

## Preparation for Session 20 – The Mountain-top Experience

In the next session we will explore various aspects of mountain-top experiences. A mountain-top experience may be one in which we “celebrate a sense of being part of something greater than we are – the cosmos, beauty, a cause.”[1] That experience might be a part of something quite ordinary. For example, the late poet May Sarton wrote these words as she was recovering from a stroke: "A moment of pure joy, as I lay in the chaise lounge for a few minutes - it was four. The afternoon light struck two sprigs of mountain laurel, so richly white, in a brilliant blue glass vase - the whole room was filled with their presence and I just lay there and looked."[2] It may be an experience that is literally on top of a mountain. Or it may come at the end of a long spiritual “climb.”

- 1) Do you remember having a mountain-top experience? What led up to it? How did it feel? What state of mind made it possible? What were the after-effects?
  
- 2) We might like to take the mountain away with us. What strategies have you used to let the experience linger? What takes you back, and refreshes the insights and emotions you had? If you find that you can't really go back, what have you learned from the experience that might enable you to have another such experience? If you find there are ways to carry the experience into your daily life, share them.
  
- 3) *That evening [Campbell] lectured to a small but enthusiastic audience on the nature of the goddess...After the lecture he was besieged by those who had pressing individual questions for him...A woman in her late thirties or early forties approached Joe and, speaking very rapidly, with great emotion began to outline her plan for going to Greece to “find the spirit of the goddess you spoke of tonight.” She pulled out a notebook and showed Joe her itinerary. She had made precise calculations of the best time to visit every major cultural attraction and just where and when she would make her salutations to the various deities whose statues remained. “Do you think this is sufficient?” she pressed Joe. “Do you think I’ll find the spirit of the goddess?”*

*[Campbell] took her one free hand in his and with great kindness and solemnity said, “Dear lady, I sincerely hope all does not go as planned.” With that he slipped into his overcoat and left the building...Finally mustering all the courage of my seventeen years, I said, “Mr. Campbell, that woman who was going to Greece – why did you tell her you hope things did not go as planned?” Joe paused and then threw back his head and laughed with a mystic’s glee. “How will the gods ever find her when she has done everything in her power to make sure they never will!, he exclaimed. Then, very soberly: “Unless you leave room for serendipity, how can the divine enter in? The beginning of the adventure of finding yourself is to lose your way!”[3]*

Is there an element of serendipity in your mountain-top experience? If so, what would the experience have been like without the element of serendipity? What might be some ways to plan or prepare for such an experience without destroying the experience itself?

1. Richard Gilbert sermon, “Times of Excellence – The Burning Bush Along the Unitarian Universalist Way” <http://www.rochesterunitarian.org/1998-99/990110.html>
2. Quoting from p. 75, *The Art of Pilgrimage: the Seekers Guide to Making Travel Sacred*, Phil Cousineau, Conari Press, Berkeley, CA., 1998 in “Why do we go to the mountain? — On Pilgrimage” a sermon of April 22, 2001 by Rev. Sue E. Sinnamon
3. May Sarton, *After the Stroke*, W.W. Norton & Co., 1988.