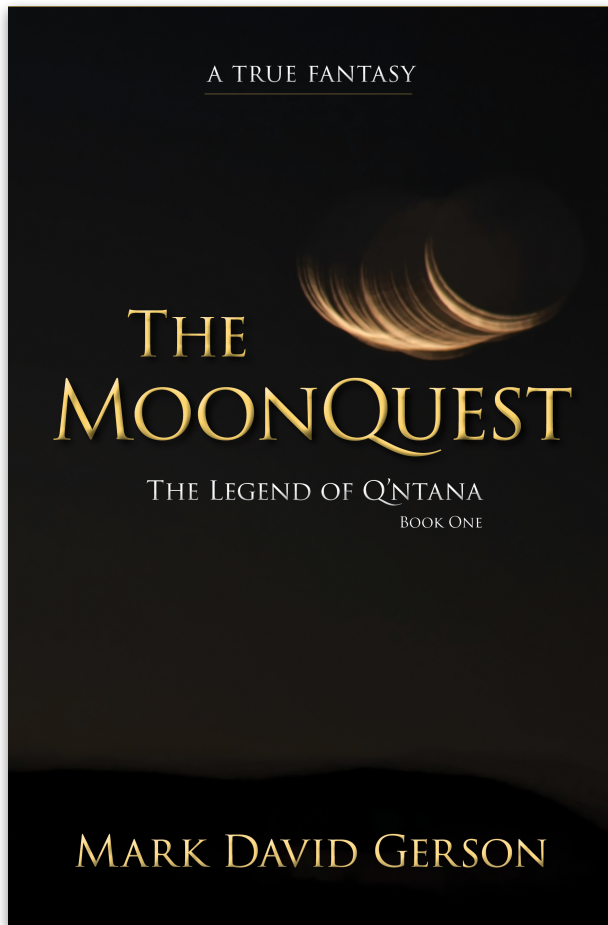


A READER'S GUIDE
TO
THE MOONQUEST



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INTRODUCTION

At its most basic, *The MoonQuest* is a gripping fantasy adventure where evil is ultimately vanquished by the forces of good.

Going deeper, *The MoonQuest* is a coming-of-age story, where a naive youth matures into manhood through the nightmare hazards of an unlikely quest.

Going deeper still, *The MoonQuest* is the archetypal hero's journey. As Joseph Campbell describes it in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." That also sums up *The MoonQuest*.

We may not be slaying serpents or fleeing tyrants in our day-to-day lives. Yet in some metaphoric way, we experience each of these levels of *The MoonQuest* on our personal journey. It is that journey and its parallels with Toshar's, Yhoshi's, Garan's and Fynda's that we will explore together through the questions raised in this Reader's Guide.

As I suggest in all my books and as Toshar himself discovers on his MoonQuest, there can be no rigid rules on the journey toward an authentic, creative life. As such, this Reader's Guide is but a starting point. It's a place from which to launch your own version of Toshar's adventure and to let it carry you and your group where it will, as you, like Toshar and his companions, journey into an expanded awareness of your own story and bardship.

In short, there is no right way or wrong to use this guide. Find your own way, just as Toshar, Yhoshi, Garan and Fynda must on their MoonQuest.

One final note before we set off... Because the group discussions that will emerge from the questions posed on these pages are certain to take you to deeper, more personal places than you might have encountered with other readers' guides in other book clubs, please keep the following suggestions in mind as you move forward with *The MoonQuest* and with this guide.

- 1) **Keep It Safe:** Do whatever it takes to create and maintain a safe, nurturing environment in your group or book club, one where all participants can feel free to share openly without fear of judgment, criticism, mockery or rebuke.
- 2) **Be Respectful:** Always speak and respond with compassion and respect, remembering that everyone else in your group or book club is at least as sensitive as you are. Honor all opinions expressed. Honor all feelings shared.
- 3) **Keep It Private:** Personal information is bound to be revealed through these pages and the resulting discussions. Respect all participants' privacy and do not talk outside the group about anything you have heard within it.
- 4) **Be Open:** Don't censor yourself. A group like this only has value if all participants feel free to speak openly about their feelings and experiences. For that to be possible, remember and honor the previous three points.

