



THE RETURN HOME

Bringing Aliveness
Back To Daily Life

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The Return Home: Bringing Aliveness Back To Daily Life

Boon - a symbol of life force energy, geared to the needs and requirements of the one on whom it is bestowed. The 'pearl beyond all price'.

Return - to turn one's attention back to (something); a feeling of coming back or recurring after a period of absence; to feel, say or do in response to (something).

Born again after experiencing a life-enhancing and soul-awakening journey, we must now return home from where we have taken our leave. We must now survive the impact of returning to the world as it is, having become who we now are, and risk bringing forth our newly clarified gifts and capacities – as this is the whole purpose of the journey.



*"In loving the spiritual,
you cannot despise the earthly.
The purpose of the journey is compassion.
When you have come past the pairs of opposites,
you have reached compassion.
The goal is to bring the jewel back to the world,
to join the two things together.
We are not there until we
can say "yea" to it all."*

- Joseph Campbell



*It is time for all the heroes to go home
if they have any,
time for all of us common ones to locate ourselves
by the real things we live by...
Suppose an insane wind holds all the hills
while strange beliefs whine at the traveler's ears,
we ordinary beings can cling to the earth
and love where we are,
sturdy for common things.*

~ William Stafford



Many of us can say that we have experienced profound moments of bliss. Many of us can say that we've had mystical and magical encounters with nature, with our lovers, and with the seen and unseen forces of the universe.

Moments such as these tend to live outside of time. They enrapture us and capture us; they bring us alive with wonder and awe. Moments of mystery and unity with the world tend to transport us, move us, and inspire us. They undeniably connect us to something larger than and beyond our previously known selves.

We can't make these awakening experiences happen through our own will, even though we can seek them out. We can only enter the necessary conditions within which they have the possibility to occur. When these moments outside of time do happen, we are typically surprised by their occurrence. Over and over again, we discover ourselves to be filled with grace and gratitude.

In order to allow this boon of mystical enchantment to take place in our hearts, we practice surrendering control, open up to the unfolding of mystery, and say yes to what comes. Our spiritual center of gravity turns towards the unknown, and even the unknowable.

As we enter into the realm of mystery, we feel carried by the spirit of adventure. We accept that we cannot know the outcome of hero journeys in advance, nor can we attach ourselves to expectations or desired outcomes.

Whenever we undertake an authentic journey of the soul, we inevitably experience success and failure, and we learn and grow from both. This is especially true of our failures. We enter the light and we enter the darkness, and when the adventure and the ordeal goes well, we find the unifying life force energies in between and beyond any sense of duality or polarity.

When we journey in this way, we invariably enter the reality of mythic adventures and ordeals. Through our lived experiences, we are destined to feel our lives being pulled downward and taken inward; then we feel our lives directed forward and outward once again, like Jonah from the belly of the whale.

Ultimately, by going through these adventures that move us beyond our usual selves, we discover something about how the 'zeal of eternity' wishes to embody us, expressing itself through our unique personality and circumstance. This is the discovery of the boon, the vital and meaningful inner life that awaits us at the core of our very being.

Then we must return, once again, to that which was at once familiar, and perhaps now strangely foreboding. We must find our way home again.



Crossing the Return Threshold

*The first problem of the returning hero
is to accept as real, after an experience
of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment,
the passing joys and sorrows,
banalities and noisy obscenities of life.
Why re-enter such a world?*

- Joseph Campbell

Those of us who have had the experience of a life-giving, mystical 'other-worldly' encounter can certainly relate to the disenchanting aspect of returning to what we would rather eliminate or leave behind in our lives.

We return to face crowded airports and traffic congestion; we stand in lines and stare at stacks of (e)mail; we encounter un-stocked refrigerators or overgrown grass in yard; we come home to hassled and pre-occupied family members.

