



Sweet Darkness

When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.

When your vision is gone
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn

The Journey of Descent

Over the past decade, I've used Joseph Campbell's archetypal Hero's Journey as a template for mapping inner transformation. But the #MeToo movement and torrent of revelations about sexual assault and harassment of women, suggest that the solo, heroic paradigm is ripe for revision.

Enter the ancient, Sumerian Myth of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth.

The opening lines of Inanna's story begin: "The Goddess opened her ear to the Great Below." As she listens, Inanna hears the wailing of her sister, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, who is mad with grief over the death of her husband.

"I am going down," she announces, against a chorus of worry and angst. Everyone knows: no one returns from the Underworld. But Inanna is resolute, and sets forth on her journey of descent.

The opening of the myth reveals a distinctly feminine twist. Inanna's journey begins with compassionate listening; the willingness to attend to the shadowy underworld, where discarded parts of ourselves churn and fester unexamined. The direction of Inanna's journey is also telling. She does not set out across the wide world, but descends down, dropping into the depths of what is already here.

What does it mean to descend and discover more about who we already are? What does it take to unearth previously ignored aspects of our heart-mind and weave them into wholeness?

As Inanna travels down, she passes through seven gates where she is stripped of her royal accoutrements: silk robes, lapis lazuli beads, brass breast plate, golden scepter...until she arrives at the Court of her sister, "naked and bowed low." When Ereshkigal sees Inanna she immediately strikes her dead, and hangs her body on meat hook.

But the story is not over yet.

Inanna's journey is not a singular, daring effort. After three days, her faithful attendant, Ninshubar, beats the drums of Heaven, calling for help. In response, old Father Enki fashions two tiny, magical creatures—the Kurgara and the Galatur—from dirt under his fingernail, and sends them into the underworld to help her.

I love the image of dirt as the source of magical power and of salvation. What is needed is so often right under our nose (or feet, or fingernails.) Also, Ninshubar and Father Enki underscore the importance of attentive companions, and of asking for help. Inanna's journey emphasizes that *while no one can walk our path for us, we do not walk alone.*

Meanwhile, back in the Underworld, Ereshkigal continues to wail and moan.

"Oh my back!" she calls out.

"Oh your back," the Kurgara and Galatur whisper, hovering close.

"Oh my heart!"

anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.
~ David Whyte

"Oh your heart."

This goes on for some time, until Ereshkigal, now feeling much better, sits up and asks: "Who are you? And what gifts can I offer you for your kind words? I would gladly give you the bounty of the harvest, the depth of the oceans, the vastness of the sky."

"Actually, we'd just like that body over there, hanging on the hook," they say.

Then they revive Inanna and escort her back to the Great Above.

The empathic mirroring between Ereshkigal and the Kurgara and Galatur offers a pith depiction of how to engage with difficult states of body, heart and mind. Be present with what is. No judgement. No advice. Hover close, listen, and respond with simple, honest words.

Inanna's journey offers a revised view of traditional mythic tales of bravery and valor. Instead of going out into the world, her adventure takes her down, into her inner depths. Instead of returning home with riches and power, she returns with a rounder, more inclusive integration of who she is.

It is time to transform our (so-called) universal archetypes; time to craft new stories that respect the feminine and honor the earth; time to wake up to the truth that darkness is not just the absence of light. Darkness is fertile ground, the source of our creativity, possibility and potential. It is where everything comes from, and where we all return.

Upcoming Events

Friday, April 13, 2018
The Mindful Leader

The Buddha was a great leader. This daylong workshop at Spirit Rock will use Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey as a framework for exploring the life of the Buddha and understanding leadership as a path of practice. Our time together will weave talks, guided meditation, reflection, and interactive exercises. You will leave with a clear map forward for your personal leadership journey, and new practices and perspectives to support you. Open to anyone in a formal or informal leadership role.

[Click here for more information.](#)

Tuesday Evenings 7:00-9:00
April 17, 24 and May 1, 8, 15, 22, 2018
Taking Refuge in Buddha: Inspiration for Walking the Spiritual Path

This six-week seminar will study the historical and mythical stories from the life of the Buddha as a lens for exploring our own lives and spiritual journeys. We will draw on Joseph Campbell's map of the "Hero's Journey" as a framework to illuminate the archetypal stages of the spiritual path. The seminar will weave meditation, talks, interactive dialogue, with between sessions reflection and practices to ground the teachings in daily life.

[Click here to register.](#)

Or contact: renee@appropriateresponse.com

As we roll into 2018...

May we find the tenderness and tenacity to meet the onslaught of bewildering news.

May we dedicate ourselves to standing for truth and justice.

May we have the courage to walk hand in hand and to bring as much honesty, creativity and kindness as we can to our wide, aching world.

With love and appreciation,
Pam

Pamela Weiss is the founder of Appropriate Response. She is a coach, meditation teacher and recognized pioneer in integrating the principles and practices of mindfulness into leadership development and organizational transformation.