THE MOONQUEST

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

PROLOGUE

*"It is not for me to boast of my exploits," I argued.
"Others have sung them. Let them continue."*

As *The MoonQuest* opens, fear and disempowerment disguise themselves as false modesty: An elderly Toshar isn't really being humble in his encounter with Na'an. He's afraid. Despite all his accomplishment and celebrity, this great storyteller is reluctant to share his own story, to "fix *The MoonQuest* on parchment" for others to read. In so doing, he refuses to claim that story and, with it, his power. To use a Gospel analogy, Toshar is hiding his light under a bushel. To borrow again from the New Testament, only his truth, freely expressed by him, will set him free. Unless he surrenders to that imperative, he will be stuck; he will not be free to realize his desire to "move on to other realms, set off on other journeys."

Questions:

- Which of your stories are you disinclined to share?
- In what ways are you refusing to claim your own story?
- In what ways are you reluctant to express yourself?
- Where are you hiding *your* light under a bushel?
- What unexpressed truth is holding *you* back from moving forward?
- How might you be deceiving yourself about your motives?
- In what other ways do you identify with the characters in this prologue?

CHAPTER 1

"The boy is no longer a boy."

Zakk continues to see his nephew, a young man on the cusp of mastery, as a "boy" — as an immature, unformed youth neither worthy nor capable of the great accomplishments that are his birthright and destiny. But isn't Zakk simply confirming Toshar's self-image? It's a self-image that Eulisha tries to replace with one that is more consistent with what she knows of her grandson's potential...with what is core the truth of Toshar's potential.

Questions:

- Where do you undervalue yourself?
- In what ways have you underestimated yourself? In what ways do you continue to underestimate yourself?
- Who in your life and what situations in your life support that limiting self-view?
- Who in your life and what situations in your life counter that limiting self-view?
- What changes can you make in your life, starting right now, that will bolster the core truth of *your* potential?

CHAPTER 2

"You are trained to know when stories sing true or speak false."

When Zakk is faced with the popularly held belief about the Tena'aa — that they are fierce cannibals — he chooses to believe the "mass-consciousness" story rather than the "true" story. Zakk refuses to look beneath the surface, refuses to seek out the discernment of his heart, refuses to be open to the deeper truth he could find within himself, were he only to look. The "training" Eulisha refers to in this quote is neither formal education nor socialization. It's the innate discernment that is an integral part of our nature, when we allow it its natural expression. It's also a discernment that, ironically, our socialization and formal education — our "training" — can often dull.

Questions:

- What about the world around you have you accepted unquestioningly, without applying to it the discernment of your heart?
- Who have you judged unthinkingly, without opening to the truth of his or her heart?
- Where have you subscribed to the popular or predominant view — about an individual, a minority, a nationality, a country or a situation — without going deeper to discern the "true" story, the story only your heart can reveal?

CHAPTER 3

*"Your despair feeds Bo'Rà K'n and starves M'nor...
Your guilt, shame and self-pity do the same."*

Toshar and Yhoshi are each locked in a self-constructed prison of stagnant emotion: Toshar in his sense of futility, Yhoshi in his suicidal guilt. Neither is willing to feel fully and, in feeling fully, to travel through and past whatever is preventing them from progressing in their lives.

Toshar and Yhoshi are not unique. The feelings and situations we know, however discomfiting, often feel more comfortable than the still-alien feelings and situations that might replace them. These stuck emotions can act like a false-security blanket, offering us the illusion of safety even as they constrict, restrict and suffocate us.

Questions:

- What are you refusing to feel or to feel fully?
- Which uncomfortable emotions form the false-security blanket that is actually suffocating you?
- Using your heart, not your mind, ask yourself where you are stuck and what you can do and/or feel to get unstuck.

CHAPTER 4

"It is best not to know too much too soon."

Toshar, like the rest of us, longs to know where his story is going and how it will end. And he, like the rest of us, feels as though he must know the outcome before he can commit to the journey. Our human minds yearn for information, explanation and justification. These help us to feel safe in a world that often feels unsafe, to feel in control in a world that often seems to be spinning out of control. Yet, even when we possess the information we seek, any resulting feelings of safety and control are meaningless illusions, phantoms with no substance. That's because, as O'ric tries to tell Toshar, our safety can only ever come from within. It can never be derived any external source.

Questions:

- There's a difference between wanting to know and feeling as though you *need* to know. Where in your life and in your story can you give up the need to know?
- How can you retrain yourself to feel safe in the midst of uncertainty?
- How can you foster a deeper trust in the higher wisdom of your own story?
- In what ways can you surrender more fully to the inevitability of change? To change itself?

CHAPTER 5

It was as though I was the mouthpiece for some powerful instrument beyond my control.

Toshar's plan is to share a reassuring, if dull tale he has recounted many times. What emerges instead, to his amazement, is a new story, one that speaks from his heart and shuts out the censoring judgment of his mind. From one moment to the next, he does not nor cannot know where the story will carry him. All he can do is surrender to the mystery and trust in the higher wisdom that is speaking to him through his heart.

