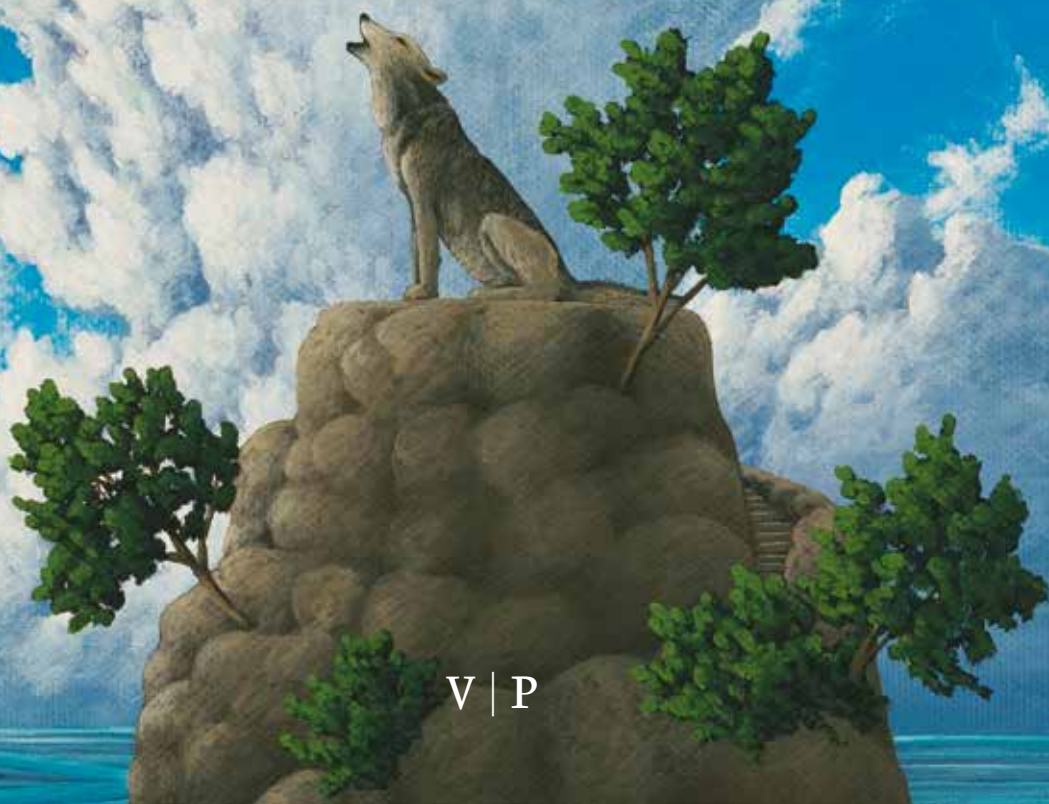


The Labyrinth of the Soul

George Fargo



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The cave that you fear to enter
holds the treasure that you seek.

– Joseph Campbell –

Preface

The word “life” is as short as life itself. During our short existence on earth, we must try to make the best of things. We are all on the same path, all in search of happiness, courage, authenticity and success. Many people say they are searching for their purpose in life or their authentic selves, while others say they have lost their passion, enthusiasm or inspiration. The search is different for every individual because everyone has to walk in their own shoes. And in the course of this search, we all struggle. This comes as no surprise when we see how poorly people often treat one another, or when we look at the often saddening world news. Everyone has to deal with personal setbacks, such as illness, divorce or the loss of work or jobs. From one moment to the next, what is certain can become uncertain, what seems good can turn for the worse.

No path is a straight line. Some encounters with our fellow humans are a blessing, while others are nothing short of toxic and challenging. We are searching for the meaning of life, but isn't the answer to this simply our existence? Sometimes I think the “philosopher” from my local pub put it best when he said, ‘Life may not have a lot of meaning, but I don't need a lot of means to live a happy life.’ In short, life is not always easy, but it is also not always bad. The simple things in life can bring everyone just as much joy as money, achievements and success.

