

The Water of Life

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"You can't teach someone something that you don't know, and you can't lead them somewhere that you yourself are unwilling to go." - Author unknown

The telling and interpretation of myth permeates all that I do. There is not a day that goes by that I don't thank the Creator and the gods for allowing me to have had the opportunity and the courage to attend Pacifica. Despite the rational aspects of saying no to flying across the country once a month to study, of all things, mythology, I answered the call, and said yes! Perhaps what is most important about my Pacifica experience is that from the beginning it encompassed the components of the hero's journey described by Joseph Campbell. Once a month I separated from my known environment and ventured into one quite different from my own. Now, through stories and the beat of the drum, I teach my inner-city youth to prepare themselves to embark upon their own journeys, to recall their own purpose in life.

Before attending Pacifica I thought mythically; once I attended Pacifica, I began to live mythically. Myth has taught me to live with paradox. Although I still have a long way to go, I have much more understanding and I am amazed by my calm reactions to painful and seemingly unbearable situations. For instance, I have personal friends who have confided in me that their lives have been turned upside down by serious and false allegations that have caused them to face jail time, friends who have looked death in the face, friends with drug problems, and of course, friends just facing the daily struggles of life. Prior to Pacifica I would have probably responded to them like someone with a counseling degree, but instead, in each instance, we were able to hold the tension of the moment, the paradox, searching for the light out of the darkness. Most importantly, we did it with calmness, with a care of the soul. Through stories I teach my youth to do the same.

Pacifica assisted greatly in my tasting "The Water of Life." Due to the sweetness of the taste, I attempt to share it with the inner-city youth I work with. I use story to create discussion, allowing each of them to speak candidly about what is missing in their lives. It is nothing to hear one of my male youth, straight from the street, talk about the last time he cried, or to holler out, "Kwame, tell us another story!" With the assistance of my drum, I teach them hope through mythological stories.

Pacifica proved to be a continuation of my own formal rite of passage process that began eight years ago. It provided an initiation that took me deep within my soul. Along the way I have received guidance and comfort from many. As I sit here typing, I peer above and notice the gifts I have received from my classmates and others: There is Ganesha, the mover of obstacles; a picture of the Black Virgin; a stone and prism heart; a framed picture of a raven crossing over the sun; a framed note from Edie Barrett and Michael Meade on Pacifica letterhead wishing that the winds favor my thoughts and that the waters of life bless me; and a beautiful African Masai warrior bracelet-all personal symbols and imagery to remind me of my helpers along the way. Percepts my greatest gift is being able to tell others to follow their dreams, no matter how foolish they may seem.

I recall one of my trips to Pacifica coming from Ohio. We were riding to Cleveland airport and there was a heavy snowstorm. Visibility was perhaps fifteen feet and we could barely see the trucks ahead of us. I knew for certain that my plane would not depart any time soon. Not only did it depart, it departed on time. Once airborne I had to put on my sunglasses because the sun was

so bright. I thought of the immense difference between what was taking place below the clouds in respect to what was taking place above. Above, the white, soft, puffy clouds looked and seemed like a storybook picture, almost a dream: below, a nightmare, an accident waiting to happen. I thought that if I did not actually experience this difference I would never believe it-Pacifica has been a similar experience. I now have an idea of what life can be. So many of the youth (and adults) I work with have no idea of what is above the clouds-now I can tell them.

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