

## Living Myth Podcast

### Episode 371 - Fear is the Way Through

**Michael Meade:** Maybe the preface for the story is that fear is the enemy of most great projects. The story might have come to mind because of being an in a nonviolence center. Because it begins once upon a time, once back in time, once when people had more time. And it begins after there was a war. And it happened that after the war concluded there was a woman, a young woman. And she had been waiting for the return of the person she loved most in the world who happened to have been away at that war. And then it happened that when he returned, he was not the same person. And even when they were together, it would feel as if he wasn't present. And often when they were together, whereas previously there had been love and care and mutual feelings that went deep, now even when they were together, he seemed distanced. And often he seemed on the verge of some kind of rage. And after a while, the young woman realized that they may never have again that feeling they had together once upon a time. And she would see him sitting on a cliff looking out at the ocean as if he was staring out in order to see or spot or connect to something he had lost. And she realized that she had lost something as well. And she began to feel a loss of love in her own heart. And the more she allowed herself to feel it, the deeper that loss went until she became concerned that she might not ever find love again.

And so she began going around looking for a cure for this loss of love. And she went to this place and that place, then tried various therapies but nothing in fact, was healing the loss or curing the pain she had in her heart. And then one day, she remembered that people used to talk about a Sage who lived in a cave up in the mountains that stood beyond the village in which she lived. And she thought, that is the person that people said used to make all kinds of cures, and potions that could cure illnesses of all kinds. And so she decided to go to that cave and talk to that Sage and see if there was some help that she could get for this loss of love, that was creating a sickness in her heart, and in her soul.

And so the next day, when the sun rose up, she rose early itself. And as the sun was climbing the stairs into the height of the sky, she climbed up those hills beyond the village. And eventually, she reached the opening of the cave, inside which people said the Sage lived. She stepped from the day bright world, into the darkness of that cave. And for a moment, she couldn't see anything. And she just stood there, facing darkness. And after a while, as her sight adjusted, she could see what appeared to be the flickering of a little flame at the back of the cave. And so she walked in that direction. And soon enough, she saw a small fire burning in the back. And she could see the curve of the back of someone sitting close over that fire. And she assumed that that was the Sage. And so she approached quietly. And realizing that she was interrupting the deep silence of the place, she apologized for bringing an unwanted sound, but said, "I'm here looking for a cure. I'm here, looking for something to cure the illness that I have." And the Sage said immediately, "A cure, a cure. Everyone in this world looking for a cure for a world that is itself sick. How do you expect to get this cure?" And the young woman said, "Whoa, I didn't think I would have to be answering questions. I thought I would just be asking for something." And the old Sage said, "Alright. What is it then?" And she told the story of this heartbreak and this loss of love. And she was wondering, could there be a cure? And the Sage said, "Well, they might be. Come back in three days and you'll find out."

And so she bowed, and thanked the Sage, and she went back out of the cave, back into the light, down to the village. And she spent the next three days, the way you spend your time waiting to find out, is there a cure or not? At the end of the three days, when the sun rose up, she began to climb the hills again, climbing all the way back up to where the cave was. And once again, standing in the brightness of the day, and stepping into the darkness, losing her sight and standing there quietly facing the dark. And then seeing the flickering of the fire and the shape of the Sage bent over the fire.

She made her way back to where the Sage was and said, "Well, the three days are up and I've come back to find out is there a cure or not a cure." And the Sage said, "Well, there is good news. In this case, there is a cure. And I've gathered all the ingredients needed in order to make the cure that can take away this illness except for one ingredient that I don't have. And I wonder if you would be willing to seek the ingredient that's missing?" And the young woman said, "Of course, I'll do anything, I'll go anywhere, anything to get that ingredient." And so the old Sage said, "All right. The thing that's missing, the ingredient that's lacking is the whisker from a tiger. As a matter of fact, the whisker from the head of a living tiger. And as soon as you procure that we'll be able to make the potion and that will create the cure. And you will be well again. Is it clear?" And the young woman said "What? What kind of medicine is this? Does everybody come here have to go out and deal with a living tiger in order to get well?" And the Sage said, "I think it was you that had just been saying you would do anything. You would go anywhere in order to get the ingredients." And she said, "Oh yeah. I did say that." And she bowed to the Sage and she left the darkness of the cave and stepped back into the brightness of the day.