Questions:

- We carry many old stories within us, stories we repeat until we believe that them to be true...even when they're not true. Where in your life can you abandon an old story and surrender to the mystery of a new one?
- In what part of your life does the censoring judgment of your mind shout the loudest? In what ways can you love it into silence and give voice to the higher wisdom of your heart?

CHAPTER 6

"Jump," a voice deep within me urged. "Jump. Now."

Toshar's celestial highway has come to an abrupt end. Now he is called upon to jump, to take the leap of faith that calls to us all. Will he plummet to earth and die? Or will he land safely? Where will his leap take him? If he could answer those questions, it would not be a leap of faith. If he could answer, he would not resemble The Fool, a tarot character often pictured stepping off a cliff into the unknown. Like Toshar's, The Fool's leap may be one of faith, but it's never blind faith. For he knows that even as he trades the certainty of solid ground for the mysteries of the void, the infinite wisdom of his infinite mind will guide him forward. This knowingness frees him to surrender again and again — not without resistance and not without fear, but in the conviction that resistance is futile, fear cannot stop him and meaning is always present, even when it is invisible.

Questions:

- Have you ever taken a leap of faith? If so, what prompted you to take it? What happened? How did it work out? If you resisted, what were the consequences of your resistance?
- Are you feeling the same call now that Toshar did? That the tarot Fool does? What are you being asked to do? How do you feel about it? Will you jump? Or will you step back from the cliff edge into perceived safety? Why?

CHAPTER 7

“Why is darkness so dark? / Why do tears streak the sky?”

Q’ntana has plunged into darkness because its heart is closed, its voice has been silenced and its vision has been veiled...just as M’nor’s light has been veiled. But is Q’ntana’s world all that different from ours?

Q’ntana’s darkness derives from its stifled creativity, its shrouded vision and its focus on fact as “the only legal tender.” We live in a time where information is king, where music and art programs in schools are sacrificed on the altar of budgetary restraint, testing and common standards. We live, too, in a time where individual freedoms and individual expression are being traded away for an illusory security in a nebulous “war” on terror.

Whatever is true in our culture, nation and world must also be true within each of us. For nothing can exist outside us that is not a reflection of what we carry within.

Questions:

- Is there something you dislike about the current political leadership in your city, region or country? Elsewhere? Look within, more honestly than you have perhaps dared do before, and see where you carry that same energy inside you. Look within to see where you carry the inner conflict that reflects in the outer world as war. Look within to see where you carry the scarcity consciousness that reflects in the outer world as poverty and lack. Don’t do it from a place of judgment. Look within from a place of loving compassion for *all* aspects of yourself.
- What did you discover through the previous question that you can begin to shift within yourself? Once you do, pay attention to the changes, however subtle, that begin to show up in your life and in the world around you.

CHAPTERS 8, 9, 10

"You are the key. You are the key."

Toshar, Yhoshi, Fynda and Garan, having reached a dead end in a deathly maze, discover that they cannot return the way they came: The way back is closed to them. Nor can they stay where they are and hope to survive. They feel hopeless and helpless until Toshar's vision and story remind them that they alone hold the key to their salvation and forward movement.

Too often we abdicate our power to another person, to a situation or to an institution, ignoring the fact that, as with Toshar, the key to our destiny — like everything else of true substance — lies within us.

Questions:

- Where in the past have you given your power over to someone else, to something else or to a situation? Did you reclaim it? If so, how? How did that feel? If you didn't, how did that feel?
- Where in your life today are you abdicating your power? Don't be embarrassed; we all do it, so be honest with yourself. Once you have identified the people, places, institutions or situations that you are allowing to have dominion over you, ask yourself what you can do to reclaim your power and, with it, your destiny. How can you do it lovingly, compassionately and forgivingly...toward yourself? For no one can disempower you if you have not given them permission, however unconsciously.

CHAPTER 11

*“Break the chain, the future’s lost /
Break the chain and bear the cost.”*

As they sit around the Table of Prophecy, Toshar, Yhoshi, Fynda and Garan are told that the only way their MoonQuest can succeed is if they not only work together but stay together. They are the Four Who See and, together, their power for good is greater than the sum of their individuality.

Oneness is not only about working together with others. It’s also about integrating the many and sometimes conflicting parts of ourselves into wholeness, even — and perhaps especially — those parts that we wish would go away. That inner wholeness, too, is greater than the sum of its parts.

