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Take a Step Back

The first explorers to visit the Grand Canyon were simply overwhelmed. They couldn't comprehend what they were seeing because they had no previous concept of anything of this magnitude.

Standing on the edge of the future, many people are experiencing a similar vertigo. Many are being challenged by extreme events such as war, climate change, over population, a struggling economy and pressures at home.

Is there any previous experience to help grasp the multi-dimensional complexity of modern reality?

How does one come to an understanding about the nature of the current crisis and the human role in it?

Around the country today there is a call to action. How can the work and service of an individual bring forth the best in every moment? The call is explained by mythology expert Joseph Campbell.

The Hero's Journey, as described by Campbell, is a classic and timeless model for following one's personal path through change. There is a wake up call, a call to adventure, the quest itself and a return to give back to the community what has been learned.

The journey is a metaphor for the natural flow of living in and adapting to a person's world. It describes the elemental process that underlies all learning, personal freedom and spiritual growth. The embodiment of what philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer called "the dialogue that we are."

Take this for example: CNN headline news: Monday, April 13, 2009. Passenger lands turboprop plane after pilot dies. Doug White learned that the pilot was unconscious and took over the controls at 5000 feet above a Miami airport. The tower talked him through the landing procedure. White told a reporter that he was in a state of focused fear.

Most powerful stories have a hero or heroine who has done something remarkable.

Humans are all "heroes in waiting." The hero's journey is a cycle which repeats itself countless times in life. It helps to show where a person is in the current cycle of change or growth. It helps a person see where one is 'stuck' or what needs to be done next. One can imagine the hero's journey as a map to be followed during all stages of life.

As emissaries of Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark stood on the Continental Divide in June of 1805. They were shocked to see an endless range of mountains instead of the waterway to the Pacific they were expecting, but fortified by a higher purpose, they decided to "forge ahead." Their mission was to "ease suffering for all mankind" and to expand on the liberty envisioned by Jefferson.

Lewis and Clark were incredibly successful because of their heroic qualities. They demonstrated vision, courage, integrity, and all team members were treated as equals. As they traveled into the unknown they treated everyone they met (mostly Native Americans) with dignity and respect.

Being willing to embrace the unknown is the first step of the hero's journey: the purpose is to make your dreams real, to learn from life's challenges, to contribute what one's learned for the benefit of others.