

Dorothy and the Initiatory Journey

An interview with
Jonathan Young Ph.D.

By

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Dorothy and the yellow brick road are as much a part of our culture as cowboys, apple pie and home on the range. Taken as a simple children's story *The Wizard of Oz* is entertaining and original. Within this story, L. Frank Baum wove deep mythic and psychological meaning speaking to a deep part of us that recognizes something familiar in Dorothy's adventure. Frank Baum followed the mythic journey -- he had a background in folklore and myth and knew the key elements. Joseph Campbell popularized the initiatory journey with *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and later by the public television series, *The Power of Myth*.

Psychologist and author Dr. Jonathan Young assisted Joseph Campbell for many years and later became the Founding Curator of the Joseph Campbell Archives and Library in Santa Barbara. He is now a consultant to international corporations and uses mythic stories to train executives in sensitivity to other cultures. White Cloud Press publishes his recent book, *SAGA - Best New Writings on Mythology*. I caught up with Dr. Young on his speaking tour through the Pacific Northwest.

What is the initiatory journey and what are the stages?

The classic myth starts in regular life. Then a problem presents itself -- customarily the problem is both personal and collective. Dorothy has a problem -- she is an orphan and does not have a sense of place on the farm. The farm and by extension, the community or nation also has a problem -- it is in depression. We have depression of spirit and economic depression. So, we have a small introduction and then the Call. Some event arrives to pull us out of ordinary life and into the lessons. Miss Gulch is the wealthy neighbor, annoyed with Toto for messing the garden. She comes with official documents to have Toto destroyed. Dorothy panics, and turns to the authority figures of Aunt Em and Uncle Henry. They can or will do nothing and she has to solve the problem herself. She goes and meets a professor and returns home, previewing the adventure. The threshold journey is in the Tornado, a dangerous example. Then the wisdom realm with its lessons -- the Land of Oz. The seeker or hero returns from the mythic realm with some gift, like wisdom or power, for the collective. Obviously, her role in Kansas is to bring the vitality of the realm she had visited back to Kansas.

Why is Oz the wisdom realm?

This is a place she dreams of, over the rainbow. It is ritual space, the sacred dimension of wonder. When indigenous people went on a vision quest, they went out into the wilderness or onto the ice flows. It is not merely the desert though, but to another dimension where they can talk to animals and see visions. In the book, Baum presents Oz as a dreamspace, which is appropriate because dreams allow magic. Dreams follow the same structural logic as mythic tales because they are of the same part of the human imagination.

Joseph Campbell said 'Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths'...

Yes, a dream is a personal experience of the mythic imagination. When generations of storytellers spin a myth, it is a collective dream. Often in mythic stories the hero has the option of saying no to the course that is open just as in our own experience we customarily have the choice of refusing the call. Dorothy crosses the threshold by the Tornado and does not have a choice. If the call comes as an illness, a terrible divorce, or the financial depression of an entire nation, we cannot refuse. We become enmeshed in events much larger than ourselves. Often it is a disaster and so large there is no way to refuse it. In this story, the chance to refuse is in the pre-figuring events. When Miss Gulch showed up, Dorothy could have agreed with the power of the community to destroy her dog, and declining the call. If you let the thing happen and go passive, you take the conforming choice. She was a good girl, so for her to run away was a change in her character already. She was willing to accept the call.

When she gets to Oz the munchkins think she has special powers.

They think she is the new witch from the planet Kansas. They treat her as the person she is there to become. She cannot know yet, and we do not find out much later in the story, but she really is the new witch from the planet Kansas.

When she arrives in Oz, the house lands on the wicked witch of the East, killing her by accident...

The seeker may not own all of their powers at first. She is new at this and cannot handle the part of life that includes power; she uses it unconsciously. Much of the initiatory journey is about growing into a new role and much of that is about the using power responsibly. The gift is power itself. Most people have experiences where power was not used well and are afraid of power. They hope to navigate adult life without having to use it. They say, 'those oppressors and hypocrites, they have power and I am never going to be like that.' They equate the misuse of power with power itself. The world needs people to claim power and use it well. The fool or innocent in myth uses power unwittingly or unwisely because at first, they do not know our own strength.

