

# LIVING MYTH PODCAST

## *Episode 374 – Threads of Fate and Destiny*

Fate is a mysterious presence found within each life and encountered in all serious undertakings. Ancient notions of fate include the idea of an invisible thread woven through all the things of the world and throughout all the events of time. Fate appears then as the original web of life, but also as the fine thread that weaves each soul into the world of time and space at birth. The word fate comes from the Latin *fatum*, which can mean a thing spoken by the gods at the beginning of each life. But fate also carries a sense of fatality, which is a reminder of the presence of death waiting at the end of every life journey.

Following that thread, each soul begins a kind of life sentence at birth, as the original agreement for receiving the gift of life involves accepting the inevitability of death. Life itself turns out to be fatal, and can seem to be fatalistic until we understand the deeper intimations of our own individual fate. Our fate is there at the beginning, it waits for us at the very end, but it also tries to surface and become conscious to us at each critical juncture of our lives. Although for most people fate has come to mean something predetermined, in the older, wiser sense, fate is a kind of inner koan, an archetypal pattern, and an enigma woven into each soul. It is a puzzling question that our soul asks and secretly desires to answer.

In that sense, fate shapes the particular storyline through which each soul enters the great drama of life. Seen this way, fate becomes an inner plotline trying to unfold a living text that is both open to interpretation and at times, subject to change. When accepted by us, our fate functions more as an oracle needing interpretation than a narrow plot with a fixed outcome. In times of trouble, we can sense the delicate nature of the life thread of our souls and understand the old saying that life hangs by but a thread.

Without a sense of fate, life seems more random and accidental, and we tend to feel less purposeful, less convinced that our souls could be leading us somewhere. In moments of awakening, we can feel the subtle presence of fate and learn how we are woven within, and how we are mysteriously entangled with the life threads of other people and with the great skein of life. As has been said many times, life is change. However, when we try to change or try to grow, we encounter our inner limitations as well as outer obstacles. And both those inner and outer limitations can be seen as the inevitable presence of fate in our lives.

So, fate appears as whatever limits, restricts or even imprisons us. And yet, fate is the territory where we must go if we are to awaken to our inner destiny and change in the way that our souls would have us change. So, fate involves the earthly limitations of our lot in life. While destiny, from the Latin *destinare*, implies that we are also of the stars. We are earth-bound, but we are pulled on to an unseen destination by the stars that are also part of our inner woven life. We are each secretly tied to the stars,

each star-born and in this old sense of destiny, star-bound. Destiny can mean to stand out, to stand apart from others, especially to be standing in a visible relation to our own inner genius, or daemon as the Greeks would have it.

So, when not considered as something predetermined, fate becomes a key needed to unlock our innate destiny, but also needed to reveal the underlying unity of our own soul. Whenever we brush up against the limits of our fate, we are also standing near the doors of our destiny. And in that sense, fate would stop us in our tracks and strip us to the bone so that we might discover the essential imagination and deeper sense of meaning and purpose that lies at the core of our lives.

Then, taken together, fate and destiny are an archetypal pairing woven together within each soul, forming a dynamic tension which is intended to release and express the specific plotline that makes each soul unique, never to be seen, never to be born again. In a strange way, fate is purpose seen from the other end of life. In other words, were we to stand at the end of our life and look back, we could see how the limitations of our fate and especially the twist of fate, were all along trying to align us with the destiny, which is the purpose of one's soul lived out. There's an old saying that a person finds destiny just where they were hiding to avoid it. And that leads to another old idea which states that what is fated to be yours will always return to you. And we could turn that the other way and say we will always be returning to the thread of fate that originally wove us into life to begin with.

One of the fateful moments in life that each person must at some time encounter is what has come to be known as the dark night of the soul. The term dark night of the soul was coined by the old mystic Saint John of the Cross. And it was also St. John who said, "If a person wishes to be sure of the road they tread upon, they must close their eyes and walk in the dark." The times when we feel we are walking in the dark turn out to be the precise moments when we are close to, and engaged in, the necessary tension between our inner woven fate and the call to our destiny. In other words, the periods when we feel most lost tend to also be the times in which we are closest to finding our true sense of self. It also turns out that the times that trouble us the most continue to live inside us as part of an archetypal drama that we continue to return to or that continues to return to us whether we want it to or not.

