



THE HERO'S
JOURNEY

A VOYAGE OF SELF-DISCOVERY

STEPHEN GILLIGAN AND ROBERT DILTS

The Hero's Journey

A voyage of self-discovery

**Stephen Gilligan
and Robert Dilts**



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Day 1

Introduction and Overview

We (authors Stephen Gilligan and Robert Dilts) have been on a journey together for more than 30 years that started back in the early 1970s when we were students at the University of California at Santa Cruz. It was there that we met and worked extensively with Richard Bandler and John Grinder, the founders of NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP). We also had the tremendous opportunity to study with Gregory Bateson, who many consider one of the greatest minds of the last century, and Milton Erickson, who is arguably the most brilliant psychiatrist, hypnotherapist, and healer who has ever lived.

After we graduated, each of us went our own way, only to reconnect in the mid-1990s. We were both married and with growing children by then, and had both established our own separate and successful professional paths – Stephen in Ericksonian Hypnosis and Psychotherapy and Robert in NeuroLinguistic Programming. We discovered, however, that our different journeys had brought us to many similar experiences and conclusions.

The idea of each life being a potential “hero’s journey” is one of our most passionate shared interests.

The essence of the hero’s journey is: How do you live a meaningful life? What is the deepest life you are called to? How can you respond to that call?

If you don’t find that calling, you’re likely to live in a lot of misery – to be unhappy, feel lost or confused, or perhaps end up with some significant problems. Perhaps a health issue, a career confusion, or a dysfunctional relationship.

To live a hero’s journey will provide the most amazing rewards, but to turn away from it may cause tremendous suffering. So what

we hope to do in this book is to help you sense and discover what your journey is, and how you might live it fully and deeply. Our interest is to explore how you can connect and align with the deepest part of your spirit, so that everything that you feel and think and do in the world is aligned with the human spirit.

A hero's journey is about a type of awakening and a type of opening – an opening to what life is bringing you and calling from you. And this calling is not always easy. Otherwise you wouldn't need to be a hero to do it.

There's a great benefit of the hero's journey, which is a sense of a meaning, a sense of being alive in the world. But with that benefit comes also the challenge, the cost. Wherever there is light, there will always be shadows – and in fact you could say the brighter the light, the darker the shadows. And living a full life is about holding and addressing both, the shadows as well as the light.

Another way of talking about this is that we're going to be focusing equally on what we call the *gift* and the *wound*. We say that deep within each of us is a gift that we're here to give into the world. But equally deep within each of us is a woundedness. And a woundedness, of course, does not just start with our own personal life – we carry the wounds of our family; we carry the wounds of our culture; we carry the woundedness of our planet. So the hero's journey is about sensing how to be able to deeply connect in a positive way to both of these energies.

Thus, a hero's journey is simultaneously about living your gifts and healing your wounds. Your power and your fullness are in both of these energies. And those two things will be there as major influences on your intimate relationships, your professional life, your health, and your development as a person – this simultaneous process of healing and sharing your gifts will always be there.

The Beginning of the Journey

The majority of this book has been drawn from a transcript of a seminar that we did on the topic of the hero's journey in Barcelona, Spain. We believe that the hero's journey is a dynamic, alive, and constantly evolving process. Thus, we feel it is appropriate for a book on the hero's journey to preserve the spontaneity, humor, and feel of a live seminar. We have indicated our names in relationship to our personal contributions in order to maintain the unique flavor of our different perspectives. Enjoy the journey!

Steve Gilligan: Good morning, everybody, and welcome! We've got a lot to cover in this program.

Robert Dilts: (*In an excited voice*) Are you ready for a journey?

SG: (*Voice like a preacher*) Brothers and sisters, are you ready?

RD: Say amen!

("Amens" and laughter from the audience.)

SG: Mmmm . . . that's what we like to hear! So now that you're a bit out of your rational selves, we want to take advantage of it and deepen it by honoring our daily tradition of reading a poem. Partly this is to honor our Irish roots.

RD: We're both half Irish. My half is the bad half. (*Laughter.*)

SG: And even more importantly than our Irish roots, in this search we really want to emphasize language as metaphoric and poetic at its base. We see literal language as a secondary language, and we see metaphor and symbolic language as the primary language.

RD: There's an interesting book by a linguist named George Lakoff that is called *Metaphors We Live By*. Lakoff points out that we usually think of metaphor as being a secondary language process to the fundamental, literal language. But he argues, as do we, that it's actually the other way around – our fundamental language is metaphorical. A child lives in a world of stories and metaphors

long before he or she learns literality. So the language of our heart and the language of our soul is metaphorical, not literal.

SG: From a practical level, this means that we're especially interested in how language enters the body; how it touches the body and awakens experiential-symbolic experience in the body. So when we talk about the hero's journey, we're going to be exploring that not in terms of some intellectual concept, but as a distinction that, as you breathe it deeply through your body, begins to awaken all of this experience within your body.

RD: They say in Papua New Guinea culture that "knowledge is only a rumor until it's in the muscle." So your hero's journey and your calling are just rumors, just ideas, until they get in your muscle. Your goals, your resources, your potentials – they're rumors until they're brought into the muscle, the breath, the body. Then and only then do they become living ideas that can transform your lives. So we would like for you to leave here more alive. Anybody want to be more alive?

SG: (*Enthusiastically and playfully*) Say amen!