Helpers join Dorothy on her journey...

Yes, the Allies are a crucial element. Detective stories or westerns often leave this out, simplifying the adventure. The Allies are crucial because they teach us we do nothing of significance alone. The ability to form alliances and accept help is a significant part of the initiation. In Indigenous peoples' stories, the allies are magical animals, representing nature. In this story the allies are a scarecrow, a tinman, and a lion. There are so many layers of symbolism in the story. The scarecrow is a creature of agriculture and seeks intelligence. The lion is of the animal kingdom,

and seeks courage. The tinman is of industry, as a walking factory representing work and productivity, and he seeks relationships and heart. These are the three great lessons at any stage of life, are we smart enough, are we strong or courageous enough, and do we have enough heart to make the judgments and relationships. Buam really covered the bases.

Dorothy's allies live in the magical realm and are of that place. They have the local savvy. Although, at the end, we see parallels of the ally figures in this place. Though we go to the Land of Oz, we are in Kansas all along. The place we live is full of wonder and magic, we just haven't seen it.

In the book, the mice are helpers, ally figures. They are very interesting. Like the munchkins, they are small and unimpressive when taken one by one, but collectively very strong. They are analogous to the small, undeveloped elements of our inner resources. When we pull ourselves together, we are synchronized within and have a sense of our multiple energies working together, we can do more than we thought. We all feel like mice, but we can be an army of mice.

At the beginning of the journey Dorothy doesn't really know what she is doing...

She hopes for supernatural assistance from the Wizard. At this point, she has not met this person and he has done nothing. It is pure projection, pure fantasy, and pure hero worship. Dorothy and her allies are going to discover they can solve the problem themselves and have everything they need. At the early stage of life, at the early stage of our lessons, we think someone big and powerful is going to help us. It comes as a shock -- not only are they not coming, but we don't need them anyway.

On the journey and there is a series of trials...

One is a test of courage, the poppy field, and it is the lion that succumbs. The scarecrow, who does not need sleep, saves the day. The different members of the ally group can always handle the crisis when one is tempted or overcome. In the book, the Wicked Witch sends wolves against them and everyone hid except the Tin Woodman, who cut off their heads. The scarecrow is ideally suited to scare the crows the witch sends against them. Each of the challenges fits the unique talents of one member or psychological part. Not only are we talking about the ability to work in teams, but psychologically, having multiple aspects to our personality. Inwardly we haven't identified with the lion alone, but with Dorothy, and thank goodness, the scarecrow, so some part of us is available when another succumbs. If we have a simplistic sense of identity, we are in trouble. No single part has enough sides for every situation so any single challenge we meet can destroy us. Can we stay the course or will we zone out and watch TV or drift into addiction rather than facing our fears. Can we stand the seemingly overwhelming situations without collapsing with our own sense of limitations? This is all about taking on our anxieties.

Another common theme in myth is assistance that is always available.

Like the good witch who appears from time to time. These angelic, transcendent characters do not rescue them from all the scrapes though. Assistance is available; it just doesn't seem to show up every time. Fate leaves us to our own devices allowing the development of our own strengths and capacities, and from time to time we get assistance -- just often enough that we are saved. If we had this quasi-mother figure to pull us out of the fire there would be no initiation, no growth or maturity.

In their journey the Wicked Witch sends flying monkeys to capture them.

This is the supreme ordeal, the dark night of the soul. In Jungian terms, it is the encounter with the shadow. You go to the darkest place in your experience. Psychologically, to the deepest part of yourself. We all have a wicked witch within, and we must come to terms with whatever part of ourselves we have not accepted.