Now she was descending the hill back to the village, thinking about how could she get a whisker from the head of a living tiger? How could you do it? How could she live through the attempt to do it? And she returned to a little hut in the village. And that's all she thought about. And she thought about it day in the night. And then she remembered that people used to talk about a tiger that lived in a cave that was at the end of a trail that went up to the mountains on the other side of the village. And she thought maybe I have to go up there and face that tiger. And one evening, as she was thinking about that, and feeling the kind of fear that arose in her bones at the idea of going towards the cave of a tiger, which was reported to be a man-eating tiger, which she imagined could also be a woman-eating tiger, as she was thinking about it, and she was cooking rice, and the steam was rising from the rice as she stirred it in the park, it occurred to her that a tiger must get hungry. And maybe if she brought food to the tiger, maybe that would help. And it occurred to her also, since it was a man-eating tiger, it probably wasn't vegetarian. And so she put some meat sauce together and put it on the rice, and began to walk up the mountain towards what she thought was the cave of a man-eating tiger.

And she happened to go up in the evening, as the darkness was gathering at the edges of the world. And she walked forward, carrying a bowl of rice with the sauce on it, not knowing how far to go, but at each step, stepping further into her fear. And finally, she went to where she could go no further. And she stopped and she put the bowl of food down on the ground and turned around and went back to a hut. And the next evening, she took another bowl and headed back up the same trail. And eventually she came to the bowl that she had left behind. And she saw that it was empty, she began to think this may really be a path leading to the meeting with the tiger. And she stepped over the empty bowl and went as far as she could go that evening, until she put the bowl down again, and went back and picked up the empty and returned to a hut. And each night, that's what she did. Going further and further up

that trail closer and closer, she imagined to her meeting with the tiger, and we will leave her as she's going along that path until we ourselves come back again to the story later.

First thing with a traditional story is to just sit for a minute and see what struck you. Story goes out to people differently. It speaks to each person in the language of their own soul. You could also say that a story is like mythological acupuncture, it sticks you exactly where you need to pay attention. And so, there's no right or wrong details in the story. There's just right and left. And anything that strikes you is the thing you have to hold on to. Because the story, the word means storehouse. And what's stored inside stories is what everybody in the world keeps forgetting. And if you let the story talk to you, it delivers things that have been stored in the old treasury of the human soul. So just sit for a minute and see what struck you.

So, when I was mentioning earlier, the ideas about the uniqueness of the soul, another companion idea, people used to be introduced to the knowledge of death while they were young. Because the presence of death, if it doesn't cause paralyzing fear, causes a deepening of imagination. When we know that we're here for a limited amount of time, each breath gains a little bit more value, and the possibility of wasting time becomes more obvious. And so sometimes the proximity of death is there to awaken a greater awareness of what it means to be fully alive. Right? Isn't that the African proverb? When death meets you, may you be fully alive? Because it's going to meet everybody. You got that memo, right? No one gets out of this alive.

And I'll say one other thing about it. You know the phrase die before you die. It's a really good phrase. What it means is die to the limited view of the surface of life that people are trying to tell you is what life really is. And in dying to that surface view of things, fall into the depths of your own soul, which truly knows answers about both life and death. Die before you die means let the surface view of life die, and go deeper. And so, one more thing that might be helpful there, there's little D death and Big D death. Big D death is at the end, and it's rather conclusive. Little D death means each time we let the ego dissolve a little, if you want to use psychological terminology, or each time we don't make the same old fearful mistake, and we try a risk that leads to a greater opening of imagination, or beauty or courage or whatever it is. There's a little death that occurs each time we awaken some more. So that's why they say die before you die.