Typically, there are traumatic elements in each experience of a dark night of the soul. And it can be the traumatic parts of the story that keep returning to us. And that can simply seem to be post-traumatic, and simply inhibiting, restricting or damaging. And we could see that as the fate or fateful part of the traumas and dramas we experience. On the other hand, when understood in the deeper archetypal sense of the inner drama, we can return to it in order to find some healing, but also to continue to learn from the way the inner story unfolded at that dark time. So that we can continue to grow from the aspects of our lives that turn out to be indelible, but also can turn out to be oracular and essentially connected to the calling, as well as the purpose set within our souls to begin with.

I'm speaking about this, partly because once again, I find myself returning to the first thorough experience I had of a dark night of the soul that happened when I was 20 and 21 years old. At that time, the war in Vietnam was still underway. And that ongoing tragedy happening overseas was increasingly tearing the country apart back home. I found myself caught in a drama that began when I refused to

fight in what I considered to be an unjust war. I had received the draft notice and notified the government that I wouldn't be coming to a war that had not been declared, and that seemed ill-fated. In what rapidly became a life changing and life-threatening series of events, I wound up being sentenced to prison for taking a stand against the war and for what I felt was refusing to take the life of others or sacrifice my own life, for reasons that went against my conscience and my essential sense of soul.

What had begun as a crushing ethical dilemma having to do with the outside world had now become for me a dark night of the soul. There are many twists and turns that occurred as a result of being imprisoned. But one of the darkest turns occurred when I found myself utterly isolated in solitary confinement. Like most modern people, I had been educated to consider things in terms of logic and rationality. Yet the state of societal turmoil and the seemingly unending war gripping the outer world appeared not only irrational but a kind of madness, and being imprisoned for following the convictions of my own soul seemed anything but rational or logical. Increasingly, the rational world seem far away, and I was falling further and further from it. Increasingly, I felt I was slipping into darkness and silently falling out of life.

After being isolated from everything and everyone for over a month, something instinctive and insistent inside me caused me to stop eating, and that soon turned into a hunger strike that lasted for many weeks. Any kind of imprisonment means doing time, means being trapped in place and having nowhere else to go. Solitary confinement means having little or no contact with other people, and having nowhere to turn but inside oneself. In that sense, it becomes easy to feel totally condemned, and completely stuck. Yet strangely, there can be another side to it, in which the solitary cell can also become like a monk's cell, or even like an initiatory cave, in which it becomes possible to find rejected and repressed aspects of oneself that have never been given voice or found a way to be expressed.

Sometimes entire days and nights would be filled with cutting loneliness and ramping fears. At other times, it would be as if something timeless and enspirited that could not be restricted, denied or interred, would awaken within an open interior landscape and territory that had a light of their own, and could bring me to the edge of revelation. Although I could not fully understand that at the time, the small cell of concrete and iron had become a kind of initiatory cave in which I became literally stripped to the bone and thrown back upon a deeper sense of myself that I both knew in some way and also did not know. Although my survival was in doubt, and my future was literally in question, some things became more clear. Although I felt trapped in a kind of underworld, I began having wild dreams and visions that transcended the conditions I was in.

I also had strange visitations that completely altered my sense of awareness and challenged my sense of reality. On one hand, the visions and visitations gave me a reassuring feeling that I was not completely abandoned despite being truly isolated. On the other hand, the other worldly nature of the visions could leave me deeply unsettled and fearful that I was losing my grip on reality. I had reached the end of anything that I thought I knew, and seemed to have hit the bottom of life, and the question became whether I was losing my mind or actually finding it in some different, deeper way. And not having anywhere else to turn, I finally felt that I had to trust the promptings in the presence of my soul. Instead of finding a dead end, or what I feared could be an endless void, I found myself on the verge of

the ground of my own being. I realized that my soul was sending me meaningful messages in the form of compelling dreams and little visions.

At the same time, images from myths that I had once read could suddenly arise as apparitions that felt like visitations. Figures from ancient stories were apparently companionshiping me in this descent and offering inspiring images and words. The isolation of solitary confinement and a lack of food and nourishment had opened me to an inner realm that in subtle ways had been calling to me all along.

I remained in solitary confinement for months and came close to dying of starvation several times. Yet, something had broken open within me and I was strangely freed from a kind of self-imprisonment that I had been living in since I was a child. When all else was stripped away, what remained was a vital connection to imagination, a subtle bridge to something ancient, mythic and enduring, that was somehow an essential part of me. Take away everything, and what surprisingly remained was something indelible, a sense of self and soul that could not be denied, even if I had often neglected it and failed to recognize its presence before. Without fully realizing it at the time, I was in a struggle not simply to survive, but also to awaken to the true nature of my own soul and to the secret aim of my life. Instead of falling endlessly into the void, I found myself landing at the roots of my own imagination. And it turned out that, because I had not given up on my soul, it would not give up on me.