The journey must have a death and rebirth experience. The encounter with the witch is a life and death matter -- she is going to kill them. She nearly kills the scarecrow when Dorothy throws a bucket of water and inadvertently kills her. Dorothy comes into possession of the broomstick the Wizard required and can now make some demand of him. Gelinda and the munchins' prophecy has come true. She is the new witch and now she has a broomstick to prove it.

The Wizard's Power is interesting. He is just a humbug, but has a kind of power.

What the wizard has is the power of naming, which has a great influence in how we experience reality. Naming doesn't create things, but psychologically shifts them into conscious knowing. He gives the lion a medal that says 'courage,' well actually the lion has demonstrated courage a number of times, but now he knows it. The Wizard gives a Thinkology degree to the scarecrow, even though the scarecrow has done many very bright things but now he can own it. He gives the heart-shaped clock to the tin woodman. This character has shown more tenderness and emotion than any other character. He is forever crying over tender little things -- he has heart. Connecting an image or symbol to what we know is what symbolic work can do for us. It connects something true but unconscious with a conscious knowing, making it available. In other words, studying dreams, symbols, and myth, is the great bridging move we can do for ourselves. We can also be the wizards, that higher, powerful self. It is within us, but the closer we get to it, the less magnificent it seems. We realize it is just us, just some girl from Kansas.

The Wizard is a trickster. That is what ritual does.

In the book, Dorothy tries to go back to Kansas with the Wizard but misses the balloon.

This is the second threshold, the return passage, and as Joseph Campbell underscores, the threshold passages are the trickiest part. After all, we are passing from an enchanted place back to reality; from magic to ordinary life and this is no small feat. If you are not successful, you end up a troubled soul indeed. Dorothy's attempt is not successful at first. In the balloon, a kitten distracts Toto and he jumps. Dorothy is not going to be separated from Toto. This is wise since not only has

Toto moved the story forward in each key scene, he is the ongoing animal guide. Toto also represents the protagonist's natural physicality. We do not want to end up just mental; just understanding this as an abstraction, we want to understand it in our bones and in our bodies for a 'Toto' or total understanding. Dorothy stays with Toto and misses her ride home. Interestingly enough, the Wizard is much wiser as a former Wizard is, than when he was trying to impress everybody. When we get off our pomposity we are much more use to the world. Only now does Gelinda show up and tell Dorothy she had the way home all along. Think about the ethics of that situation. The Goddess of the story turns out to have known things that are vital. It is for our own good, but still cheating. Angels follow their own rules. She tells Dorothy all she has to do is click her heels. She wakes up, letting us know we have come back, out of the dreamworld, out of the mythic realm, back to Kansas, which will never seem the same. Dorothy says, 'I had the most amazing experience, I went to the most wonderful place. You were there and you and you,' pointing to the ranch hands played by the same actors. This lets us know the archetypal ally characters that were full of magic and amazing abilities are really here with us. The adventures don't really happen in another place, but right here at home. Right away there is a test. Aunt Em, representing conservative, conforming reality says, 'Oh, you must have been dreaming, we dream the silliest things.' As if to say, hush up now, don't talk about this. Dorothy has to overcome this and says, 'Oh no, it was real.' She has to assert herself. When you return from an amazing experience, someone will say, that was not important, what is important is to get your laundry done, and get to work on time and all of that mundane stuff. The test is to hold onto the insights and the lessons. Some don't, they go off, spend their year in Africa, and within two weeks let it all go. The returning seeker's challenge is to integrate what they have learned. It makes people nervous. They want to categorize your experience because they don't know what to do with it. The people who stay home have an enormous need. Everyone is yearning for the place over the rainbow. They need the boon, the vision, the qualities and vitality the other place represents. Life longs for color. The returning adventurer must share their experiences, their boon, because it does not belong to them alone. They are under a moral mandate to give it away, because it belongs to the collective.

The initiatory journey changes everything. The process of initiation changes the seeker, they are matured, deepened, and illumined which by extension, illumines their place of origin.

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