waiting patiently and lovingly as always.