

Into Skoteino Cave: Four Levels Down

by

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The cave challenged like the birthing of a child and now it seems difficult to fully remember the fear and pain. The joy of the journey reigns.

Bodily, She tested. Throughout the previous days, the tour leaders had discussed the physical difficulty of descending into this cave, but I had looked forward to this cave since reading about the trip. Although the warnings sometimes seemed directed toward me, I shut out the idea of not going down. I had to go.

Karolina led the way and soon was gone from view. I boldly ventured forth, knowing I would go and needing to trust Her. Each of us with a head lamp, we watched the woman in front of us for the path, the next step, as we descended into darkness. I found myself near the end of the line, not wanting to hold up the quick stepped and leapers; knowing I needed my unrushed time to trust and feel my body and the Goddess in the descent.

Early on, it was easy – like any hike on a path. Climbing down over rocks and watching for steady footing. Then lower into the darkness and seeing only a foot ahead. Blackness surrounding us. Down further into the earth. Climbing down over slippery, moist dirt. Red, brown earth. Mother Earth. Lamp lights on - shining only on the next step. Following the light before me into the dark. Light and darkness, light and darkness... Going toward the light of the woman in front of me while we descended into darkness.

And then, a small tight ledge with a twist to the left challenged my tenacity. Needing to move around a corner on a narrow ridge – a rockface to the left and a dark drop to the right. My fear struck deep. Not knowing how far the cliff fell - would I fall a few feet or a thousand? I didn't want to know but my terrified imagination took over. I slid on my buttocks around the twist with a loose rope to hold on to. I thought, "What is this rope tied to? How old is this rope? What is it attached to?" Unknown, afraid to ask. I had to trust She wouldn't abandon me now. She would carry me through. I slid further and froze, afraid to lurch my body. Afraid of going further into an abyss. No one to help me. No one can help me. My difficulty in asking for or receiving help froze my progress. I can help others but to be vulnerable is a lesson I continually resist. The women behind me gently began to coax me. (Perhaps afraid I wouldn't go?) I was afraid, but I also KNEW I would go. I would make it. I KNEW I would make it. I planned on making it. No matter what. I must do this on my own. I wanted to cry, afraid I couldn't hang on. More afraid of letting

go. My companions offered help. "NO. I CAN DO IT MYSELF!" I know I will make it. I will. I must go down to the last section. No turning back. - Where is my Goddess? Don't leave me here! The Goddess. She never left me. I forgot Her. I pulled myself into the right position and moved through. She was there. I'm not alone...

Then down further and finally squeezing my buttocks through a last drop, I wondered how I would ever get back up.

I drop into the bottom, a large "room" with a high ceiling. I am in a Goddess church. A chapel. A sanctuary. A temple. The far corner has a crawl space up to what looks like a pulpit. I stood in the large space, knowing my size limits my ability to climb into the pulpit. I feel a sadness my body can't move as I once could. Promising myself to get back into shape. To gather strength again. But it's not my role or desire to be in a pulpit. I am the worshipper here for the lesson.

Each woman was asked to find a space. I found and squatted into a natural seat on the side of the cave. I feel ancient and natural in this space. It fits my body and I am open to Her cave. All head lamps are turned off for our meditation time. In the dark of the cave, I closed my eyes and waited for an image. I wait for Her guidance as I breath softly and search for Her spirit.

One of the women began to weep. I selfishly felt annoyed by her noise and sniffing. "She is interfering with MY meditation!" Distracted, I wondered who was crying? I realize I have cried through every ceremony so far and I begin to wonder in this dark loss of time, if it is really a reflection of my own tears I am hearing. Or Mother Earth weeping. Gaia shedding tears. I'm tired of crying. I need to allow the sadness to just be.

And I smell the earth. I smell my own sweat and my odor mixing with the damp earth. My skin sweaty and wet. My clothes muddy and red. Red like the blood pouring of a woman. Blood of Mother Earth's wound. I am giving birth. I am my own child. I am crouched against the wall ready to give birth. I feel my vulva open as I crouch to the earth. I smell my own earthy scent mingle with the cave's dampness. This cave smells like a woman. Rich, fruitful, salty, bitter and sweet honey. I birth myself, pushing myself out of my birth canal and into my own arms. The cycle continues as I enfold inward and birth over and over again. Mother arms waiting, greeting. Absorbing in and then pushing out. I realize my eyes are closed and laugh that I have closed my eyes in this black dark. I open my eyes to the absence of light and ask the Goddess to show me what I need. "Give me a vision. Show me the way." I see a straight road before me leading through distant mountains. A long journey but the mountains await me. Hopeful. The road and horizon begins to move and the image becomes a labrys. The road the handle, the horizon and mountains the blades. My guide

for the future, a symbol to hold on to. Spirals and circles dance before my eyes. Moving and rotating and then fading.

Karolina calls us back with a light. I am disappointed I cannot stay. I am not ready to move on but know it is not my time to delegate. I dread the climb out. I am challenged again by my size and lack of strength. And my fear of sliding into who knows where. But my women cohorts laugh at our challenge. We hoist each other up. Someone has a push on my feet. Another pushes my buttocks but with laughter and joy. Like midwives and with a community of contractions to birth this fat baby. Laughing, grunting I climb out. I am slithering out of the dark womb and crawling up the cave.

As I reach the top, Fran, our crone, is waiting near the cave's entrance. She reaches out for each of us and cries, "It's a girl. She looks like you and she is beautiful." I giggle. I am struck that I am welcomed into the world. I had been told that the family was disappointed at my birth - that I was a girl, "another girl". Fourth girl in a row. I was "supposed to be a boy." Chances were that I would be a boy. What a frustration I was. Girl. Another girl. Another girl. Another forgotten girl with no special place.

And now I wonder: What if when I was born, there had been women welcoming me and saying, "It's a girl and she is a lesbian!" What if there was a place where lesbians were honored? Where lesbians were seen as special and unique rather than twisted and wrong. (And of course, not just lesbians but all people – but I need my fantasy for now. I need to honor myself.)

This has been an incredible sensory experience. Hearing cries, smelling earth, seeing visions, feeling cool dampness. When I wonder if I was missing the taste of the Goddess, I remember the wonderful Cretan meals that sustained me on the journey.