We inevitably return back to find once again the confining nature of everyday life - we are inside of four square walls; we are tied to schedules; we find people behaving towards us as they always do. We might initially feel ever further constrained by the routine obligations we have undertaken within the worlds we inhabit and know so well.

As we re-enter the dense, demanding atmosphere of daily life, we can lose sight of the beauty, the mystery and the eloquence of timeless ways of being expanded. The mythic realm, recently so palpable to us on the mountain in West Virginia, can feel far away in a hurry. Experiences that were momentous just a week or so ago can now seem irrelevant, or even somewhat silly, in the midst of the day's normal routines.



When we return to the sameness of the world we left behind, we can find ourselves wanting to turn away from our ordinary lives. The appeal and lure of staying in the mythic adventure pulls at us.

We may want to avoid grounding ourselves back into our familiar physical locations in space and boon, not yet having any faith that the boon will now begin to arise from within us, while in the midst of daily life. We may begin to doubt that we can bring forth new life and new love wherever we are presently planted.

During the return home phase of our journey, many of us might also feel out of place in our once familiar worlds, in the same ways we might have felt initially lost or uncertain when we crossed the threshold into the mystery of our journey.

We might feel lost in the cement jungles and in the bland, rectangular forests of urban landscapes. As we re-enter the selves we have been in these worlds, it can feel as if the clothes we once wore no longer fit us - yet we don't yet know what else to wear, or what our new size is. It is understandable that we might now feel 'out of place' in places that once suited us very well.



Joseph Campbell tells us very clearly that *the problem we face is to maintain one's sense of the eternal in the face of immediate earthly pain or joy.*

The return back to a temporal life, and all the fruits of this world, can draw our attention away from the new spiritual center we may have discovered as part of our boon.

We can find ourselves being pulled, sometimes as strongly as ever, back towards the more peripheral crises and persistent dramas of our current circumstances and relationships, and become swallowed by them once again.

This is a common struggle, and often we will fall or fail here once more, losing sight of the new boon of spiritual awakening and clarity. We may need some kind of 'spiritual insulation' to keep the seeds of our newly established boon nourished, and to keep remembering we are being re-shaped to a newly forming identity.

We might also have to re-define what 'home' means to us, what it now feels like, and where that is now located - especially within us.



Redefining Our True Home

The sense of 'home' we all know and learn to cherish is a place of shelter, nourishment, safety and warmth. It is a feeling of being contained in a desired and familiar way, felt deeply in the bones of our being, and in the heart of what we know best. We may be wanderers, seekers, and journeyers, but we all also carry within us a longing for home.

As part of our return, we have the opportunity to re-examine and re-define the differences between one's house and one's home.

- *What is the difference between a physical shelter that is simply a storage unit for our possessions, and a sense of place where we can bring our hearts, minds and bodies for rest, refuge and sustenance?*
- *We tend to feel at home in environments and physical spaces where we can feel most like our real or true selves.*

Home is not necessary a physical location, though it often involves a sense of connection to a particular exterior space or landscape.

For instance, I feel deeply at home in various mountain terrains, for reasons I cannot rationally explain. Yet I can also feel at home, as an urban city dweller - especially at night, and especially when I am near the river in the south side of the city where I was born and raised.

I also feel bucolic sense of home in the realms of various forest regions: in the green fields and open skies of rural environments, ancient and soulful, unconcerned with things of the modern world. From time to time, I feel an old, melancholic pull to reside in the midst of nature's sounds, smells and visual delights, a certain kind of timeless, country comfort.

Home can also be defined by our sense of connected to people who are significant and known to us.

I feel at home among the company of family members in one way, and at home in a very different way when I am among the adventurous seekers and journeyers who have become the most kindred of companions to me.

We all need some anchoring, some actualized sense of place, where we can rest in ourselves, and prepare ourselves for the life challenges and meaningful experiences that are waiting for us.

