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Lions at the Gate

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Many mythological stories depict the trials and tribulations of the hero's journey culminating with the final challenge of passing the ultimate test; overcoming fear and lust. Often symbolized as lions at the gate, dragons blocking the passageway, monsters guarding the bridge or demons feeding on intruders, this final test is often in the form of a riddle that must be solved.

So what is the riddle that all heroes must solve lest they be consumed by fear and lust? The riddle can never be answered with the logical thinking mind. It is a Koan that can only be understood when the analytical mind is surrendered.

What is on the other side of the guarded passageway? It is Heaven, Paradise, Nirvana, the lost lover, the key to salvation, the kingdom.

A detailed story of this passage is represented in Siddhartha's journey to obtain enlightenment and become the Buddha (the word 'Buddha' comes from the root word 'bud', which means 'to awaken') .

As he sat determined to obtain freedom under the Bodhi Tree, his intention to obtain freedom aroused the anger of Mara. Mara symbolizes the embodiment of death and all the obstacles that prevent one from attaining enlightenment.

Mara sent his army to attack Siddhartha wielding every kind of weapon; flaming swords, boiling water, hooks, whips, raging elephants. Yet as Siddhartha remained unstirred in equanimity anything that touched him was transformed into fragrant flowers.

When Mara's weapons of fears failed he was further enraged and so he sent his beautiful daughters to seduce Siddhartha by displaying themselves, teasing him, dancing seductively and whispering into his ear. Yet Siddhartha's mind remained still and unmoved until, at last, the obstacles fell away and he passed through to the other side.

As he entered into enlightenment he awakened to all his past lives and saw the Four Noble Truths revealing the Eightfold Path out of suffering. Aversion (fear) and craving (lust); these are the lions at the gate.

Remain still and unperturbed and deliverance from suffering ensues.