

FINDING YOUR SOUL IMAGE

Summary and Reflection



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Starwalkers - Northfield, MN

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Summary and Reflection Paper

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Finding Your Soul in Nature

In July of 2007, I participated in the Finding Your Soul Image retreat at Starwalkers - an intentional learning community in rural Northfield, MN. "Soul Image" refers to those archetypal, primordial, life-held images deep within one's psyche. According to Olivia Frey, the workshop facilitator, these images represent our deepest yearning, as well as those notions long forgotten, repressed, or rejected.

In this retreat, five participants including myself, were invited to gather in intentional ritual, reflect on long-held dreams and images, take meditative walks in nature, and build sculptures in nature to illustrate and illuminate our own essence of "Soul Image." Between activities, we prepared and ate meals together, shared many personal stories, and lived in community with one another.

Opening Ritual - *Forgiveness and Renewal from Mother Earth*

We began with an opening ritual, gathering in a circle around a large plant in an outdoor clearing. Using a rattle, Olivia Frey, our facilitator, walked behind each of us, shaking the rattle above our heads and around our bodies in an initial blessing. We then turned to face each of the four directions - East, North, West, then South, to give thanks, and to invite any friendly spirit guides to be with us as we embark on our personal journeys for the weekend.

After calling in the directions, we were each handed a glass filled with water.

Close your eyes.

Begin to wander back in your mind's eye, all of the bad things that you have done to yourselves - all of the things that have happened in which you blame yourself - all of the reasons you may hate yourself. Think of the times you have desecrated the Earth, your relationships, your very self. Hold these thoughts, and begin to project them, through your hands, and into the water within your cup.

...

As you breathe deeply, you begin to feel a warm energy coming up from the ground - into your feet, then your legs, your stomach, your heart, and your head. You notice that the energy is a comforting and loving one. Allow this comforting energy to fill your body, until you feel it expanding all around you. This is the loving energy of Mother Earth. Listen as she calls out to you - deeply and lovingly.

"I feel the grief you feel, and I am part of you. I forgive you my child. I invite you to pour the water of your grief upon me, so that I may empty this pain from within you, and transform this water to nourish me. Come! Empty your cup onto me."

After our cups were emptied onto the plant in the center of our circle, fresh apple juice was poured into our cups, as the ritual continued.

Water that is given to the earth is vital to its transformation. Water brings a catalyst of growth, change, and new life. Come and drink of the fruit of the earth. Water and grief is transformed, and new life begins!

We then drank from our cups again. Then, in closing, we each were allowed to offer to the circle - one thing in which we were thankful - as we held hands in our circle around the plant. At the end of the ritual, Olivia offered us a final parting.

May the circle be opened - yet never broken! Go in Peace!

Water and The River Between

On Saturday after breakfast, we began talking about "Soul Image" and any thoughts we had about our own "Soul Images" before the workshop. What things had we been drawn to over time? What images kept repeating themselves?

One of the images that I have been holding for the past year, which I have pondered upon extensively, is my image of "The River Between."

When the seemingly large "boulders of institutions" no longer serve to feed humanity, we must find a river between. This river does not protest, petition, elect, nor ask for permission. It finds its own path of least resistance. It weaves a path between the rocks, carrying the waters of life downstream. Once the river is forged, the water has the power to erode stone over time - changing and transforming the boulders around it. The river brings animals of Earth and Sky. Soon, moss begins to grow on rocks, and grass begins to peek up from between rocky cracks.

I brought a picture I had drawn of this "river between" to show. It is interesting to note, that over time I have been drawing this image, yet this was the first color image I had made. My river was now in color, and there was much more activity in the water and around the

boulders. The boulders were only outlines in brown, while the river was deep blue, with stars and swirls appearing under the surface. My river was definitely transforming!

I also brought a piece of writing about water, found in Between Heaven and Earth, by Harriet Bienfield and Efre Korn.

**Of all the elements, the Sage should take water as his preceptor.
Water is yielding, but all-conquering. Water extinguishes Fire.
Or finding itself likely to be defeated, escapes as stream and re-forms.
Water washes away Soft Earth, or, when confronted by rocks, seeks a way round.
Water corrodes Iron till it crumbles to dust; it saturates the atmosphere
So that Wind dies. Water gives way to obstacles with deceptive humility.
For no power can prevent it following its destined course to the sea.
Water conquers by yielding; it never attacks, but always wins the last battle.
The Sage who makes himself as Water is distinguished for his humility.
He embraces passivity, acts from nonaction and conquers the world.**

Tao Cheng

Eleventh Century, A.D.