- *Where do you feel most at home? With whom do you feel most at home? What reflecting mirrors do you need; where do you long to be most; what best reveals to you a sense of 'at-home-ness' within yourself?*
- *From the opposing perspective - where does the wanderlust in you live? Where are you restless and ever-on-the-move? How are you not yet at home?*



Remembering the Boon

One of the fundamental tasks for the return home is an ongoing remembering to one's true nature.

We must be willing and able to 're-member' the self that has been long forgotten or set aside, lost or disowned, and is now to be reclaimed as an essential aspect of our true nature.

The whole purpose of the hero's journey is to re-connect with and re-member who we really are and what we were born for, and not just what we were born into.

We are asked again and again to keep listening to our soul's calling: to bring forth a talent, a capacity for a deeper humanity, growing into a certain ability that is rising up from within, coming into a new awareness from the deep wellspring of our eternal being.

Our new gifts and abilities often come forth as a result of the recent adventures and ordeals we experienced during the journey we have just taken, and have been taken on. These adventures and ordeals have created the exact circumstances and conditions we needed to elicit the vital and re-generative life force energies from within us, that reveal to us the boon of who we really are.

Once we achieve this hard-won boon, this discovery of our deeper, true self, found in our ventures into the unknown, this fresh self-revelation - can be easily lost to us as we return home. We become vulnerable to one of two fundamental ways of failure as we facing the challenge of bringing back our boon to the world we live in.



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One way we fail in our return home is by being over-attached to what we have discovered about ourselves. In the Buddhist tradition, the problem would be termed as one of 'grasping'.

When we cling to what feels important to us, we attach a kind of 'specialness' to it. This feeling of 'preciousness' begins to cause us to become possessive, and to narrow and control the flow of vital energies within. We can become willful, locking ourselves onto a path that once more becomes confining because we have begun to take our gifts too literally, or too seriously.

I remember a council sharing that took place among our stewards during a Men's Hero's Journey wilderness intensive a good number of years ago. As part of our annual weeklong Journey Intensive, the men who are the stewards and keepers of our Journey ways create a *Spirit Fire*.

A *Spirit Fire* is our ceremonial fire that burns continuously throughout the life cycle of a Journey - from the time of the journeyer's first arrival at our basecamp, to the final departure from our community space. It is a living symbol for the communal Spirit that burns within each of us, as well as among us.

It also represents the Great Spirit of life, from which we all have come, and to which we will all return. The stewarding team sees to it that the fire is well-tended, and kept burning day and night.

The teaching we embrace is that we all must learn to tend to our inner fire, to keep this fire burning through the inevitable joys and sorrows of our life.

During our opening talking stick council one year, one of our men shared how the year before, he felt that it was important to him to light a particular votive candle for himself from the weeklong Spirit Fire. He intended to carry that lit fire home with him, to keep his own inner fire burning. He lit his candle and kept it close to him, carefully protecting it from the element of wind, throughout all of his preparations to return home.

This became his primary focus as he departed the mountain in his vehicle. Yet by the time he came to the end of the six-mile descent from our basecamp, the flame had somehow become extinguished without his noticing it. He felt defeated, and was despairing about how quickly the flame can go out.

Slowly over the course of his drive home, something new came to light in him. He came to realize that he must let go of the journey he just had, to stop his clinging to it, and to trust the process of life. He had to allow the fire to go deeper within himself, beyond what he could see, and just let it come alive through him when it was needed. He had to become willing to *be* the light, to embody the light when it was necessary.

This was a far bigger challenge than literally keeping a votive candle flame burning. But it was also more vital and more meaningful to him as well. Moving from an ego attachment to a literal outcome, and shift into a surrendering of one's whole self to the process of becoming awakened, is a big paradigm shift.

Moving deeper towards the realization that a spiritual fire burns inside our being, sometimes in our awareness and sometimes out of our awareness, is a necessary step towards the integration of our soul's giveaway to the world.



Another way we fail to remember the boon is that we fail to take hold of what is truly ours (and ours alone) to take. We can fail to take ownership of our inner resources, to continue to nurture them, and then we fail to actualize our unique gifts into the worlds we serve.

