

Medicine Wheel and Vision Quest Preparing (24 Mar 2009)

Dear Questors:

Here are some resources for psycho-spiritual preparation for the S. Manitou Vision Quest Experience.

Axis Mundi: Vision Questing and the Mythology of the Medicine Wheel

The axis mundi = center of the world, it is the heart of Being, presence of the Divine orienting Center, symbolic of the heart of each being and creature, and is found in the symbolism of all the world's cultures and their mythologies. It is the hub of the Medicine Wheel, and is recurrent throughout all the shamanic practices, ceremonies and chanting used on this vision quest experience.

A Medicine Wheel is a geometrically circular symbol, with crossing lines indicating the Four Cardinal directions, and having a central orienting axis or axis mundi.

In the indigenous and shamanic rites of the Americas, the Medicine wheel is the structure of all sacred ceremony, and traditionally was the structure of village, dwellings, and sacred ceremonial and community lodges. Its symbolism thus is reflected in each sacred rite and ceremony: peace pipe, sweat lodge, long house, fire ceremony, vision quest, cleansing and smudging ceremonies and so on. It is the shape of the sacred drum, and represents the sacred hoop of life. It is expressed by the Spirit Tree down in the Crows Nest by the guest cabin. As such the medicine wheel is a archetypal mandala image, a kind of universal myththeme that symbolically points to the heart of You, and of all things, the presence of the Spirit. When we listen to our own hearts, to the NGS, we are accessing our own inner axis mundi, and when we participate in sacred ceremony, we are orienting ourselves to this central point of the community of human and non-human relationships.

In this Vision Quest, from start to finish, this sacred mythological system is employed, because mythic imagery reaches into places in the soul which the intellect itself cannot go or express.

The Medicine Wheel has many layers of meaning. Most fundamentally we have a scheme like this, and this is the general model I use.

East = Place Where the Sun Rises / New Beginnings / Birth and earliest childhood/ Fire Element

South= Place Where the Summer Warmth comes from, childhood, playfulness, intuition, felt-sensing, open heartedness. Earth Element

West= Place Where the Dark comes from/ Midlife, Cave of Introspection, Ritual Death and Dismemberment / Burial also associated with Water, and Thunder Beings/ Cave Bear

North= Place where cold comes from / Elders, Role Models/ Ancestors, Grand parents/Wind Element

Note: Each direction has spirit helpers. Give a gift and thank them, invite them into your peace pipe, into your heart, into your solo Quest site Medicine Wheel.

Medicine Wheel for Soul Retrieval Work -including reconnecting to the soul's core (=heart). This is the Form we use for the pre-Quest Medicine Sweat, so be thinking about what old patterns or behavior you need to give up, and what your need to recover or give new life to.

1. East: Give Thanks for Hope of New Life, of New Beginnings without your affliction. Give a symbol of

this new beginning to this East altar/portal.

2. West: Burial Place of old patterns, thoughts, feelings you no longer need. Give thanks. Leave symbol of what you are giving up in the coffin of the West.
3. North: Recall and Give Thanks to some grand parent or Aunt or Uncle, or Teacher who helped you survive a difficult time. Leave symbolic gift.
4. South: Recall and give Thanks to the innocent (trusting, playful, creative, heart-open) child part of you which got left behind, and hides behind a wall of fear...because it was not safe to be here anymore. Take your time and coax and invite it back on line in your life. Give Thanks.

Another version or layer of the Medicine Wheel has to do with the Seasons of the Year and of the life-cycle.

East: Birth / Spring

South: Childhood-Youth/ Summer

West: Midlife / Autumn

North: Old Age/ Wisdom/Winter

Myths go where intellect cannot, deep into the psyche, and right into your center of being. The ancient mythological system of the Medicine Wheel will serve you well on this Quest Experience, and can transform your life and bring tremendous clarity of Vision (of purpose) about your life and where it is headed. So contemplate it well this coming week, as you make your final preparations for the Vision Quest.

RITUAL and the ARCHETYPAL HERO

Sacred ceremonies are enactments of mythology, my teachers Paul Ricoeur and Mircea Eliade used to say. The key to the work of the great mythologist, Joseph Campbell, is this: Following your Bliss means listening to and following the heart, its energies and honoring its navigational system guidance [NGS]. For Campbell finding your bliss requires the Hero's Journey, the second major stage which he sometimes called the "Journey to the Center."

The Hero's journey is the heart and key to every mythological and spiritual system in the world. It has and Call to Adventure [known as the Quest), followed by three major phases that are variously described: 1) The Separation from the everyday social order. 2) The Descent/Initiation or Journey to the Center, 3) Return to the Boon. The Vision Quest follows this very ancient and archetypal paradigm, as you have already responded to the Call in agreeing to go on this Quest, and you will progressively separate and shed your everyday social attachments and habits, giving up watches and cell phones for 5 of the 7 days of this Adventure. Through the various sacred ceremonies you will journey deeper towards your center, and strip away more masks and layers, letting go of baggage and garbage you no longer need. You will Descend into your depths and journey to your center, your personal axis mundi. There, in the depths of your solo questing you will seize the gold of your true nature, the source of your bliss, and then take on the challenges of progressively returning with it into your everyday world, bringing it on line in a new way of living, and sharing the benefits with others in your life and communities.

Consider this: 1) Spiritual practices are rituals (sacred ceremonies). 2) rituals enact myths. 3) Myths enact

archetypes. 4) Archetypes are the numinous and primal thought forms of the Divine Spirit...the consciousness and creativity of the Divine Life manifesting itself in the world, and in your life. Every spiritual practice has the archetype of the Hero Myth in it implicitly: prayers, worship services, prayer pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, soul retrieval ceremonies, vision quests, walking the heart path, even the creative process itself of artists, composers, architects, poets, and writers of all kinds. Because this archetype is central to all mythologies -it is the archetypal template of the heart path, individuation, the path of the mystic, the ceremonial healing—it is fundamental to understanding its role in the mythological shaping of a life-transforming vision quest.

For more information, you can consult Joseph Campbell's, **Hero with a Thousand Faces** (Princeton Bollingen Series), but a more readily useful source is Christopher Vogler, **The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers**. Vogler's book is very practical and provides easy examples of the Hero myth in modern films. Finally my book, **Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue** goes into all this in great depth.

Mikkal