



ILLNESS & ACCIDENTS AS INITIATORS

Illness is a harsh and sometimes deadly teacher, it brings a fierce initiation. The hot breath of the dragon has scorched us all, so many cross this fiery threshold. Yet through this fierce dragon, a door opens up to the infinite and to the possibility of a healing, even beyond a cure.

Accidents upset our preconceived notions of security and separateness. They introduce us to our mortality. They burn away illusions and teach us what is real. They wake us up to the preciousness of each moment; they make us vulnerable and less self-sufficient. They slow us down. They show us who we are under the masks.

Have you had an accident or illness that has prompted a realization or your pursuit of a deeper, richer life? Has an accident or illness of a loved one helped initiate you to higher ground?



MOVING PAST DEPENDENCY

All of us have had the expectation that a parent, boss, partner, leader, teacher or the expectation that a parent, boss, partner, leader, teacher or spiritual guide will support us and help us meet our needs, only to discover that we have been deceived or at least naive about our expectations. In relationships of dependency we are not whole human beings, we are like Siamese twins believing that we cannot survive without the other. This leads to an overwhelming fear of loss or a strong desire to control the other. When someone leaves a relationship of dependency the other feels betrayed, those who aren't able to get past the experience of betrayal often become bitter. Bitterness is a closed heart and it is the living-death state of no journeys.

The gift of this experience is that as you move past relationships of dependency you gain the piercing eye which assists you in ascertaining motivations, your own, as well as others - as you move to wholeness and communion with others.

How have we moved past the childish state of dependency? What has lulled us back into it? What means have we used to move past or break free of it? Do we perceive any complicity in our experiences of betrayal? How have our relationships of dependency hampered the journeys of others?



PERCEIVED FAILURE AS INITIATOR

The possibility of failure is essential to the possibility of success. Without the possibility of failure there is no journey, no adventure, no love, no dance of life. Failure punctures our shell of egotism, makes us vulnerable, more ordinary, more able to connect with other human beings.

The hidden door to another way of seeing and being is always lower than we expect. If we forget to duck when entering it is natural that we hit our heads. This brings us to our senses and allows us to see our fragile egos. The doorways in Nepal and Tibet vary in height, but are generally lower. Coming into the dark rooms from the intense light, we westerners are constantly smacking our foreheads into them.

How can we be creative without risking failure? How many of us have arrived at higher ground through perceived failure? When and where in your life would an outsider think that you had failed – what is the real story? What helped us move through failure to grace? What would we like to be more conscious of?



BRINGERS OF LIGHT

If we are open-hearted we are certain to attract the attention of enlightened guides, lovers, magical aids and helpers of all kinds. How wonderful it is to be lovingly initiated into the deeper life. How sweet, how precious it is to be initiated to the deeper life by a teacher who is aware and loving. The relationships that form through this kind of initiation go beyond kinship.

Make no mistake enlightened does not mean perfect, but rather a bringer of light. This means the Bringer of Light can take many forms and appear in many situations. These guides and helpers are on their own journeys and are doing their own healing and inner work. They are watchful of creating relationships of dependency and they do not try to take you beyond where they have gone themselves. They are authentic, they make you stronger, more your unique self and their work assists you in finding and trusting your own inner guide.

Oftentimes we are woken by a true prince or princess who believes irrationally in love. Through gentleness and fierceness and through bringing all of themselves to the loving encounter we are woken from self-preoccupation and slumber. Or perhaps it is even the mountain itself, or nature that responds to our needs and initiates us to the deeper life. Many mountain climbers become pilgrims through the guidance of the mountain and the natural world.

In many of Rumi's poems he sings the praises of Shams of Tabriz, his spiritual teacher and guide. What poems of praise for a guide and helper flow from your heart and spirit? This is a chance to praise. How and when did you meet this bringer of light? What can you learn from them in how to be with others?



THE GATEKEEPERS

The Gatekeepers are the guardians of the status quo. They stand at the threshold of the deeper richer life; they prevent our journey to higher ground and wholeness. Their names are duty and self-image. They live behind our eyes and control all our actions. They tell us to soldier on, they tell us that other peoples opinions matter more than our own spirits and souls. They ensure that the call to higher ground or a new way of being falls on deaf ears – or on too-busy ears.

The gatekeepers are cleverly disguised, it looks as if they have our best interests in mind. But they do not serve us; they serve the status quo. Yet they also serve an important purpose: to ensure that only those who are sufficiently committed to the soulful, adventurous life with all its hazards heed the call.

Once initiated what are the things that prevent us from going on the soul's journey? Who are the gatekeepers that stand at the threshold of your life choices? How do these gatekeepers appear in your life? What is their script?



FINDING SANCTUARY

From time to time we all require a refuge and sanctuary. Knowing where our sanctuary is and being able to return to it for renewal is vital knowledge for healthy, soulful adventure. Without sanctuary we have no place to lick our wounds and begin the healing process. Without sanctuary we cannot slow down enough to notice the hidden door to the bigger life. Without sanctuary we do not find the time to open our hearts to another's suffering.