We can also fail to make enough insular time and space to gradually cross the necessary thresholds of the journey back to home.

If we don't respect the time it takes to integrate what is new, we will quickly feel lost or dis-oriented again, and will be easily pulled into old and familiar wounds, distractions or dramas. We end up feeling empty when this happens, and old feelings of inadequacy or uselessness revisit us.

Here, significant faith is required of us so we can begin to let go of everything that is no longer essential in our lives for a short period of time, in order to take hold of what is becoming most essential for a sustained period of time.

Re-integration means returning home to the depths of our own heart spaces that have been touched and moved. It means having some wandering around time, or simply resting or sleeping for a while, waiting without any demands or expectations from ourselves for some days - trusting that something most essential is taking root and coming together inside of us, that will soon emerge in new and surprising ways.

On the return home, allowing this process to happen is our true 'leap of faith'.

Unfortunately, many of us lack this kind of understanding of the integration process. It requires a certain faith, along with extended patience. We need to honor and cultivate an ability to wait, and let the seeds of new life take root within us.

Many of us often fail to make room for this type of fertilization for our inner space. We must realize and allow for the integration process to take place in its own time. There isn't something to 'be done' about it for a while.

The challenge is to practice essential acts of self-care that nurture the seeds of something worthwhile and uniquely our own, little by little, until the time is right to take new (and heroic) action steps, to venture forth in new directions.



*Cauldron of changes, blossoms from bone.
The arc of eternity, a hole in the stone.
We are an old people,
We are a new people,
We are the same people,*

Deeper than before.

- A song from our Journeying Traditions

I have recently returned home from another Men's Journey Intensive in the mountains of West Virginia. It was once again a satisfying and exhausting experience of communal wilderness living, done with meticulous service. We brought forth what was most essential in each of the 50 men undertaking their own journeys. We formed ourselves on common ground and through the common good.

Men came from across the Americas, Europe, Asia and from the land Down Under, each finding their own way towards rich resources of meaning and vitality – some found within them, some found all around them. From this experience, I feel well spent.

Now a week later, I have been waiting for the past two days for my own personal integration process to begin taking root. I have had the opportunity for aloneness and silence. I have had a birthday celebration with family, social and musical time with friends. I have had time alone in the woods with my horse. I have taken the time to do mundane and menial tasks: food shopping, gardening, laundry, yard work.

Waiting for something, and for no-thing. Waiting in the space of 'no-thing-ness' – no particular thing of significance yet. This phase of the journey usually feels both timeless and endless to me. It is a feeling as if I have both been here before and like never before; yet I also have to be here once again, for an extended sense of space and time.

This morning, it has been more of the same. Now the rains have come. Somehow I sense this was the essential ingredient for my integration. I feel nurtured by the rain, like I am a seed being watered. I am able to let go of my pressing expectations for myself. I can let go of the day's demands, and just feel the grey, cool, moist air.

It is *now* that I can drink in a particularly meaningful reflection I received via email yesterday. It was from a man dear to me, who was also on our recent Journey Intensive. He offered me a deep mirroring of who I am to him, from the clarity of his own heart and eyes. It is one that feels essential to take into my own heart.

His reflection now rains down and into me. I feel able to deeply absorb his reflections. I am soaking in his reflection like a sponge, undistracted for a timeless moment.

I feel the importance of laying claim of my ability to be a 'Herald', someone who awaken others to life. I feel how I want to keep coming forth with what is alive in me, and how I can. I am able to call out in an impassioned and embodied way to others. I also feel my deep desire to gather people together, to create vital and

fertile group spaces, in which something meaningful and lasting can unfold and be shared among all present.

At last, this knowing is more than just a thought going through my mind; it is not just a passing feeling. It is now welling up in me. My integration process is bringing a new kind of inner *knowing*, born from a long time of 'not knowing myself' that preceded it.