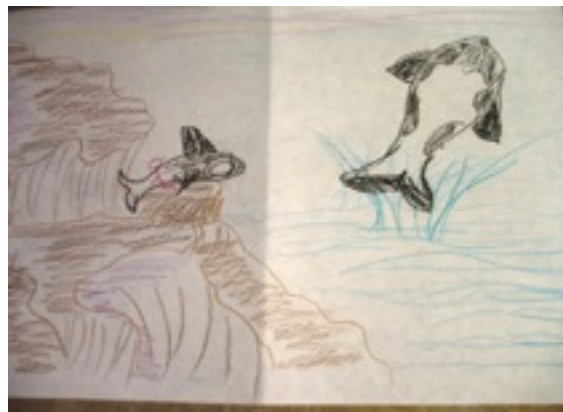
I stumbled upon this writing, ironically, during this workshop, as I had picked up the Between Heaven and Earth book after speaking a few days earlier with my acupuncturist about how my body “traps dampness.” I wanted to read more about Chinese Medicine Theory, and thought I could read parts of the book during any free time and before bed. I had no idea that this very valuable writing would make itself visible to me at this time.

Journey to a Dream - Longtime Friend and The Upward Leap

One of the core techniques, or exercises at Starwalkers is that of “Journeying to Dreams.”

As a group, we were given drums and rhythm instruments to play, as we “create the space” to manifest and journey to a dream we wish to explore. After 5-10 minutes of drumming and creating rhythms, we were each handed crayons and markers, along with a large sheet of paper, upon which we would draw and illustrate our dream.

I'm sitting on a flat area of a high mountain, overlooking a deep cavern with pools of deep blue water below. I've come to meet my dearest of friends. My



friend is a Killer Whale - an Orca, as he was first named. He is large, yet not as mature as the rest of his clan. I come to visit him from time to time - yet there are sometimes long periods of time between my visits. He sits with me in silence, allowing me to lean my back against him. We sit and gaze out at the wide expanses, and the deep cavern below us. We sit, and we breathe, and we allow our thoughts to drift. We are longtime friends - friends since childhood - and perhaps, friends until the day we die. We gaze more down into the water, and a large Orca, perhaps ten times the size of my Orca friend, leaps out of the water playfully. He jumps hundreds of feet with joy, as if to simply say, "Hello!" - then falls back to the water where the splash at the bottom reaches as far as we sit. We are wet and awestruck!

When speaking about this dream, as a group, we first explored some of the meanings behind my communing with the whale.

“If the whale is a part of you, what does he long for?”

Throughout much of my life, I have been alone. I am an only child. In many ways, I often feel isolated even among friends, and feel that I cannot share or express my deepest feelings of joy and transformation with them. I long for someone who shares my passions instinctively - so instinctively that we need not express them. We both hear the song of the wind, the song of the ocean, and the song of life itself, and we can simply “be” as we sit and experience the song. Our relationship is uncomplicated, yet deeply profound. We never ask anything of one another, yet enjoy and treasure our time together. While we may grieve our goodbyes, we are confident that we will meet again.

My impressions of modern society often leave me feeling very weak and disheartened. I see how structures like consumerism, status, stature, and the fear of losing these things, keep many whom I consider friends, from experiencing perhaps, a truer life potential. While I know that I should refrain from judgement upon others’ lives, I often feel a kind of grief that I am “alone” in my love for the earth, in my desire for transformation, and my deep desire to “unplug” and come back to perhaps “the essence” of what my life experience holds. Much of this thinking can be seen by others as far too esoteric or “in the clouds.”

I deeply seek others who dream, who imagine, and who long to find or create the “paradise” they, no - we, have always wished for.

As a second part of our dream journey, we were told to draw once more - only this time, focus on a specific part of our dream. Perhaps there was something else we wanted to explore. Maybe we still had questions unanswered about our dream. What are the more curious aspects of the dream that beg for exploration and illumination?

I chose to draw the image of the larger Orca leaping forth out of the water.