What or where is sanctuary for you. How can you tell when you need to return there? Is there a way to bring it back with you or store it inside?



THE HERALD OF ADVENTURE

When our dreams, goals, plans and ambitions are in ruins; when we are confused and feel like we have failed and we are faced with an ending. Do we remain in self pity or blame? How do we begin again? How do we find our way to the greater life? The journey to higher ground turns on this question.

There comes a day when the arrow of another's suffering penetrates the thick armour of our ego-preoccupation and sneaks by the busyness of our minds. One day we are broken open by another's suffering and we become receptive.

When we listen to our hearts we hear the herald of adventure, the call to higher ground. If we give ourselves permission to heed this call, if we face another's suffering with open hearts then we let the journey of love, with all its uncertainties, triumph over the journey of control. This takes courage. We must not miss the opportunity for love by becoming angry at the source of the suffering. By following our hearts we are guided towards the greatest adventure of all.

What has touched your heart and where has it led you? What has made you more receptive? How have you learnt to listen to and trust your heart?



TRUSTING THE PATHLESS WAY

You have begun to move in a different way and yet so often you are tempted to go back towards old patterns and the status quo.

There is a bridge that stands at the border of Nepal and Tibet that is sometimes referred to as the cloud bridge. You step off solid rock onto a swinging bridge with the occasional plank missing. Far below you is the raging Karnali Khola, ahead of you the bridge just disappears into the clouds. You take one step after another, trusting that the bridge is anchored into solid rock on the other side.

What helped you to trust your heart and intuition? How do you continue to be receptive and trust a pathless way of moving through life? How can you combine this with your need to set and implement goals?



FACING OUR FEARS AND MEETING OUR SHADOWS

This encounter requires that we face our fears and own our own shadows. For a thousand years robbers dressed up as pilgrims rob the unsuspecting. Sometimes fierce heavily armed Khampa bandits rob pilgrims on their way to Kailas. The bae bae bandits rarely kill but relieve pilgrims of their "excess" belongings often donating a portion of their spoils to local monasteries.

How many of us have not felt dehumanized or robbed in body or spirit? Behaviours fostered by institutions and individual greed assail our humanity every day. Bandits now take on 1000 guises and we find the human and the natural world treated like a commodity, as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself.

How do we begin to recognize the inhumanity within ourselves? How do we begin to see our own shadows? How do we begin to transform them into compassion? How do we take this opportunity to realize our full humanity during a time when humanity is under siege?



LETTING GO AND RISING UP

Even though the bandits have left, we have not let go of what has been taken. We tell the same story of the robbery over and over to all who will listen. Underneath we are still angry. We are secretly yearning for a way through and yet our intellects are not up to the task. It has been said that a sacred journey is not just moving around our interior furniture. Ultimately the path leads through acceptance and surrender, some furniture, some possessions must go!

Through the encounter the masks of our identity and who we are in the world have been shattered we can either occupy ourselves with piecing them back together, or let them go and become the "smithy of our souls".

As we begin to let go we experience a small death. At first it is difficult to tell if it is our ego or our spirit that is dying. This is vital knowledge that we can only gain by careful self-observation. If, following our letting go we sense our spirits rise then it is our ego dying and we are surrendering. If we do not, then it may be our spirit dying, our source of inspiration. This is much more than the furniture, this is the house. Beware of becoming a sacrifice!

What have you had to accept or let go of? Has your ego diminished? Have you felt like you have risen through letting go?



Move to Departure – see
Resurgence Thoro

RECEIVING PURIFICATION & RENEWAL GAINING CLARITY AND SIMPLICITY

We have begun to let go and we are on our way to greater clarity and simplicity. Now we begin to realize that we have received a backhanded gift from the Bandits. We are ready for purification and renewal. Bathing in the icy waters of Lake Manasovar at the foot of Mt. Kailas is said to erase the sins of a lifetime.

Having faced our fears and encountered our shadows we have become aware that none of us can live every moment with full awareness of our actions and their effects. We are beginning to gain insight into those places within ourselves where we lack humanity. Following letting go we move to a deeper waypoint and recognition begins to take on a profound role; recognizing that we are in the other and the other is in us. Now forgiveness of others and self-acceptance become available to us, and this helps us not waste too much time with remorse and depression. Nor can we through deprivation and austerity force our fears and shadows into submission.

Only the one with the pure heart can heal the king, pull the sword from the stone, slay the dragon or ascend the holy mountain.

Have experienced purification or renewal? Have you moved towards clarity and simplicity? Has it been voluntary? Have you moved to greater self-acceptance in your life? Have you been forgiven or have you forgiven another?



BECOMING RECEPTIVE AND CONNECTED

Now we are at the physical and inner high point of our pilgrimage. This marks our turning for home. We have become receptive now we are experiencing a connectedness and a sense of oneness that we have never felt before. It 's as though a door has been opened to the entire world around us; the mountains, the lakes, the clouds, the sun, the restless wind, fellow pilgrims, saints, mystics, madmen, beggars, and even bandits – all have been welcomed as a guest at the door, all have touched our inner life and enriched us. All of them have helped us to higher ground.