Questions:

- How can you harness the power of oneness in your life? How can you acknowledge, honor, express and live the interconnectedness of all things?
- How can you respect the power of oneness in your inner life? Which ignored, disliked or hated parts of you can you love back into your family of wholeness?

CHAPTER 12

"I don't want to be Elderbard ... I don't want to be different."

Not only is Toshar reluctant to embrace his power, his Elderbardship, he is loathe to separate himself out from the crowd. He doesn't want to see himself as different. He doesn't want to be viewed as different. Yet even as we embrace the interconnectedness of all things, we are also called to celebrate our individuality, to salute — without ego-puffery — our unique gifts and qualities. These gifts and qualities don't make us better than anyone else; they make us our best selves.

Questions:

- What are your gifts, talents and strengths? Don't hide your light under a bushel! What can you do, starting today, to acknowledge, honor and celebrate them? To express them?
- What gifts, talents and strengths are you ignoring or running from? Which of your gifts, talents and strengths are you afraid of? Give yourself permission to acknowledge them. Give yourself permission to own them. How can you, now, begin to express them — in your world and in the larger world around you?

CHAPTER 13

"It is not cowardly to fear."

A fearful Toshar welcomes an opportunity to step from his body, his quest and his life and into a place he perceives to be free of all fear. Yet, as Na'an reminds him, "Fear need not exclude action. When fear stops you, Bo'Rà K'n has won."

We all experience fear. However it's triggered in our lives, our highest response is one that acknowledges the fear, loves and reassures the fearful parts of ourself and moves through the fear, to the other side of it. When we allow ourselves to be paralyzed by fear, we weaken ourselves and strengthen the Bo'Rà K'ns of our world.

Questions:

- Has fear ever paralyzed you? How? How did you ultimately move through it? Or are you still paralyzed? If you are, what first step can you take to move through the fear?
- Have you experienced moments when, like Toshar, you would prefer to escape from some challenging aspect of your life? How have you indulged that desire? Have you acted out in unhealthy ways, trying to dull what you feel...what you fear? How did you come to terms with the situation that caused you such pain? If you haven't come to terms with it, how can you, now?
- In your life now, are you experiencing any escapist desires? How are you dealing with them?
- How can you begin to love and reassure the fearful parts of you? What can you do, today, to move forward, despite your fear?

CHAPTER 14

"Everything you need is still in your heart."

Toshar's final link with his past, the last remaining keepsake of his old life, must be sacrificed to deter the King's Men. It has been tainted by Zakk and is putting Toshar and his companions at risk of capture.

How often do we cling to some piece of the past, believing it to be helping us when, in truth, it is a hindrance? How often do we mourn the loss of something we believe to be irreplaceable? As Eulisha reminds Toshar, everything that links us to anything of value resides first and most powerfully in our hearts. If we keep it alive there, there is no need for a physical keepsake.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with physical keepsakes, or with possessions...unless we retain an unhealthy attachment to them, unless their presence ties us to a person, place, time or situation that in some way holds us back. The pendant tied Toshar to a place, time and self-view that he had outgrown, to which he could never return. Because Toshar recognizes that nothing of importance is being lost — that something of importance is, in fact, being gained — he is able to let the pendant-of-his-past go.

Questions:

- What are you clinging to unnecessarily? It doesn't have to be a thing. It could be a person, a place or a situation. It could be an emotion, attitude or belief system. Can you find a way of letting it go? Can you take a first step?
- Is there a physical possession to which you feel an unhealthy attachment or that is somehow holding you back? Can you now release it, even as you express gratitude for all the ways it has served you until now?

CHAPTER 15

"It seems to me you have been thinking altogether too much."

Toshar stubbornly insists that because he alone knows the correct way through the endless leech-infested swamp, the others must follow him. After all, he is the bard. Toshar has moved out of his heart — the place where all wisdom resides — and into his head, where a rigid mindset brooks no argument and countenances no alternatives, including those that might emerge from deep within his soul...or others'.

Too often in our lives, we adopt Toshar's know-it-all stubbornness, ignoring the small, still voice of our heart-based discernment. Too often, we believe our minds to be infallible, when that potential exists only in our hearts.

Questions:

- Think of a time when you ignored the small, still voice of your heart and followed the insistent whine of your mind. What happened? Were there consequences? Would you do it differently now, if you could? What did you learn from the experience?
- What about today? Where in your life can you lose your mind and follow your heart?

CHAPTER 16

"As our circle closed, jagged tears ripped through the illusion."

