NORTHERN FABLE: SEALKSIN, SOULSKIN



Élményakadémia

individual (group) N° of pax 1-50

45 mins

storytelling

indoors | outdoors

mental well being

PURPOSE

- reflection on ourselves
- understanding personal boundaries - finding creative energies
- understanding and cherishing our personal needs

MATERIALS

- headphones + mobile phone or laptop if you want to listen the audio file
- audio file available: https://bit.ly/3OhYx4L (16 minutes)
- Youtube: Sealskin , Soulskin Story "Women who Run With the Wolves" (Clarissa Pincola Estés)

PREPARATION

- collect the materials needed - decide whether you would like to listen to the story or read it.
- prepare a comfortable place/spot indoor or outdoors - make sure you have mats or chairs to sit on or blankets to lie down.

INTRO

The Soulskin/Sealskin story is derived from a northern myth that puts the origins of humans in the sea and supposes that before we were people, we were seals. One of these creatures comes ashore to ease the loneliness of a man, lives with him for seven years and mothers his child, but as her soul, extracted from its natural element, begins to wither, she is compelled to return to the sea. Parting from her son, Ooruk, is heartbreaking. The myth of losing one's pelt or of it being stolen speaks deeply to the more subtle position of so many women in being divested of their time, resources and creative energy in the service of psychic support of others. The world, like the man in the story, 'is lonely for comfort, and for the hips and breasts of women,' and that it is the work of women to 'stop running the milk train' and turn themselves towards home.

STEPS

1. Find a comfortable indoor or outdoor space where you can sit or lie in comfort - take care that you prepare a spot where you can listen (16 mins) or read the story in peace and undisturbed.

2. After sitting/lying comfortably, make sure that your body parts are relaxed (not crossing each other) and take 3 big breaths - inhale and exhale loudly. Use your nose to inhale and mouth to exhale. Make sure your thought process has quieted so you can be absorbed into the story for the coming moments.

3. Listen to the story! or Read the story!

4. Take some minutes to finish the process, again take 3 big breaths - use your nose to inhale and your mouth to exhale. Once you have thus completed the circle, you can go for your personal reflection.

REFLECTION

- what emotions did the story evoke in you?
- are there similarities between you and the main character? If yes, what?
- what was the most touching for you in the story?
- what questions would you ask yourself?

COMMENTS

The story was collected from the book: "Women who Run With the Wolves" by Clarissa Pincola Estés, if you want to read her analysis on the story it is worth getting the book.

The activity can be enriched with a drawing which is added to the story. Once the participant has listened to the story, he/she can create a drawing which represents his/her impressions, imprints, aca harvesting of the fairy tale.The drawing is not about being an item of beauty but more a processing of the exercise, to highlight and evaluate the essence for the listener.
The drawing can take another 20 minutes in time.The reflection questions can follow after.

Soulskin

During a time that once was, is now gone forever, and will come back again soon, there is day after day of white sky, white snow … and all the tiny specks in the distance are people or dogs or bears.

Here, nothing thrives for the asking. The winds blow hard so the people have come to wear their parkas and mamleks, boots, sideways on purpose now. Here, words freeze in the open air, and whole sentences must be broken from the speaker's lips and thawed at the fire so people can see what has been said. Here, the people live in the white and abundant hair of old Annuluk, the old grandmother, the old sorceress who is Earth herself. And it was in this land that there lived a man … a man so lonely that over the years, tears had carved great chasms into his cheeks.

He tried to smile and be happy. He hunted. He was trapped and he slept well. But he wished for human company. Sometimes out in the shallows in his kayak when a seal came near he remembered the old stories about how seals were once human, and the only reminder of that time was their eyes, which were capable of portraying those looks, those wise and wild and loving looks. And sometimes then he felt such a pang of loneliness that tears coursed down the well-used cracks in his face.

One night he hunted past dark but found nothing. As the moon rose in the sky and the ice floes glistened, he came to a great spotted rock in the sea, and it appeared to his keen eye that upon that old rock there was movement of the most graceful kind.

