

Mountains as Archetypes

Everything that evokes a feeling response, or an experience of some state of Being, is the catalyst for an awakening in us of something the object or person represents. In other words, the activated states of shame and fear, or the awakened states of love, joy and peace, at a certain stage of development, is seen to reside in the object of our experience, and so is the cause of our experience. In fact, the mountain evokes what is within us, and the external mountain merely reflects something back to us that we can readily experience, find and know within ourselves.

The mountain as a major archetype has the capacity to awaken within us the qualities, that may have been dormant in our experience, until we see them reflected in the light, mist, majesty, mystery, grandeur of the mountains.

Indeed, mountains have held the capacity to awaken aspirations and desires within the human psyche from the beginning of time, and so they are often seen as sacred. They are, of course, sacred, and they evoke and awaken the sacred capacities and heights within ourselves.

John Muir says of the Sierras:

"When I first enjoyed the superb view, one glowing April day, from the summit of the Pacheco Pass, the Central Valley, but little trampled or plowed as yet, was one furred, rich sheet of golden compositae, and the luminous wall of the mountains shone in all its glory. Then it seemed to me, the Sierra, should be called not "the Nevada," or Snowy range, but the Range of Light. And after ten years spent in the heart of it, rejoicing and wondering, bathing in its glorious floods of light, seeing the sunbursts of morning amount the icy peaks, the noonday radiance on the trees and rocks and now, the flush of the alpen glow, and a thousand dashing waterfalls with their marvelous abundance of irised spray, it still seems to me above all others the Range of Light, the most divinely beautiful of all the mountain chains I have ever seen."



What Muir is seeing reflected back to him is the beautiful complex light of divinity and glory of his own soul. I have known many people who would not be able to express the beauty around them in the mountains, because they could not see it. They would seek their own stage of development reflected in the mountain. Perhaps as some height to attain or conquer, perhaps as a resource for wealth and status, by mining and destroying it for ore, just to name two obvious projections.

What we see is what we are. And this is borne out in the magnificent contribution that Muir, as one of America's transcendentalists, gave this country, in terms of preservation, conservation, and protection, literature, poetry vision and hope, that earned him the accolade of Father of our National Parks.

There was a relationship between Muir and the Range of Light. This relationship of mutual respect, love, protection, beauty and shared meaning and beauty was an intimacy within, in relationship to self, that gave rise to a ripple of creativity extending to a whole nation and the world.

The question is, "what is your relationship to mountains?" Can you see it as an external representation of an internal reality, dynamic and process? What does it represent to you internally? Which part of the journey does it represent in terms of internal states of expansion and constriction? How does the external mountain experience, translate into an internal peak experience, that is then expressed in your external life?

These are deep questions and as with our relationship with anything in the external world, can only be answered by understanding both the UP and DOWN of mountains, and the INSIDE AND OUTSIDE, of the experience and seeing mountains within the context of our own evolutionary path.

This year, let's together discover and explore the mountain archetype – both externally on our trips together, but also internally as a metaphor, symbol and archetype of our inner life. Start by creating a folder and then collect through the year:

12 of your favorite images/photos/art of mountains

12 Holy Mountains and what they mean to the culture

12 artificial mountains constructed by humans

12 poems about mountains

12 literary quotes about mountains that speak to you

12 songs to/about mountains

Write 12 meditations, insights about mountains

Write down any dreams you have about mountains

Find at least 12 teachings about mountains in at least 5 different spiritual traditions

Start sharing your discoveries with each other and see if you can expand your awareness both externally and internally through this powerful archetype.