Perhaps, because of the height gained in his jump, the whale would need to gather a tremendous amount of energy, and swim up from depths far beneath the surface of what the eye can see. In order to grow so large and strong, he must live below for many decades. Eating, swimming, training himself, learning how best to jump from others, and by taking small jumps, would be his daily, repetitive activities. He may only have the energy to make his highest jump a few times in his life. Yet, for the chance to inspire others, to share his dreams, or to simply say "Hello!" - his jump is worth the time spent under the surface.



The insight gained from this examination of the larger whale has helped me to realize many things about my own life as an activist, healer, and “transformer” of things. If only I could use the energy I put forth in my longing or frustrations, and channel that energy into gathering knowledge, training, and making attempts at my own “huge leaps” - then what could I become? What might I be able to do beyond my wildest dreams? Perhaps all of the time spent “underground” or “under the radar” with many projects or ambitions is of complete necessity, as it will be crucial for any “great leap” that I may be called upon to make in my life. I must tell myself that “Change begins slowly - underground. It begins its process where eyes cannot see it. The time spent preparing may well be the essence of transformation itself.”



My Sculpture - Three Cauldrons and the Water of Life

We were told to find a spot in nature that we felt especially drawn to, and to collect items we found in nature to create a sculpture that would illustrate our Soul Image. One of the problems I initially encountered was the lack of a river, stream, or waterway on the Starwalker’s property. However, my ideas for a sculpture came about when picking choke cherries and wildflowers as I passed the garden near the house.

A hose!

Once I found the long and winding hose, I guided it through and between the many different plants in the flower garden near the house. I then had the end spout of the hose positioned over the gar-

den wall, where I placed a stack of rocks, followed by three bowls descending down a hill to catch water. I placed some of the berries and wild flowers I had been picking into each of these bowls.

Luckily, the hose had a valve at the end, and I could close the valve, then walk up the hill to turn on the water, to fill the entirety of the hose (approximately 100 feet), then turn off the water. After that, I could walk back down the hill to my sculpture, and open the valve on the hose to release the water.

Water would shoot out, at first beyond the bowls, quickly seeping into the ground. Then, as pressure became less and less, the stream of water would spill into the bowls one by one, and then trickle upon the stones at the top near the garden wall.

I named my sculpture “Three Cauldrons and the Water of Life.” I felt that the winding path of the hose represented my image of the twisting and turning “river between.” I especially enjoyed the irony of making a sculpture with a water source coming downstream, yet the bowls I had positioned were filled as the water pressure eased - in essence, making water travel upward, to fill the cauldrons and to spill onto the rocks.



Soul Image and the Transcendence of Time

Throughout this workshop and afterward, I found myself reflecting on the many serendipitous encounters I would have with my “Soul Image” of water and The River Between.

While I named my nature sculpture “Three Cauldrons and the Water of Life” - I had not yet begun a large part of my personal journey into the stories and beliefs of the Celts. I learned many months after this workshop that a quarter of my ancestry could be traced back to England, and that the signature “red hair” of my mother’s side of the family is a recessive gene that can be traced primarily to the Celtic people of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. The Celts believed in three “cauldrons” or energy centers of the body. These cauldrons could be compared to the idea of the seven “chakras” or spiraling energy centers of the body, originated from ancient India.

There were many “threes” in the Celtic belief system that I have been encountering.

Three Cauldrons of the Body

Three elements - Earth, Air, Sky

Three essences of humanity - Body, Mind, Soul
Three realms of reality - the Upper, Lower, and Middle Worlds

The stacking of stones to make cairns, and the many references to stone wells in England, Scotland, and Ireland I have been reading about, have also given me pause when I look back at this sculpture. I am now beginning to view this sculpture, as well as many of my other creations of art, journey work, and dream work, as possible visions of a deep connection to the earth. Perhaps there is an ancestral longing, or a deep archetypal image to which I have now been shown a doorway, or portal.

My Soul Image Sculpture, while created in a time now passed, and now, long since dismantled, still grows in me as an example of a vision born from the earth - given to me. If a Soul Image is that which stays with us over time as we grow, change, and transform, then I should not be surprised when an experience relating to it seems to “just appear out of nowhere.” Perhaps my Soul Image is that which exists outside the boundaries of time and space. Perhaps it IS my longing, and my deep joy. At times it seems untouchable and nowhere to be found, and at other times, it is all around me.