Throughout this chapter, Toshar, Yhoshi, Fynda and Garan struggle to determine what is real and what isn't. First, they experience the disquieting and then comforting illusions of the serpent's belly. Then, later, Toshar's story about Kyri and Castle Rose not only merges with the story he and his companions are living, it transports them, in their sleep, to the Castle Rose ferry dock. Even Kyri's experience is an odd blend of illusion and reality, of the clearly possible and the conventionally impossible.

Questions:

- Where in your life has illusion shown itself to be real and reality to be illusion?
- Where have you allowed your choices to be circumscribed by the conventionally possible?
- Where have you failed to act because your mind has insisted that "it's not possible"?
- Where have you allowed your vision to transcend the limits of your mind and the limits of others' views?
- Where in your life right now can you move past doubt and limitation to embrace what others might view as impossible?

CHAPTER 17

"The past is passed. We let it go."

Throughout his coronation and its aftermath, Kyri is reminded that looking backward will prevent him from moving forward in a sovereign and empowered way. First, he watches as all vestiges of his father's kingship are consumed by fire. Then, he is scolded for kneeling before Fortas and, in so doing, worshiping the past.

It has always been tempting to focus on the past with a sort of false nostalgia, to seek out the familiar for its ability to give us an illusion of control. It's even more tempting today, as change pushes through our culture and our lives with unprecedented speed. Yet we are only truly alive when our focus is on the present moment. It is that focus alone that allows us to chart our unique course and blaze trails into the future.

Questions:

- What vestiges of the past are you clinging to?
- Where in your life is false nostalgia thriving?
- Where have you not charted your own course?
- Where are you not honoring your own path, sovereignty and empowerment?
- What steps can you take today to focus more on the present moment?
- What steps can you take today to echo the call of Kyri's coronation and let the past?

CHAPTER 18

"The time to fight will come. The time to part is now."

To everything there is a season. A time to wait and a time to act. A time to stay and a time to part. A time to speak and a time to keep silent. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to plant and a time to harvest. Toshar, Kyri and Garan each seeks something before its time in this chapter, impatient for a moment that has yet to ripen.

More often than we would prefer, Mind Time and Heart Time operate on different clocks and schedules. More often than we may be comfortable admitting, the Seasons of the Heart serve us better than the Seasons of the Mind ever could. It takes faith, discernment and practice to know which clock is calling and to know in which season we find ourselves.

Questions:

- When in your life have you favored Mind Time over Heart Time? Did that choice have consequences? What happened?
- When in your life have you favored Heart Time over Mind Time? What were the consequences of that choice? What happened?
- Do you tend to be impatient? How can you begin to let your heart take charge of your timing?
- Focusing on the Seasons of the Heart, where in your life right now is it time to wait? Where is it time to act? Where is it time to speak up? To keep silent? Where is it time to stay? To part? Where is it time to tear down? To build up? Where is it time to plant? Where is it time to harvest?

CHAPTER 19

*"It didn't seem possible. Yet there were the suns,
where they had no right being."*

Toshar, Yhoshi, Fynda and Garan produce what to them is a miracle: shifting time to avoid certain capture by the King's Men. We often view miracles as rare manifestations of the conventionally impossible. But are they? In truth, miracles are present in every moment of our lives. It's our limited vision that prevents us from seeing them. It's our limited sense of what is possible that prevents us from believing in them. It's our fear that prevents us from embracing them. The more we acknowledge the miracles we allow ourselves to notice, the more miracles we *will* notice. Miracles, too, need not be as dramatic as the one experienced here by Toshar, Yhoshi, Garan and Fynda in order to be worthy of your notice.

Questions:

- Where has the conventionally impossible shown up in your life?
- What miracles have you experienced in your life?
- What miracles have you experienced this week?
- What miracles have you experienced today?
- What miracles have you dismissed as too small and insignificant to count as miracles? Include them in your inventory!

CHAPTER 20

"You saw beyond the uniform, beyond the flesh..."

Unlike Zakk, who in Chapter 2 refused to see beyond the widely held beliefs about the Tena'aa, Toshar allows himself to see beneath the Stranger's cruel exterior to the universal divinity that lies at the core of his being. Even in war, we are called to love our enemies, not for their actions but because they carry the same spark of godliness we all do. We are them. And they are us.

Questions:

- Without condoning their words or actions, without subscribing to their views or beliefs, who in your life — past or present — is it now time, at last, for you to love?
- Take a moment to open your heart to someone who has betrayed you, someone who has hurt you, someone who has scarred you. Can you do it? What does it feel like? If you can't, commit to trying again, perhaps with someone whose impact on you was not as dramatic.
- Take another moment to expand that openheartedness to take in those in positions of leadership — in your community, in your workplace, in your government or in the world — whom you now judge or hold in contempt.