I was fortunate that the extended period of starvation I underwent did not seem to have lasting physical effects, although, I was advised that it could take a long time to know that for sure. Meanwhile, the altered states in the liminal condition I had experienced internally did not simply diminish upon my return to daily life. At certain times, the post traumatic aspects of the deep descent I had experienced could come rushing back, and at other times I could find myself slipping into altered states that had mythical and mystical qualities to them. In both of those ways, I was a radically different person. When I came out of my solitary experience, I understood somewhat painfully that there could be no going back to the life I had before.

I later learned that that is a characteristic of a rite of passage or an initiation. That is to say, after a certain point in a rite of passage, there is no going back whether it is a formal and guided or informal and without guidance rite of passage. The point of the passage is to take a person through a period of uncertainty and disorientation to a place of reorientation that aligns them with the core of their soul and the aim of their life.

In terms of fate and destiny, the reorientation of a person's life involves a realignment with their destiny, and such a radical reorientation requires an acceptance of the fate that has befallen us. In other words, inside the solitary confinement cell I had to come to the realization that I had been imprisoned inside myself before I got myself imprisoned. That didn't mean that taking a stance against the war was meaningless or lacked purpose, quite the opposite. Taking that stance was, in a way, the first acceptance of an aspect of fate that was inside me. But inside the solitary cell, I had to look at what was causing me to be there. And I had to accept that although the situation was dark and troublesome, and even life-threatening, there was another side to it that had to do with awakening and realization. And part of that realization connects to what people call the twist of fate. That is to say, the more I

accepted the fate that seemingly had befallen me, the closer I was to realizing aspects of vitality and destiny that were hidden in me.

Going back to what I said earlier, fate is a mysterious presence found within each life but also encountered in all serious undertakings. For me, taking a stance against the war was a serious undertaking that had something to do with self-respect, and self-awareness about my own inner nature. And that provoked both the extreme limits of fate and the radical sense of destiny that were both in me. To be clear, I'm not suggesting that everyone needs to undergo an intense, lengthy dark night of the soul and be condemned to prison and trapped in solitary cells. That's not the point. Each person, whether they know it or not, is already in a story trying to unfold from inside their soul out into the world. And that means each person is already in some kind of tension between the fate that limits them and the call of destiny that would pull them into a process of continuous growth and transformation.

In order to gain an understanding of this archetypal process, I have to draw upon the threads of fate and destiny, and the energies of transformation that I have actually experienced. At the same time, each personal story illustrates the archetypal dynamic that we are all affected by. And I say all because right now, entering the modern world can be seen like entering a rite of passage that is already underway. We each have our individual struggle with the elements of fate and destiny. But we are collectively in the midst of a great transition that involves a descent into the depths of the soul that could, and hopefully will, lead to a realignment with the ideals and core values of humanity, and to finding ways to envision a world that is better than the one we currently have.

We are already in a radical transition in which we are being pulled into territories that we would not choose to go into on our own. We are living in radical times, but also in liminal times, that is to say, between a world that used to be and another world that has not yet come. Living in betwixt and between times means that we must become disoriented before we can find a new orientation to life. And just as the next stage of an individual life typically arises from a descent into darkness, the next phase of the world must take shape in the darkness, and the betwixt and between uncertainty of a liminal time. At critical times in life, we are all called to encounter life's essential mysteries, and the liminal space, the in between space that can seem like a prison, but also that can be a place of awakening, release and renewal, is the place where life's mysteries wait to be found again, and wait to be learned from anew.

If we frame the radical changes in deeper uncertainties that we are all currently experiencing as a rite of passage, as a struggle between collective fate and destiny, we have a greater chance of finding a deeper sense of our individual selves as well as a greater sense of the true ideals and greater aims of humanity as a whole. If we can accept that we are in a meaningful struggle that involves both fate and destiny, and accept that we are in the liminal stage of a collective rite of passage, our very fears, our uncertainties, and our self-doubts can become doorways to our awakening to meaningful callings in life and to transcendent visions through which we can contribute in some way to a regeneration of life and healing of the traumas that currently affect both nature and human culture.