The journey has taken us a million miles from the familiar, broken us open, made us vulnerable and moved us to surrender, all to make us more receptive. Why? Because if we are not receptive we cannot see the sacred, we cannot receive healing and wholeness, we cannot meet the beloved.

We cannot climb to the summit of the sacred mountain; the summit of the sacred mountain can only be attained by realization. Now that you have become more vulnerable, more available to the fullness of life you catch a glimpse of the summit through the clouds. You can see that any hierarchy is an illusion. That the peak is oneness.

Ultimately every good story is a love story. This is an opportunity to listen to and share our love stories. How has life broken us open and let the love pour in? Share the big loves or the little loves that our receptivity has opened us to.



HEALING AND WHOLENESS

So many wounds healed over, so many journeys, so many homecomings, so many cycles.

Now you have completed one cycle beginning with Initiation, through The Call, to The Adventure and now around to the Return. Literally and metaphysically you have completed a Kora which in Tibetan means pilgrimage around a sacred site. In other traditions this is called a circumambulation.

You feel whole and complete, not perhaps for all time, but for now you feel like you are right where you should be. You look over your shoulder and you no longer see a mountain of rocks and ice you see the interplay of light and shadows, you see the peak of Kailas catching the last rays of the setting sun and bursting into flame. There is something inside you that has melted; there is a part of you that feels whole.

Leonard Cohen wrote, "There is a crack in everything, it's where the light gets in." Our journeys orbit around our wounds, (fresh from this life, or unhealed wounds passed to us through our parents). This wound that the journey circles becomes our source of compassion, making sacred what once was broken. From the wound flows a source of blessings.

What healing journeys have you been on? What have you learnt on your healing journey? How has your healing affected the lives of others? What have you had to overcome to become more whole?

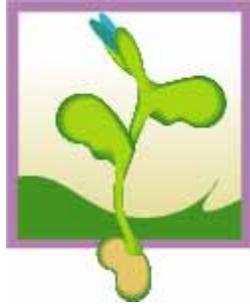


SACREDNESS & REVERENCE

The Nepalese greeting Namaste acknowledges the possibility of a divine relationship between people. "I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides; I honor the place in you of love, of light, of truth, of peace. I honor the place within you where, if you are in that place in you and I am in that place in me, there is only one of us!"

As we become whole and move beyond relationships of dependency and ownership, we become attuned to the sacred dimension that exists all around us, all the time. As we are broken open and melt we become more attuned to the connections all around us. We begin to move with reverence wishing to participate with the sacred dimension more and more often. We begin to see it in each other; it in the wind, in the earth, in the fire, in the water, in the air, in the animals, in the birds, in the flowers – in all things. This is like Mana, food from the Gods, given freely and available to all and within all. Once we have tasted this we seek to discover the limits of where it can be found. Now we are seeking more than just an adventure. We are pilgrims and all of our journeys have become sacred.

This is a chance for us to share what is sacred with each other. What is sacred to you and how have you come to see the sacred dimension around you?



GIVING FROM ABUNDANCE

As our wounds heal we become bringers of light to others. We are filled to abundance by gifts that flow from love and our experience of the journey of life and we wish to share that abundance with others. Perhaps we wish to enter the dark places and bring light to others.

One of the great challenges of the return is how do we make a living and live in accord with what we have experienced and what has been revealed to us on our journeys? Do we need to leave our work or is there a way to bring the sacred into the work we do now? Often what we initially offer is rejected by society. How do we face this, how do we embrace this as part of the journey, how can we use this as an opportunity to remove the ego from our offerings?

How do we socialize this experience without turning it into a commodity and dishonouring it? How can we continue to move and live with the truth as we have seen it? How do we stay on our journey and not burn out? What guidelines should we follow in helping others along a more spiritual path?

There are so many questions here. One thing is certain - we cannot do this alone. This is an opportunity meet other who have faced this challenge and to share with each other our experiences in helping others to higher ground.



LOVE AND ETERNITY

The pattern in our lives can't be scripted in advance. The pattern emerges in the living; the path is made by walking. Yet when we move in relation to the sacred, when we embrace both the light and dark in our lives, when we pursue wholeness, sacredness, and love, when we offer or receive grace, when we observe the power of redemption, in these ways we catch a glimpse of a divine order. And when we look back on a well lived life we see a pattern emerge and there in the sand is the dance of a crane.

When we see what others have begun in love and find ourselves inspired to pick up where they have left off, when we are following our calling and sense our destiny, when we inquire into death, when we embrace love, in these ways we catch a glimpse of infinity.

After completing thirteen Kora's around the Holy Mountain you are no longer a novice, at 108 Kora's you reach another spiritual waypoint; journey upon journey, round upon round beginning again and again and yet never returning to the same place. Spiralling into infinity.

Inspire and be inspired by others who have glimpsed at infinity and a divine order. Is there a tradition that connects you with the spirit moving through time? How have you caught a glimpse of divine order? Have you received something precious that had been lovingly cared for by another?