CHAPTER 21

*"A union of all the qualities, masculine and feminine,
resides in the truest of bards."*

In the midst of his fear, Toshar experiences his future masterly self: a balanced blend of the highest qualities and energies of the masculine and feminine. Whether we "live" in male or female bodies, we are all called to experience our masculine and our feminine qualities, and to experience them in an integrated way. Too often, though, men hide their soft, emotional side under hyper-masculine bluster and women take on a caricature of masculinity because they believe it to be the only way they will be able to compete in a male-dominated institutions and power structures.

Questions:

- Where in your life are your masculine or feminine qualities out of balance or steeped in stereotype?
- If you're a man, how is fear of your innate sensitivity holding you back from a fuller expression of your humanity?
- If you're a woman, where can you more fully integrate *healthy* masculine energy into your life?

CHAPTER 22

"They call it the end of the known world."

Beyond the land of the Vilda'aa, Ro'an tells Toshar, is nothing and nothingness...the "end of the known world." Once Toshar hears that, he knows that to be his destination. "Then that's where we shall find Mir M'nor," he tells Ro'an with a certainty he neither understands nor questions.

Just like the legendary pot of gold that sits at the end of every rainbow, our heart's desire can only be found when we travel beyond the beyond...through and past all our perceived comfort zones...through and past all that has already been explored, mapped charted...through and past all that we know and have known. Only there, where the known universe ends and the unknown world begins, can we, like Toshar, find and claim our destiny.

Questions:

- How do you feel about stepping beyond your known world? About surrendering to the mysteries of your journey?
- When in your life have you ventured beyond your known world? What did you find there? What were the gifts and blessings of the journey? Of the destination? Of what lay beyond the destination?
- There is always another unknown land waiting for us around the next bend. Which unknown land is calling to you today? How is it calling? If you haven't yet begun to answer the call, what steps can you take now to do so?

CHAPTER 23

“Unless we tell our stories, unless we share our stories, the land will not heal and M’nor will be lost to Q’ntana forever.”

Unless Fynda, Garan and Yhoshi allow themselves to release the painful, often brutal dreams and memories that they have held inside, they will remain crippled by their shame and captive to the very emotions they are seeking to transcend. Unless they take the risk that all acts of vulnerability demand by sharing those dreams and memories, the dark silence that has shrouded Q’ntana — and each of them — will never lift.

Storytelling is as natural to human beings as is breathing. From the gurgles of infancy to wherever we find ourselves today, we carry an innate urge to communicate our stories, even the most difficult ones...especially, perhaps, the most difficult ones. Yet our shame, our fear of judgment and our unwillingness to reveal our apparent imperfections often hold us back in self-censorship. That self-censorship holds us back in other ways, too, for as Toshar and his companions discover throughout their MoonQuest, only their truth can set them free.

Questions:

- What story from your life have you tried not to acknowledge, even within yourself? Can you take steps now to accept it as part of your life, to own it, to come to terms with it?
- What story from your life have you held back from sharing and expressing with others, perhaps even those closest to you? What story from your life have you been afraid to share and express with others? Can you share it now, with this group? If not, can you commit to sharing it with someone in your life?

CHAPTER 24

"There are more where we came from. There always are."

Holgg's warning to Fara reminds us that that our choices, actions and attitudes don't necessarily excise the Holggs — inner and outer — from our lives. And when they do, they don't necessarily remove them for all time.

Choosing to live an authentic life from a place of heart and discernment does not mean a life stripped of challenge, pain and hardship. Nor does it mean that similar challenges will never recur once "dealt with." What living from that place of authenticity offers us is the wisdom, insight, strength and compassion to better respond to those difficult moments and people...especially when they seem to come around again.

How often have you been certain that you had successfully put a life issue to rest only to have it recur? When that happens, our first thought is a self-critical one: We didn't "get it right." Chances are, we did. But many of our most vexing life issues — our Holggs — are so deeply rooted that we can only deal with them in layers — each layer like the delicate skin of an onion that must be peeled away before the next can be reached.

Questions:

- Have you ever had a crisis of faith when faced with a particularly challenging issue or situation? What did it feel like? How long did it take you to get to the other side of it? What did you do to get to the other side of it?
- What is your current "Holgg"? What current or recent life issue is a "rerun," one you thought was over and done with for all time? Instead of beating yourself up for not having fixed it last time, can you credit yourself for all you have healed that now allows you to take on the next layer?