She was taken right at the beginning, by the damage done, that war does to the soul. And what it does to those who are left bereft by the war, you know, I mean, this is, you know, back in this argument going on how you treat, the widow whose husband has died in the war came right back into the culture. Again, you know, what I'm talking about, this argument about what whether the President, I don't even like to call him the president, but Donald Trump, whether he was able, willing, interested in communicating, able even to communicate, you know, the kind of compassion and empathy that is what is naturally given to someone who has lost a loved one.

And, you know, they used to, in the smaller community groups, tribal groups, when someone died, everybody knew the person who died, it wasn't a name from somewhere. And the old rule was that a funeral for anyone has to take at least three days. So, everybody would stop what they were doing, in order to participate in paying respect and understanding the tragedy and the drama of life and death. And so now people barely pause. It's like death has come back in again. So, the idea of talking about

death is not morbid. It's actually the only thing equal to life in power. So, anybody who thinks they want to know about life, has to actually learn about death, especially little D death. And so, one of the problems with having people in charge, who have not been introduced to life and death in the meanings of suffering in the human soul, is they misuse power automatically. How could they use it properly if they didn't understand issues like life and death and suffering?

And one way to understand that is people used to get initiated. Initiation means the small version of you dies, so that a bigger version of you can come to life? And what happens now is we elevate people to positions of very great power, who are not initiated into life, much less into the into death and suffering. Am I making sense? Yeah, well, that's something that could be changed. That's something that could be changed, it probably has to be changed, or it continues the way it's going. Thank you.

I think it was coming into the building that made me think about war, and the aftermath. What's going on in modern conflict is not actually war. It's really a desire to in any way, destroy and mutilate and damage the supposed enemy. That's not even what war used to be. Not arguing in favor of war, I'm saying it's not even war, or as an actual battle. This is just destructive activity. So, something in the soul knows that something's very wrong, very wrong, when people are threatening to destroy the whole world with nuclear weapons, very wrong. And the soul feels a kind of a shuddering effect from that. And that effect spreads throughout a culture. And it creates levels of anxiety that are not personal, that are collective. And we're all living through that. And I have to say it out loud. We all know it, but young people are living right up into it. That's in the atmosphere, they're inhaling. And so, then you see what's happening, they're doing the studies now and young people are holding back from making commitments, like love relationships, like having children, like choosing a career. They're holding back because the world they're trying to step into is fragmented. And it's also distorted in many, many ways, and reckless ways. Anyway, just trying to keep the old story in touch with the story we live in.

In order for her to heal or even begin to heal, she had to face her fear. And so that that tells you the story is there to show something that is pretty profoundly true that where we fear to go, is where we must go. Right? Fear used to be called The Awakener. The word fear comes from the old Anglo word, fare as in thoroughfare. And the meaning of fear is to go through it. That's what it means to go through it. What we fear is what we're going to go through. And so nowadays, of course, fear is used to manipulate entire populations. But the troubles in the world now are the things that we have to go through. And if we don't understand that there are meaningful things in our own souls in our own lives, and meaningful things in the connection to the soul, the world, it makes it harder to have the courage to face the fears. And so that's sometimes why I'm trying to be emphatic about what it seems to me is present in the world, and willing to help us. So she had to face her fear. The first step is you have to acknowledge something wrong, that's like a good thing. And then realize that you would have already solved that if you weren't afraid of going there. So, then it has to be a matter of facing the fear. And of course, in this case, the fear is being set up in a tension with love. That's often the case.

If we're going to live our life in a full way, and step into things that cause us to face fears, become bigger, we'd better have a practice. In other words, you need your art or a practice. She develops a practice. She practices facing her fear every night, she practices going further every night. And what I take from that, myself, is that in order to be on the path, and actually be going somewhere, we need practices, usually more than one, you know what I'm saying? There's two big paths of practice. The

