



the stages of the quest

Through the Archetypal Gauntlet of Life Part 2
The Later Stages – “Atonement” through “Freedom to Live”
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“Giving is an essence of existence, and a test of our character; it asks deep questions about our relationship to other, to ourselves and strangely, to time itself.”

– David Whyte

In our last quarterly issue of *INSightOUT* we outlined the first half of Joseph Campbell’s 17 stages. These stages launch the undeveloped and uninformed Hero on a tour of duty unlike any he or she has experienced in life so far. The Hero has moved through the embryo stages of the *Call*, the *Refusal*, and the *Spiritual Aid* of a sage or doyen. With an emerging confidence he/she *Crosses the First Threshold* only to find him or herself faced with *Temptation*, on *The Road of Trials*, and in the *Belly of the Whale*. In the midst of these relentless assaults, he/she experiences unconditional love and unimaginable beauty in the *Meeting with the God[ess]*. The Hero is cresting in the journey as the quest now delivers him or her to the pinnacle stage of *Atonement*.

Stage IX: Atonement requires the Hero to confront the person who holds ultimate power and authority in their life. He must be initiated by whatever holds the ultimate power in his life. In many myths and stories this is the father, or a father-figure who has the power of life and death. The Hero needs to develop his own sense of Self and become *one with self*. The Hero must advance past this figure and take his own place as *Head of the Table* and thus become the father. This births a transcendent and radical adjustment with the parental figure.

This is the pivot point of the journey. All the previous steps have been moving to this place and all the steps that follow will move out from it. For *The Transformation* to take place, the Hero’s old self must be “killed” so that the new self can come into being.

Stage X: APOTHEOSIS is the transforming moment for the Hero. It is a resurrection from the final death of Self in the confrontation of *Atonement*. In this stage, the Hero is *Apotheosized* in an elevated status that symbolically ranks him or her “among the gods.” This step is also a period of rest, peace, and fulfillment before the Hero begins the return to the *Ordinary World*. The Hero reaches the point of fulfillment and experiences the revelation that in the end, the way forward is the way back; a return to home. The Hero must soon call an end to the journey.

Stage XI: The Ultimate Boon is earned, the goal accomplished, but the quest remains unfulfilled. The Hero has survived death, overcome his/her greatest fears, slain the dragon or weathered the *Crisis of the Heart* and now deserves a rest. It would be easy at this point of the Journey to focus on the prize the Hero receives, but the *Boon* is more than a solitary prize or treasure. It is the outward consummation of success. The reward is symbolic of overcoming. It represents the Hero’s transformation in the quest and the gift he must bring back to his *Ordinary World*.

Stage XII: Refusal of the Return is an atavism to the *Refusal of the Call*. Having gained *The Ultimate Boon*, the Hero seeks to remain in the place where bliss and enlightenment abound. The Hero rationalizes the *Refusal to Return*. Why would he or she ever want to return to the *Ordinary World*?

Even in the growth and maturation of the Hero by way of his or her journey, there is still much that is unconscious which is yet to be revealed to the conscious. There is a certain repose that the Hero may take advantage of for a time with his/her prize. This is now the greatest *temptation and test* for the Hero. It is

superior to all other temptations and tests, for this *feels* deserving. There is a sense of completion and validation. The reflex is to enjoy what has been earned.

Stage XIII: The Magic Flight is the furious race for home. Often times the boon is not freely given, it must be retrieved with expediency as other parties may be after the same thing. It might have been necessary for the Hero to slip past a guardian of the boon and it is now necessary to make a dash. Though the Hero is reborn into a greater acumen, a greater skill, an expanded wisdom and confidence, the battle or chase remains desperate. The Hero no longer fights against the disadvantage of his/her lesser self, but rather struggles against factors which are outside of their control. Instead of fear, the Hero holds an exhilaration in the outcome. The wager is high, and the Hero will use everything he/she have learned to obtain the victory and return it to their world.

Stage XIV: Rescue from Without is what reminds the Hero that life is never a solo production. Just as the Hero needed the sage and doyenne to help him/her in his journey, he also needs allies to assist his/her escape back.

The Hero is agile in his new found acumen but he is still a neophyte against his adversaries. He is fresh from the stages of his Hero's Journey and hasn't mastered his new self completely. The need for rescue re-affirms the humanity of the Hero and clarifies that the Hero is never truly alone in the Journey.

Stage XV: The Return Threshold is the transitional moment of fulfillment for the Hero. The true test of his or her success lies in how well they share this newfound wisdom. The Hero must return to the reality of common life.



The first threshold the Hero crossed in the beginning of his Journey, was a symbolic death from the *Ordinary World*. This final transition, *the return threshold*, is a symbolic rebirth back into the *Ordinary World*. This is anti-climactic for the Hero. There is no way for the Hero to communicate his experience which lies beyond form and language. The Hero must now hold both realities, his *new, non-dualistic* awareness and the *old dualistic* view.

Stage XVI: Master of Two Worlds signals the reward of achievement in balancing the inner and outer world; the spiritual and corporeal. the Hero retains a countervailing abstraction to exist in the material realm without fear of death. He now has the "*Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division... not*

contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other" for this is the "*talent of the master.*"

Change fosters change. If existence is subjective, the *Ordeal* the Hero has been through fundamentally changes his view of life and that conversion, changes life itself.

Stage XVII: Freedom to Live is the outcome of the Heroes Journey. "*The Hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he is.*" In this state of freedom the Hero receives the liberty to be who he is. He can thrive in ambiguity, hold an ambivalent equanimity, and not mistake "*changelessness in time*" for the "*Permanence of Being.*" He is not static for nothing retains its own form. Nature, the great renewer, will create "*forms from forms.*"

James Hollis points out that "*the quality of all our relationships is a direct function of our relationship to ourselves.*" At last, the Hero holds his relationship to himself without fear, anxiety, and distracting emotions. He holds life loosely in an unbiased context, living only in the present. He is not trifled by the future or the past. ***This is his relationship to the realm.*** It is not hard to see how the *Further Journey* will continue to refine and define him into a *Wise Sage*.

The Further Journey

At any moment we may find ourselves stuck or faltering at some stage of our Heroes Journey. There are many trials and temptations that hold the potential to derail us. The two most important elements of our quest for Self to remember is, we do not do it alone and we are never really finished. As David Whyte conveys, the way forward is the way back, and with each iteration of our Heroes Journey, we renew it at a higher elevation. We strive to ever ascending heights until one day we look down and realize how far we've come... and then in the distance we see someone... a Hero answering *The Call to Adventure*, and they ask us for directions... and we realize in that moment, that we have become the sage or doyenne for the young Heroes answering the call. We have become what we were all along; what has been inside of us from the start. The wholeness of our Truest Self.

We will continue with more insights in the next issue of *INSightOUT* in 2017.

Please contact us if you would like to discover or explore your own personal journey. We will assist as professional guides and allow your own story to emerge. Just text or call us for more information regarding the Heroes Journey: 402-598-8511.

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