CHAPTER 25

"I am not Elderbard. I may never be Elderbard. I don't want to be Elderbard. Yes, I do. I do? I can't think that. ... How do I dare? What if I make a wrong choice?"

Toshar is conflicted. Part of him is ready to embrace his destiny. But a terrified part of him is resistant. What if he takes on this powerful role and gets it wrong? What if he screws up?

Toshar's ambivalence is quintessentially human. "In my Father's house are many mansions," the New Testament tells us. That house is us...our individuality. The mansions are the many parts and aspects of Self that make up that individuality. Think of those parts and aspects as sitting in a Parliament or Congress. Some belong to opposing parties and others sit as independent members. But each carries its own fears and strengths that it applies to your inner issues of the day.

How do we act as an integrated whole in the face of that? Not by ignoring, cutting off or killing off the members of our inner legislative assembly who are resistant and afraid. We do it by lovingly reassuring them, even as we strive to live from the strongest and wisest places within us.

Questions:

- Where in your life have you been conflicted — eager to move forward even as you are terrified to move forward? What happened? Which part of you took charge?
- Where in your life today do you face a similar ambivalence?
- What can you do today to step into your empowerment and destiny, while reassuring, with love, those resistant parts of you that are afraid?

CHAPTER 26

"There is no end to the quest for those who choose to live the journey."

M'nor's words to Toshar echo teachings that we find in most spiritual traditions, teachings that tell us that the destination is less important than the outcome, that this moment is always the journey's most significant and that no journey truly comes to an end, for every ending is also a beginning.

Questions:

- Where in your life are you focusing on an outcome rather than on the present moment?
- What can you do right now to turn your attention to this moment instead of a future or past moment?
- What practice can you undertake that will gently pull you back to this moment whenever a past- or future-focus takes over?
- How can you respect, honor and celebrate the infinite nature of a life's journey that, in truth, has no clear-cut endings or beginnings?

*"You either trust or you do not," M'nor stated.
"There is no halfway in between."*

The leap of faith Toshar is called on to take in Chapter 6 is not the only one on his MoonQuest, nor is it the only life-threatening one. Here, as the story moves toward its climax, a different kind of act of faith is required: an act of surrender and trust. In being called to trust M'nor with their lives, Toshar, Yhoshi, Fynda and Garan discover that you cannot

halfway trust any more than you can be halfway pregnant. You either trust or you do not.

Questions:

- Where have you tried to negotiate or bargain with God, Spirit, the Universe or your own higher wisdom for your trust?
- Where have you tried to get away with not fully trusting your higher wisdom or intuitive nature? What happened?
- Is there any situation in your life right now where you are reluctant to trust fully, to surrender unconditionally? What steps can you take to move more fully into trust, to surrender more completely to your highest wisdom?

CHAPTER 27

“Do you think M’nor would send us into battle unprepared?”

Without clothes, armor or weapons and with Yhoshi’s vision of the destruction of Castle Rose still etched in their minds, Toshar and his companions hover on the brink of hopelessness and helplessness. Then Garan reminds them of a basic spiritual precept: We are never given more than we can handle, regardless of outward appearance. Nor are we ever abandoned, however alone we might feel.

Questions:

- Do you face a challenge in your life right now that feels greater than you can handle? Can you accept that you are strong enough to get through it, even if it doesn’t feel that way in this moment? More than likely, this is not the first time you find yourself, like Toshar and company, on the brink of despair. How have you successfully moved through past challenges? Even if you cannot apply the identical strategy to this situation, celebrate your previous achievement and know that if you did it once, you can do it again!

CHAPTER 28

*And if my arms lacked experience in violent combat,
sword and shield did not. I let them take charge.*

Toshar is thrust into battle knowing neither war nor swordsmanship. His only skill is surrender — not to the king's forces but to the higher wisdom and knowingness that resides within him. If he has learned anything through his long MoonQuest, it is that he carries everything he needs and everything he needs to know inside him. If he can trust that heart wisdom in this battle, as he has grown to trust it throughout his journey, all will be well — regardless of the perceived outcome. Toshar has learned that he is at his strongest, most potent and most effective when he stops trying to control his life and journey and, instead, frees the higher wisdom of his “story” to take charge.

Questions:

- Where in your life are you insisting on being in control? Where are you pushing toward an outcome rather than relying on your higher wisdom and intuitive power to guide you? What can you do right now to shift that “balance of power”?
- Where in your life are you looking outside yourself for answers instead of trusting your innate wisdom and knowingness? How can you re-empower yourself to seek your own answers from within?

CHAPTER 29

"Even a bard cannot understand everything."