creative arts are intended to be paths of practice, of creativity. And then the contrasting, complementing path is the path of meditation. One is the path of stillness. And the other path is the path of activity in a certain way, right? They used to be called the Great yaj. And the great nay, you know about that? That's what they are. There's two basic paths of saying yes, I'll make more stuff. I'll paint more pictures. I'll write more stories. I'll play more music. Yes, yes, yes. I'll play under any circumstances. If you know, musicians, they'll, you know, they have to play. And then the path the nay, or the negative path, is the path of meditation. No, I'll be quiet. No, I won't do that. I won't do that. I mean, I know it's hard for people nowadays, when they have the nice yoga clothes and cushions, to realize they're on the negative path. And I don't mean to be discouraging, but it's called the great nay. Right? No, I mean, just to be clear, just to be philosophically clear, the two things you can do is keep bowing to life, which is bhakti. Right? The bhakti people say, if you've got a God, I'll bow to it. You know, give me a tree, I'll bow. I'll make music. I'll sing to anything. You know what I'm saying that's, that's a way to be alive. But another way to be alive is to say, I'm going to stop that quiet, still. remove this. Am I clear? That's the origin of the two paths of how you make a practice. And some people are naturally drawn one way or the other, and many people mix them and without a practice, how do you face a tiger? Ready for more story? All right.

Night after night, the young woman would cook the rice, put some sauce on it and carry it up the path. And it happened that as she was doing it, the moon was filling night after night. And each night she would go up the hill and the moon would rise and she would go as far as she could go, put down the bowl and return. And then it happened, one night as she was going up and the moon had become full and it had risen to the height of the sky and she was carrying the bowl and stepping into her fear a little bit further, she saw the tiger coming towards her and at that point she stopped still put the bowl of rice on the ground, and really hoped that the tiger still liked rice. And she stood there quietly. And to her amazement, the tiger, and its huge stripes came up and bent and started to eat the rice and the sauce in the bowl. And at that point he did say to that huge, beautiful, terrifying animal, I don't do what I'm about to do with any intention of harm. It's just something I need to do. So please don't be offended or take this personally. And as the tiger was eating, she reached forward, and she pulled the whisker from the edge of its mouth, where its huge teeth were gathering more rice, she plucked it out and jumped back. And the tiger pretended not to notice. And now she had the missing ingredient, this brilliant whisker from the head of a living tiger. And she turned around, and she held it up to the moon that was shining in its fullness in the sky. And she began to dance her way down the path. And she returned to her hut. And that night, she spent the night the way you spend the night when you know that there is a cure for what's been ailing your soul.

And the next morning, when the sun rose up, she rose up as well. And as the sun was climbing to the height of the sky, she climbed up the path, going back to the cave of the Sage and arriving at the opening of the cave again. She stepped from the light into the darkness, and once again, lost her vision and had to wait and face darkness until once again, she could see the flicker of the flame of the fire of the Sage. And she walked back, bowed to the Sage and said, "Excuse me for interrupting the silence of this place, but I have brought the ingredient that was missing from the cure that you need to make for me so that I won't feel so heartbroken and bereft. And she held out the whisker. And as the Sage looked up, she handed the whisker to the Sage who held it above the fire as if to see it better. And then let it drop right into the fire where it was completely and quickly consumed by the flames and turned into ashes which melted into the ashes that were already in the fire so that you could never find it again.

And the young woman said, "How dare you make me face death and all the things I'm afraid of and make me go out at night in order to find this whisker, and then simply drop it into the fire where it is destroyed, and now cannot be used in order to be an ingredient in the making of the cure." And the old Sage said, "Well tell me this. How did you acquire this whisker?" And the young woman said, "I'll tell you. Every night I cooked rice and sauce and I carried it up the mountain towards the tiger, night after night, going further and further into my fear until finally the tiger was coming towards me." And the sage said, "Well tell me this then. Is the heart of a person more dangerous than a tiger?" She said, "What are you talking about?" The Sage said, "I'm just asking a question. Is the heart of a human being more dangerous than a man-eating tiger?" And the young woman began to realize what the Sage was talking about. And rather than asking more questions, she simply bowed very deeply and said, "Thank you." Thank you, as if she was realizing the point of the whole thing. And at that point, she bowed again and simply turned around and left the cave and stepped it from the darkness out into the light of day.