He paddled slow and deep to be closer, and there atop the mighty rock danced a small group of women, naked as the first day they lay upon their mothers' bellies. Well, he was a lonely man, with no human friends but in memory—and he stayed and watched. The women were like beings made of moon milk, and their skin shimmered with little silver dots like those on the salmon in springtime, and the women's feet and hands were long and graceful.

So beautiful were they that the man sat stunned in his boat, the water lapping, taking him closer and closer to the rock. He could hear the magnificent women laughing … at least they seemed to laugh, or was it the water laughing at the edge of the rock? The man was confused, for he was so dazzled. But somehow the loneliness that had weighed on his chest like a wet hide was lifted away, and almost without thinking, as though he was meant, he jumped up onto the rock and stole one of the sealskins laying there. He hid behind an outcropping and he pushed the sealskin into his qutnguq, parka.

Soon, one of the women called in a voice that was the most beautiful he'd ever heard… like the whales calling at dawn… or no, maybe it was more like the newborn wolves tumbling down

in the spring... or but, well no, it was something better than that, but it did not matter because ... what were the women doing now?

Why, they were putting on their sealskins, and one by one the seal women were slipping into the sea, yelping and crying happily. Except for one. The tallest of them searched high and searched low for her sealskin, but it was nowhere to be found. The man felt emboldened—by what, he did not know. He stepped from the rock, appealing to her, "Woman... be... my... wife. I am... a lonely... man."

"Oh, I cannot be wife," she said, "for I am of the other, the ones who live temeqvanek, beneath."

"Be ... my ... wife," insisted the man. "In seven summers, I will return your sealskin to you, and you may stay or you may go as you wish."

The young seal woman looked long into his face with eyes that but for her true origins seemed human. Reluctantly she said, "I will go with you. After seven summers, it shall be decided."

So in time they had a child, whom they named Ooruk. And the child was lithe and fat. In winter the mother told Ooruk tales of the creatures that lived beneath the sea while the father whittled a bear or a wolf in whitestone with his long knife. When his mother carried the child Ooruk to bed, she pointed out through the smoke hole to the clouds and all their shapes. Except instead of recounting the shapes of raven and bear and wolf, she recounted the stories of walrus, whale, seal, and salmon .. for those were the creatures she knew.

Sometimes out in the shallows in his kayak when a seal came near he remembered the old stories about how seals were once human, and the only reminder of that time was their eyes, which were capable of portraying those looks, those wise and wild and loving looks. And sometimes then he felt such a pang of loneliness that tears coursed down the well-used cracks in his face.

But as time went on, her flesh began to dry out. First it flaked, then it cracked. The skin of her eyelids began to peel. The hairs of her head began to drop to thie ground. She became naluaq, palest white. Her plumpness began to wither. She tried to conceal her limp. Each day her eyes, without her willing it so, became more dull. She began to put out her hand in order to find her way, for her sight was darkening.

And so it went until one night when the child Ooruk was awakened by shouting and sat upright in his sleeping skins. He heard a roar like a bear that was his father berating his mother. He heard a crying like silver rung on a stone that was his mother.

"You hid my sealskin seven long years ago, and now the eighth winter comes. I want what I am made of returned to me," cried the seal woman.

"And you, woman, would leave me if I gave it to you," boomed the husband.

"I do not know what I would do. I only know I must have what I belong to."

"And you would leave me wifeless, and

the boy motherless. You are bad."

And with that her husband tore the hide flap of the door aside and disappeared into the night.

The boy loved his mother very much. He feared losing her and so cried himself to sleep … only to be awakened by the wind. A strange wind… it seemed to call to him, "Oooruk, Oooruuuuk."

And out of bed he climbed, so hastily that he put his parka on upside down and pulled his mukluks only halfway up. Hearing his name called over and over, he dashed out into the starry, starry night.

"Ooooooomuuuk."