The fact that the Universe is filled with meaning does not mean that any or all of that meaning is always available to us. More often than not, "meaning" (and the understanding that comes from it) resembles an iceberg: its greatest bulk always remains hidden from view. That's where trust comes in, for us as much as for Toshar, who must accept that there are things he will never know or understand — at least not in his mind. In his heart, knowingness and understanding are always present and available, even if not in ways his mind can grasp.

Wisdom is not the result of more and more information. Instead, it comes from within, from the discernment, intuitive wisdom, trust and surrender that are our greatest gifts and strengths.

Questions:

- Where in your life can you surrender your perceived "need" to understand?
- Where in your life can you accept, as Toshar must, that there are mysteries that will never be revealed to your conscious mind?

CHAPTER 30

"I'm no hero...I did what I had to do."

This is not false modesty on Toshar's part any more than it is when someone runs into a burning building to save a child. Courage and heroism are rarely conscious acts. More often, they emerge without thought as a lightning reaction to a situation that denies us the luxury of consideration. "First thoughts" are rarely thoughts at all. Rather, they are intuitive responses that touch deeper truths. It's our second thoughts that engage our fearful, self-censoring selves, that deny us the opportunity to be our most masterful and live from a place of higher wisdom and inner truth.

Questions:

- When in your life have you over-thought or over-analyzed a situation before acting? Has that helped or hindered the final outcome?
- Have you ever been considered by others to be the "hero" of a situation? Was your response or reaction one you thought out ahead of time, or did it "just happen"? How did it play out?
- Where have first thoughts brought you closer to a sense of mastery?
- Where has a censoring second-thought diminished or sabotaged a situation or relationship?

EPILOGUE

*We speak these words freely now, all of us —
for we are all bards in Q'ntana.*

Freedom of expression is not a freedom any person, government or constitution can bestow upon us. It's a freedom that only we can give ourselves. It's also a freedom that no one can take from us unless we agree, however unconsciously, to give it away to them. As long as we exercise it in love, compassion and respect — as long as we tell our stories, share our truths and give ourselves permission to be vulnerable out in the world — then our freedom of expression will thrive and, like all in Q'ntana, we, too, will be bards.

Questions:

- Have there been moments in your life when you abdicated your freedom of expression? Why? How? What happened?
- What can you do — now, today — to honor, celebrate and express *your* hardship? To live the legacy of *The MoonQuest*?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

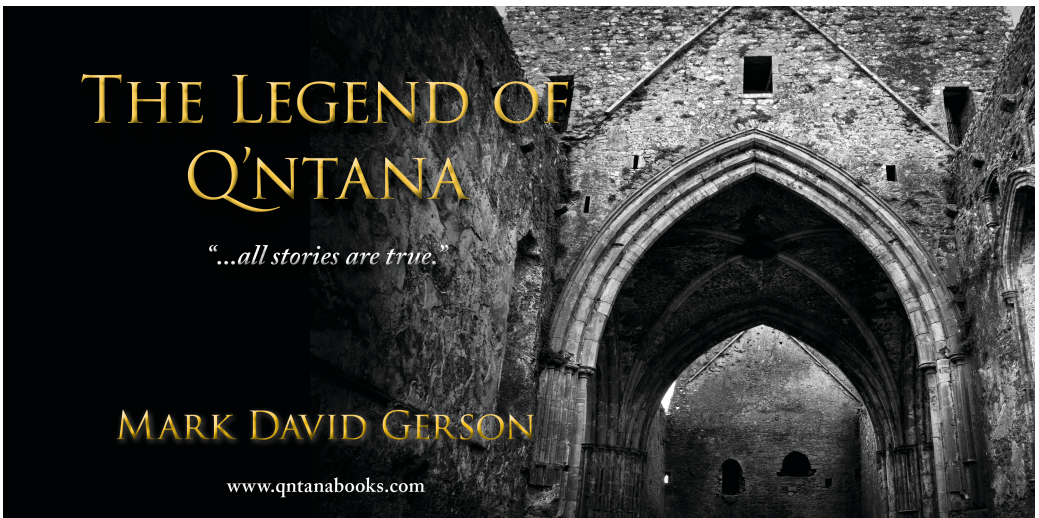
This *Reader's Guide* would not exist without Michael Hice, whose Unity Santa Fe *MoonQuest*-based course, "Developing Your Own Story," forms its foundation. I am also grateful to Michael for revealing to me themes and depths in *The MoonQuest* that I never saw while writing the book. Sometimes, the author is the last to know!

— Mark David Gerson

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