Through the eyes of another, I can listen to and trust what they truly see and I cannot see. I now know this heralding aspect of myself to be true - beyond any specific fact or particular event, and beyond anything I could describe or explain. Like myths, it is truer than any fact or literal event.

Seemingly out of nowhere, a truth is coming together inside of me, renewing me today. This presence of 'soul' feels like a resonance, an echoing within me - something that just resounds as 'what is'.

I do not know where this '*zeal of eternity*' within will lead me from here, and it doesn't feel important or necessary to know. It just matters that I know an aliveness is happening within me, right now, in a new way, coming from beyond what I know. That feels like enough for me, something worth living more deeply into in the days ahead.

I am aware that I will soon get distracted by my cell phone and by computer screens, and I will once more be consumed by my petty concerns, fretting over whatever pressing issue arises next, and happens to be out of my control. But today I am taking hold of the archetype of the *Herald*, that which wants to live in me again, and express itself through me.



Bringing Forth Our Aliveness

*"If you bring forth what is within you,
what you bring forth will save you.
If you do not bring forth what is within you,
what you do not bring forth will destroy you."*

- Gospel of Thomas

*"The work of representing eternity in time,
and perceiving eternity in time, cannot be avoided."*

- Joseph Campbell

Once we lay claim to what is truly ours, and we know it to be true in the fibers of our being, we will then need to cross the threshold further into daily life. We do this by bringing forth our distinct gifts and new abilities, and offering them to the world.

We have to take action.

We move from the downward and inward movement of soul awakening, and shift towards coming upward and outward - towards self-expression, towards manifestation, towards definitive action. Life moving forward, making its own way, as only we can, as we go – the way of mythic adventure.

This is no easy or simple task. You may have noticed by now that the world is not sitting around waiting for us to make an essential self-discovery, and speak it out loud to others. We are not typically asked to pour our talents and gifts out into the waiting arms and needs of the world.

We have work to do. We have to create or discover new pathways for our inner work to flow outward. We must find our way to those distinct places where timelessness and time intersect, where our 'deep gladness meets the deep need of the world', as Frederick Buechner says.

Today, as herald, I am calling out to each of us who have recently been on an important journey, one that has taken us far from all that is familiar to us, and now will take us to places we've never been before. For now, it is time to *return home*.

It is time to return to our true selves, more aligned with our inner life. It is time to make space to be in our 'at-home-ness' – both in solitude and silence, and with like-minded, kindred spirits, and with those who care about us.

It is time for us to rest into a newly surrendered self, becoming more sensitized to and more grounded in our being. It's time to settle into an embodiment of what is truly ours and ours alone to live, feeling into the excitement and the vulnerability of renewed life force energy coming alive within us.

When the time is right, we must have the courage to follow our instincts, and express ourselves from the new place within. Take a risk; find an authentic response to the life awaiting you, and follow your aliveness. Bring forth your true nature, and feed this hungry world.

It is up to us.

- Michael Mervosh



"What I think is a good life is one hero journey after another."

Over and over again, you are called to the realm of adventure, you are called to new horizons. Each time, there is the same problem: do I dare? And then if you do dare, the dangers are there, and the help also, and the fulfillment or the fiasco.

*There's always the possibility of a fiasco.
But there's also the possibility of bliss."*

- Joseph Campbell



Allegiances

*It is time for all the heroes to go home
if they have any, time for all of us common ones
to locate ourselves by the real things
we live by.*

*Far to the north, or indeed in any direction,
strange mountains and creatures have always lurked-
elves, goblins, trolls, and spiders:-we
encounter them in dread and wonder,*

*But once we have tasted far streams, touched the gold,
found some limit beyond the waterfall,
a season changes, and we come back, changed
but safe, quiet, grateful.*

*Suppose an insane wind holds all the hills
while strange beliefs whine at the traveler's ears,
we ordinary beings can cling to the earth and love
where we are, sturdy for common things.*

- William Stafford

