

A Soul Journey - Part 1

In January I had a dream that was so vivid I felt it physically and it woke me sharply. I wrote it down, looked it up, shared it out and did various inner work analysis with it to come to a greater understanding of its meaning. I knew it was of significance and after trying out many interpretations I eventually realised that the dream was telling me that it was time for me to die. However, before all my loved ones panic I will state that this was not to be physical death but rather a metaphysical demise of old attachments; releasing and crushing the self-imposed boundaries of my own fears and expectations of others in order to recover my true authenticity. It was a time for rebirth and rediscovery. It was time to listen to my soul.

I had already been reading the amazing book 'SOULCRAFT' by Bill Plotkin. The depth of information in this book completely reinforced the importance of this process of getting to know my soul and what would bring it the greatest fulfilment in this lifetime. One of the things that elicited a huge 'Aha!!' moment was in reading the clarity of distinctions between spirit and soul, briefly summarised as: "Soul shows us how we, as individuals are different (in a community affirming way) from everybody else. Spirit shows us how we are no different from anything else, how we are one with all that exists." Plotkin states that "Your soul is both of you and of the world. The world cannot be full until you become fully yourself. Your soul corresponds to a niche, a distinctive place in nature, like a vibrant place of shimmering potential waiting to be discovered, claimed...occupied" Yes, in my desire for unification and oneness I had to embrace my uniqueness, to create and offer my distinctive contribution into the great jigsaw puzzle of life.

By the end of February certain events in my life had flipped me upside down and inside out and I was completely ready for an immersion into solitude to do some concentrated soul discovery. I planned to spend three days fasting and camping alone in nature in order to listen to what my inner voice was trying to express in it's gentle voice that too often gets overpowered by the volume of everyday life. My dearest friends supported me on this journey by allocating space on their land for me and my little tent. It was a clearing in the midst of the forest which was close enough that they could check on me but far enough removed that I would not be disturbed. Perfect.

The three days were full and diverse in the range of emotions and experiences. It was such a joy to be living simply, taking my baths and collecting water in the river, gathering firewood and just being still.¹ I was delighted with the sights and sounds of pure beauty and felt like a privileged guest in a world that usually exists without observation; honoured to watch the ecosystem function so blissfully aware and assured. It is magical to be in this realm reading from the living book of Creation and the peace of communicating without speech was liberating. As I dwelled in the forest I listened carefully to the many 'silent' voices to hear the messages from the trees, the insects and the fungi. The fire smoke that highlights the sun rays through the tree canopy, spider's webs glimmering with the dawn dew and bamboo that creaks in the wind are all conversing with the language of the soul and this resonated through the entire core of my being. I heard the words of the wordless and truth from the timeless and in communication with the web of life I felt that I was being filled with the wisdom of a billion years.

In this space I asked many questions about what the direction and purpose of my life, what gifts were mine to share and how I could be a vessel of healing. One of the responses was for me to share these messages and assist others in communing with the spirit of nature whilst continuing my own personal journey in this dimension. I am asked to remind others that the Earth is calling out to be heard but she speaks in a language that is beyond words. If

we are to survive and flourish we must learn to hear with more than our ears and express ourselves with a language that is beyond the spoken word. As African shaman Malidoma Patrice Somé reminds us, “Language as we have it is a vehicle towards the Source but should never be mistaken for the Source itself. At the Source words would not be necessary, for meaning would be produced instantly. We could see, feel and touch results of someone’s thought instead of relying on words to give us a picture of it” Nature encourages us all to open our sensory selves to absorb its multi-faceted language so that the limitations of the spoken word no longer contains us or creates boundaries but when used are merely a part of the chorus with all other creatures in praise of creation – a part of the orchestra which blends in harmoniously with the rest of the symphony.²

Amongst my joyful connections nature also showed me its flip side. I met trees whose trunks were covered in sharp protruding thorns. I did my best to respect their presence and proceed with caution but one large thorn did manage to find its way into my finger and drew a little sacrificial blood. Razor grass also cut my legs and has since left its scars of initiation on my right thigh. On the first day I took a nap without being covered and was feasted upon from head to toe by miniscule red bugs which burrowed into my skin and covered my body in an irritating rash which itched intensely and incessantly for the duration of this retreat and the week beyond.

I am not exactly sure what it was that woke me in the middle of the second night. It could have been this unstoppable itching holding me to ransom with the threat of sending me to edge of insanity and demanding to be soothed with oils. Or maybe it was the sound of a forceful down-pouring of tropical rain, beating every side of my tent. Or it could have been the feeling of the banana leaves I had placed beneath the tent to give it more waterproof protection that had now become a source of immense discomfort as the ridges of their hard spines dug into my body. Hmm... whatever it was I was certainly awake! I was irritated, tired and began to worry that my tent was going to leak and leave me soaked in the middle of this dark night. There was nowhere I could go and nothing I could do - I had to surrender. I gave up on the idea of sleep and sat bolt upright in my tent. A few years ago I participated in a 10-day silent Vipassana meditation retreat and with Divine right timing my mind started to retrieve phrases from this training such as “equanimity and balance, just observe, don’t be attached, release craving and aversion and be free...” Amidst the initial chaos of emotion, thoughts and physical discomforts a certain calm began to emerge. I realised that there are many others in the world facing worse discomforts on a daily basis than my little 3am unrest and I was opened up to feel more compassion and caring for all beings. I observed my breath and allowed a flood of ideas to wash over me and cleanse my confusions with renewed visions of my role in life. Everything is a blessing - I was being fortified.

The new day arrived filled with bright sunshine and bird song and I felt a new confidence in my ability to manifest what was put before me in imaginative insights. I enjoyed a day of appreciation, respect and pure love energy. As this part of the Earth rotated away from the sun on the third and final night I lit a fire and having learned from my ‘mistakes’ of the previous nights I manage to create a really great fire with just the right combination of kindling twigs, quick-blazing dry fern and large slow-burning logs. I rejoiced in the orange glow of the arising flames and enjoyed the generous heat. Ah yes, this was the first step on a path of journey’s into the wild that are part of my destiny in this lifetime ahead.

The next day as I prepared to leave I took down my markers for the four directions and quarter points and said prayers of thanks to each as well as to the sky, Earth and my own heart centre. I felt waves of gratitude for the natural area which had hosted me so graciously and felt a twinge of sadness to leave this sanctuary space which over the past three days had

become home. As I turned back for a final glance the last remnants of the fire were burning slowly and I knew a phoenix was arising from the dying embers. This was time for a new beginning. I marched purposefully forward to my friend's house with stories to share, visions to manifest and enriched with the precious treasures of my soul. This is a journey to be continued...

Terri Henry
May 2006

¹ These actions reminded me of the famous Zen saying "Before enlightenment, Chop wood Carry water. After enlightenment, Chop wood Carry water" and I felt that it was a reminder that whatever our level of consciousness, these basic necessities of life remained the same and with this awareness we are to be humble and mindful to the process wherever we are on the path of life. ☺

² Even as I write this expression there is much that can not be said about my experience – words are too dense a medium to articulate what was felt and understood.