

Journey into Darkness

by Jaq D Hawkins

"Do not hide from darkness. Only in balance is truth to be found."

-Nick Frost

To journey through the underworld is one of the most common themes known to the mythologies of humankind. The stories vary, but the general theme is one of a hero who passes by or conquers a guardian of the gate to the underworld, then passes through various adventures (experiences) which may include a test of courage or a quest to rescue a damsel held prisoner - only to emerge back into the daylight strengthened by his adventures. This theme is archetypal to the magician, although the hero may well be a heroine and that which must be rescued is likely to be a part of him or herself.

The catch phrase, "acknowledging your dark side", is growing in popularity even among the most idealistic members of the new age community. The journey into one's darker self is an internal journey, but it is one that cannot be simplified into something as easy and non-threatening as a pathworking. To truly look your dark side in the eye, not only acknowledging its existence but accepting it as a part of oneself, is a balancing act of the soul that could put shivers down the spine of the most jaded alchemist.

Many of us have experienced pathworkings which veer away from the "all niceness and white light" journeys and take us into realms of the subconscious where we face potentially frightening encounters, most effectively when we face our own fears. The most potent experience of this sort that I've ever had was the result of a past life regression tape which followed a theme of looking for recurring patterns over many past lives. An experience of this sort can bring out realizations of imperfections in ourselves which can be very upsetting to have to acknowledge, but it is a beginning toward looking into our darker selves.

Acknowledging one's dark side, and accepting it, are two very different things. We can acknowledge our negative thoughts, admit to ourselves that we are human enough to hate our enemies and wish nasty things to happen to them, but can we allow ourselves to act on these natural human impulses freely, without guilt?

For example, if I acknowledge that I am inherently a selfish person, the natural inclination in today's society is to attach guilt to that which might be described as a character flaw. As a magician, to accept that description without question would be a much more serious failing than to act selfishly in many situations. After all, selfishness is a survival instinct. A healthier attitude might well be to accept the selfishness for what it is, an integral part of myself, and find ways to use it to my advantage.

If I acknowledge something much more socially unacceptable, such as a desire to kill an enemy, the situation is different because acting on the impulse would bring consequences. Even if I thought I might get away with it, murder is a rather permanent solution and doing it would negate any possibility of making up the quarrel or possibly even finding some selfish use for the offending person at a later date. Besides, there is always the possibility of ending up in prison or somehow fouling up the job.

So, in the interest of self-preservation, I can acknowledge my hatred and feel no guilt for it, and then find an intelligent solution to the problem. Sometimes this can take a lot of imagination and foresight, but the gratification when a plan comes together, or in some cases when you simply walk away from something, is far greater than any quick gun to the head solution. I speak from recent experience on this one. I've recently taken control of a long term situation concerning an ex-husband using financial advantage and personal attacks including my beliefs to try to take my daughter away from me. It isn't finished yet, but while I wait for the judge's decision, I've been busy working out and setting up ways to completely destroy my enemy through the same legal means he tried to use against me. No guilt.

There is an incredible feeling of strength that comes with walking through the fires of Hell and coming out with the prize. The prize, that part of oneself that is rescued, is the confidence that comes with facing down seemingly insurmountable odds and coming out better than when you went in.

Coming to terms with one's dark side is more than just a test of courage. It is a balancing of the personality which makes it possible to deal with real life situations where emotional distraction could make the difference in whether one survives the experience or not. The art of cold calculation in a difficult situation with no thought for moral issues or what is fair to all involved is dangerously efficient. One can feel the emotions, but use them or choose not to react to them until a less crucial time.

Self interest is not evil, it's just good sense. The journey into darkness, whether it is a dark part of ourselves or a dark time in our life, is a valuable learning experience. To allow fear to keep us from experiencing darkness of the soul would be a great loss, a loss of a part of ourselves.

Since I started this article with a quote, I'll finish with another one, much more widely known.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil because I'm the meanest son of a bitch in the valley!"