And as she stood there in the brightness of the day, she did a little dance again and then descended down the hill back to the village. In terms of the story, nothing more is said. It doesn't tell what happened to her afterwards, or how she dealt with love or even fear. As a matter of fact, it doesn't say anything at all. It's just says that she went back to life having learned what she learned, having gathered what she gathered, having left behind a number of things, but picked up something else that caused her to dance, right in the brightness of the day. And me, I'm hoping that I can have a few moments like that, in the brightness of the sun. And I wish it for you too, for in terms of this story, there's nothing else left to say, because it has come to the end.

All right. So again, consider this, the last part now how, where it strikes you and how it strikes you. An unusual story, the end of it is a little bit anti-climactic, as if to say the thing you're looking for is not in the end, but somewhere else in the story. As if to say that's what she realized, that she had already found what she was looking for. And the whisker was just a way to formulate what she needed to find.

Yeah, this thing about the light in the dark is really important. Stories are full of codes and symbols. And so the cave is Plato's cave, is the Cave of the Old.. - the origin of philosophy in Greece isn't with Plato and Aristotle. It goes back to Parmenides, and back to the pre-Socratics, and back to the Pythagoreans, and so on. And the philosophers often lived in caves. And they weren't called philosophers per se, they were called *iatromantis*, the people who work with dreams. And so before there was philosophy of the kind that we now know, in basically intellectual academic terms, philosophy, *philo* and *Sophia*, right, it means love of wisdom. And the wisdom that they loved came from dreams. And people used to go into caves, and have dreams and visions and would receive help and understanding from the philosophers. And so, there's this whole history behind caves. And you can keep going back further and further into that cave, until you're at a place like Lascaux, or many of those other deep, deep caves. And you know what used to happen, when they finally discovered those caves, they're very difficult to get into, you have to crawl inside these twisting places and go through thresholds. And you finally wind up in these deep dwellings inside the Earth, that are deep and completely dark. And the young people would be the ones that had a crawl all the way in there. And everybody would be sitting then in the darkness, and then suddenly, they would light torches or something, and the places would be all lit up. And then they would see all the paintings on the walls of animals and the interaction of people with animals. And it was those caves, or initiatory caves, which

were used to awaken the imagination, and the deep connections inside the earth of all the young people. Am I making sense? So, the history of caves is partly the cave represents going deeper into the soul, deeper into history, and deeper into the knowledge of what it means to be human.

And so, every time she steps into the cave, and it says that she faces darkness, it's really a code language, about how whatever you're looking for, must be in the dark, because if it was in the light, you already would have found it. Right? You know that one, right? You know that story about Nazruddin? Nazruddin is the wise fool in the Sufi stories, and he's a Mullah. He's like a priest. And he's out one night in the town, and he's on the ground and it is really late. And he's looking around on the ground under this gas lamp. And a friend of his comes along and says, "Nazruddin, what's wrong? Have you lost something?" He said, "Yeah, I lost my gold ring. You know how much it means to me." He said, "Oh, I'll help you." And he's down on the ground now. They're both looking around. And finally, the friend says, "Are you sure you dropped it here?" And he goes, "No, I dropped it over there in a really dark place. But it's hard to see over there. So I thought we'd look in the light." So that's what everybody's doing. Everybody's looking in the light for something that can only be found in the darkness. Am I making sense? So, every mention of the cave is a mention of the history of facing darkness as a way of awakening. I mean, it's a really rich, old thing.

And then there's another thing going on. There are two caves, one has a Sage and one has a Tiger, seems to me they might be in collaboration. Or they might be the same being showing up as a Sage and a tiger. And then I can't help but think of the awakening of Buddha. Right? Which was the called the roar of awakening, the moment when Buddha awakens, and makes it through the veil, the fears, the darkness, whatever it is that Buddha was struggling with, it's called the roar of awakening. And so there's the roaring that's part of this deep longing of the soul, that's part of this deep awakening, a roaring. It's not a simple, gentle move, and you're there. It's an awakening that has a roar to it, has a tiger in it, if you want to put it that way. So, there's deep references here, to the caves of knowledge, and the caves of being.