The child ran out to the cliff overlooking the water, and there, far out in the windy sea, was a huge shaggy silver seal… its head was enormous, its whiskers dropped to its chest, its eyes were deep yellow.

"Ooooooomuuuk."

The boy scrambled down the cliff and stumbled at the bottom over a stone—no, a bundle—that had rolled out of a cleft in the rock. The boy's hair lashed at his face like a thousand reins of ice.

"Ooooooruuuuk."

The boy scratched open the bundle and shook it out—it was his mother's sealskin. Oh, and he could smell her all through it. And as he hugged the sealskin to his face and inhaled her scent, her soul slammed through him like a sudden summer wind.

"Ohhh," he cried with pain and joy, and lifted the skin again to his face and again her soul passed through his. "Ohhh," he cried again, for he was being filled with the unending love of his mother.

And the old silver seal went out … sank slowly beneath the water.

The boy climbed the cliff and ran toward home with the sealskin flying behind him, and into the house he fell. His mother swept him and the skin up and closed her eyes in gratitude for the safety of both.

She pulled on her sealskin. "Oh, mother, no!" cried the child.

She turned to him with a look of dreadful love in her eyes. She took the boy 's face in her hands, and breathed her sweet breath into his lungs, once, twice, three times. Then, with him under her arm like a precious bundle, she dove into the sea, down, and down, and down, and still deeper down, and the seal woman and her child breathed easily underwater.

She scooped up the child, tucked him under her arm, and half ran and half stumbled toward the roaring sea.

"Oh, mother! No! Don't leave me!" Ooruk cried.

And at once you could tell she wanted to stay with her child, she wanted to, but something called her, something

older than she, older than he, older than time.

"Oh, mother, no, no, no," cried the child. She turned to him with a look of dreadful love in her eyes. She took the boy 's face in her hands, and breathed her sweet breath into his lungs, once, twice, three times. Then, with him under her arm like a precious bundle, she dove into the sea, down, and down, and down, and still deeper down, and the seal woman and her child breathed easily underwater.

And they swam deep and strong till they entered the underwater cove of seals where all manner of creatures were dining and singing, dancing and speaking, and the great silver seal that had called to Ooruk from the night sea embraced the child and called him grandson.

"How fare you up there, daughter?" asked the great silver seal.

The seal woman looked away and said, "I hurt a human ... a man who gave his all to have me. But I cannot return to him, for I shall be a prisoner if I do."

"And the boy?' asked the old seal. "My grandchild?' He said it so proudly his voice shook.

"He must go back, father. He cannot stay. His time is not yet to be here with us." And she wept. And together they wept.

And so some days and nights passed, seven to be exact, during which time the luster came back to the seal woman's hair and eyes. She turned a beautiful dark color, her sight was restored, her body regained its plumpness, and she swam uncrippled. Yet it came time to return the boy to land. On that night, the old grandfather seal and the boy's beautiful mother swam with the child between them. Back they went, back up and up and up to the topside world. There they gently placed Ooruk on the stony shore in the moonlight.

His mother assured him, "I am always with you. Only touch what I have touched, my firesticks, my ulu, knife, my stone carvings of otters and seal, and I will breadle into your lungs a wind for the singing of your songs."

The old silver seal and his daughter kissed the child many times; At last they tore themselves away and swam out to sea, and with one last look at the boy, they disappeared beneath the waters. And Ooruk, because it was not his time, stayed.

As time went on, he grew to be a mighty drummer and singer and a maker of stories, and it was said this all came to be because as a child he had survived being carried out to sea by the great seal spirits. Now, in the gray mists of morning, sometimes he can still be seen, with his kayak tethered, kneeling upon a certain rock in the sea, seeming to speak to a certain female seal who often comes near the shore. Though many have tried to hunt her, time after time they have failed. She is known as Tanqigcaq, the bright one, the holy one, and it is said that though she is a seal, her eyes are capable of portraying those human looks, those wise and wild and loving looks.