(*Laughter and "amens" from the audience.*)

SG: The poem that I want to share with you is by a British poet named Derek Walcott. You'll hear in this poem Walcott talking about the two selves that are part of the legacy of each of us as human beings. He (along with many others) suggests that we have two different selves – you might call one the experiencing or *performance* self, and the other the *witnessing* self. Another set of terms we'll use is the *somatic* self and the *cognitive* self. A big part of what we're going to be exploring is the connection between these two minds. Is their relationship hostile? Is it dissociated? Is it one of dominance and submission? Or are these two minds within you living in harmony? Because when they're living in harmony, then your hero's journey can really open up into the world. So here's what Derek Walcott has to say about this relationship:

Love After Love

*The day will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other's welcome,*

*and say sit here. Eat.
You will love again the stranger who was yourself.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you*

*all your life, whom you ignored
for another, who knows you by heart.
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,*

*the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror.
Sit. Feast on your life.*

SG: So we hope that by the end of our journey together here you can peel your image from the mirror and feast on your own life . . . that the two selves within you can unite into a deeper Generative Self that lives the hero's journey.

RD: In that same spirit, I have a couple of short readings. The first is a poem about growing older, hearing one's calling in the body, and of sensing the deeper power of spirit that emerges in aging. It's an excerpt from "Sailing to Byzantium" by the great Irish poet William Butler Yeats. It evokes for Stephen and me something of what we learned from Milton Erickson, who was a sponsor and teacher to both of us. When we knew him he was old and crippled, struggling with terrible pain, and yet he seemed to find a connection with a source deeper than his infirmities. For me this poem is about how in many ways the hero's journey never ends. Yeats writes:

*An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress.*

RD: So, during our journey together here, may soul come and visit you and clap its hands and sing, and let every mortal tatter of your being come alive with celebration and contribution.

The other quotation I have is from Martha Graham, who is considered to be one of the foremost pioneers of modern dance. She taught, choreographed, and danced well into her nineties, perhaps because of her approach to life which she describes in the following way:

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. If you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and be lost. The world will not have it. It is not yours to determine how good it is; nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep the channel open.

RD: This is the essence of the hero's journey: keeping your channel open. A key part of this journey is to identify and release what closes your channel down and causes you to lose your vitality and your life force. So we will be seeking to discover and transform the shadowy forces that block you from expressing your unique energy in the world. One of the main goals of this program is to help you develop tools through which you can keep your channel open – whether it's with your children, your intimate partner, at work, or just going about your daily life – even sitting in a seminar. It's your business on your hero's journey to keep your channel open – and let life flow through you.

First Premise: Spirit is Waking Up

SG: The first core premise that we want to offer for navigating the hero's journey is:

Spirit is awakening into the world.

Everything else we can orient to – thoughts, behavior, experience, relationship dynamics – are all seen as expressions of *spirit waking up*. And it's using all these forms – behaviors, thoughts, time,

space, identity, and so forth – as the means to do it. By sensing and aligning to spirit at each moment, the hero's journey activates.

RD: There's that old question: Are we animals pretending to be gods, or are we gods pretending to be animals?

SG: What are the choices again? (*Laughter.*)

RD: So we are spirit waking up, both divine and human.

SG: This idea of the primacy of spirit was presented in the book *Of Water and the Spirit*, an autobiography by Malidoma Somé, a beautiful man who was born and raised in West Africa before coming to the West to teach. He talks about how in his cultural tradition it is assumed that when a baby is born, that baby has just come from another world, the world of spirit. And that furthermore, the spirit has chosen this time, this family, and this culture to be born into because he or she has a gift to give to the world.

We have also suggested that in addition to a gift to give, spirit also has a wound to heal. But in both cases, you can sense underlying any experiential moment, this living, pulsating consciousness that is looking to awaken. And by aligning with that, good things will happen.

The name Malidoma, interestingly, means “one who brings ritual to the enemy.” In his culture, the baby is taken by the elders shortly after birth, and for several days the circle of elders ask the spirit in a ritual language: “Why have you come? What is the gift you have come to bring?” In Malidoma's case, it was sensed that he had come to bring a healing gift of ritual to the West, which, in the view of Malidoma's people, had seriously lost its deeper connection to spirit and was wreaking havoc as a result. Malidoma's grandfather, a chief elder, prophesied that Malidoma would venture to the West to bring this gift. To shorten a very beautiful story of Malidoma's hero's journey, this is indeed what happened. There are many ways to sense the primacy of spirit. One common way is to hold a newborn or connect with a young child and feel his or her primacy of spirit.

RD: When you hold a newborn baby, it is easy to experience the sense of awe of being in the presence of spirit. You really feel what



“Come along on a wonderful journey with these two master teachers and playfully deep thinkers. Gilligan and Dilts will challenge you, delight you and move you. With poetry, humor, exercises, and some amazing language, you will feel like you are in the room with them as they invite you to journey far and return to yourself again in a new way. Heed their call; read this book.”

Bill O’Hanlon,
*author of **Change 101, A Guide to Trance Land and Do One Thing Different***

“This is an absolutely outstanding collaboration between two of the world’s foremost transformational pioneers and a breakthrough contribution in the field of personal development.

Robert Dilts and Stephen Gilligan have produced a superb account of a magical four day seminar – so vivid and dynamic, you feel you are part of it as you read.

They’ve developed a truly profound, integrated and evolutionary model from leading-edge approaches in NLP, Ericksonian Hypnosis, Aikido, Meditation, Five Rhythms and much more, and co-train it ‘live’ with tremendous humour, compassion and wisdom.

If you want to come more alive, be more present, bring more of yourself to the party with all its joys and difficulties then I wholeheartedly recommend ‘The Hero’s Journey’ as your guide.”

Judith Lowe, PPD Learning Ltd, NLP Training, London

“This book provides an ideal format for groups who want to explore new dimensions of personhood. For me, it crystallized concepts that I had wondered about, yet had never known how to discuss. Gilligan and Dilts establish a vocabulary for spirituality that goes beyond the philosophical, into the experiential. They are teaching what mystics have always known and done.”

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