One of my favorite stories is from North American, a story of the Old Woman in the Cave, who has been weaving this most beautiful weaving, which turns out to be the whole world. And then she has a dog nearby, and she has to go and stir the stew of all the grains and seeds, or else they'll burn and there'll be no trees and no fruits and no grains. And while she's stirring that pot, the dog unravels what she has been weaving for centuries. And she comes back and she's facing all of the beauty of the world unraveled on the floor of a cave. And she has a choice. She sits down, and she sees a loose thread, and she picks it up and begins to weave again. And as soon as she begins to weave, she gets a new vision of the whole world. And she begins weaving the world again. So, there's another cave story. And that's the moment we're in, in this world now. Where's it from? It's from a number of tribes in North America, I think the first version I found is White Mountain Apache. And then it turns up in several other tribes, and there's variations of what the dog is like, and what she's like.

I love this moment, because it shows the moment that we're in, that the unraveling is going to continue. And she's the teacher, just the way the Sage in the story of the tiger is the teacher, in this case, she she's demonstrating, pick up the loose thread nearby yourself and begin to weave. That's what the world is asking us to do. And the story of this age is saying, Go get this one little thread, this one little hair, and it will change everything. And it says if we step into the right kind of darkness, if we step into

the right level of fear, if we step into the right stage of longing, then everything transforms, it changes everything. And in the case of the old woman, she just picks up a thread. So, we're getting probably near the end of the evening. And if you don't mind, I'll throw another story in because it could help pull some threads. Not a whole big drum story.

So, the Irish have, they have an idea called the Fifth Province. Ireland is divided into four provinces, traditionally, but the word province means fifth. So when you saying four provinces, you're actually saying fifth. So they buried in the word that which they call the missing fifth, right? And people say, well, there's four directions. There's the four directions and here. And if you don't have here, you lost the four directions. I hope I'm making sense. Because the reason why we have five fingers, five toes, five openings in the body, and so on like that is because we are the microcosm of the macrocosm, we reflect the whole thing. And it happens in this level, in this arrangement of five things. So, province meant the fifth. But there was no fifth, you couldn't find it. And yet every time you said province, you were referring to it. So it turned out that the fifth was the center that held the four provinces together, the same thing as the as the center that holds the four directions together. And when it all falls apart, which it does in Ireland, just like in the African song, it all falls apart. You have to go to the edge that is most fearful to you, to the place of darkness that is both attractive and fearful. And if you go there and you find a thread and you pick it up, and you pull it back to the center, you don't have to be responsible for the whole thing, you just have to be responsible for that thread that kind of spoke to you. And if other people go and pick up a thread and everybody pulls them back to the center, then you can reweave the center of the world by each person pulling a thread. Does that make sense?

So, I think that's what's happening with the whisker, that each person has to figure out what that fearful direction is and what that whisker means to them. Every moment in life is a potential moment of complete transformation. The world is made that way. Creation didn't happen back there and now we're just seeing the afterglow. Creation is going on all the time. You don't make America great again, you make the world anew. You know what I'm saying? I mean, there are antidotes to the kind of dull things that are being promoted right now. But they require a kind of a transformation on the part of the people that happen to be alive. And each of us has our path, which could be a path of deep knowledge and awakening, but it requires that we encounter fears. And it's really important to have people who are models. I mentioned Buddha, he'd be a great model. There are many other great models. But then again, they have the thing where the path, if you're following let's say the Buddha, or anybody and then the path disappears. And then you find yourself on the pathless path and there is no one who has gone that path before. You're like the woman going towards the tiger.

The other thing is this, I love this is about stories, but also about the world. You don't have to go all the way. You shouldn't have to go into the cave of the Tiger, wake the Tiger up and say, I need a whisker. She just went and then the tiger came towards her. That suggests that the world is trying to come towards us in order to participate in the transformation of our own souls which can have some effect on the transformation of the world without us be heroic about it, just dealing with our own fears, our own cures and our own gifts. Am I making sense? All right.