Narration

This is also true of the main character of *The Labyrinth of the Soul*, Jason Leonard. Although his daily life is characterized by material wealth and social privilege, he still feels unfulfilled. He embarks on a personal quest in the form of a sailing excursion that suddenly takes an unexpected turn. Unforeseen circumstances force him to face hard truths about himself and his life. While the mythical figures he encounters along the way support him, he must make a series of tough decisions that determine his future while accepting the consequences of his past.

Jason's story has as its backdrop the challenges and struggles stemming from his competing roles as a family man and successful-but-burned out businessman. While life requires him to act as the master of his own fate, he is nonetheless beholden to his wife, children and other social and work contacts. Each decision demands compromises between his self-interest and personal growth and the impact on his family life and social environment. This means that Jason Leonard ultimately must learn to rely on his own competencies in such a way that he remains master over each. That this is not easy is shown by the many challenges he encounters in the labyrinth.

The world of Jason Leonard is not a world of right or wrong, but a world in which decisions have to be made. It is up to him to gain insight from the consequences of his choices and, based on this, to determine his direction for the future. Self-determination holds a central place in *The Labyrinth of the Soul*. Two thousand years ago, the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius wrote that life is the sum of a man's thoughts. By monitoring his or her thoughts, everyone has the power to influence his or her

own destiny. The soul of man is not determined by poverty or wealth. Poverty does not diminish the soul, just as wealth does not increase it.

Personal search

The Labyrinth of the Soul is the result of a personal quest. A few years ago I suddenly found myself in intensive care in a hospital abroad. One moment I was fine and then the next, seriously ill. For a few days it was uncertain how my situation would develop. My life was reduced to a basic existence. I was not allowed to eat or to ingest even a drop of water.

For weeks I lay alone in a room and had a lot of time to reflect on my life. Just before my admission I had begun to write this narrative, but there, in that loneliness, I noticed and felt I still had a long way to go. I was not yet ready for the book. Or maybe the book was not ready for me. I realized I must first descend even deeper into my own soul's turmoil. In the end, it took more than eight years before I felt that this book was "finished", not only for me as the author but also for my readers.

The experiences, life lessons and ideas in *The Labyrinth of the Soul* are thus the result of a lifetime of reading, listening, working and searching. An important source of inspiration has been the many hundreds of coaching conversations I have had about life's great questions with a diverse range of people. It wasn't until I was about fifty that I started coaching managers and professionals.

Where previously I was skeptical about the value of such interactions, now I had advanced more than 20 years in my career as a consultant, had matured, and had a clearer picture of the contribution I could make to my clients.

By addressing the core of my clients' challenges and then letting them discover for themselves where their personal growth lies ultimately became the most satisfying activity of my working life.

Treasure

The Labyrinth of the Soul is indebted to so many wonderful books and writers that mentioning them here would be impossible and, in fact, some of them I have forgotten despite their influence. Those who read, speak and listen a lot, unconsciously store a lot. Stories and images become anchored in our memory. We are continually pushed to the recesses of our memory by the daily bombardment of information we must process on a daily basis in this digitized era.

That is why I have tried to write *The Labyrinth of the Soul* as freely as possible, to fill its pages with content mined from my soul. At times it has occurred to me during its composition that I might have been inspired by this or that; at other times I was transported to a past coaching conversation; a week later I'd think of a book, film or even a graphic novel or comic books.

In any case, I have always been something of a "culture vulture" and more specifically, as regards the works of certain authors and artists past and present. In doing so, we stand on the shoulders of giants. Books like *Robinson Crusoe*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Odyssey*; authors like Edgar Allen Poe and Voltaire have no doubt been sources of inspiration for this narrative. My love of nonfiction is also reflected in the story as well. For example, Joseph Campbell's work *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, in which he analyzes myths and sagas from antiquity, has been a frame of reference which I have used gratefully.

However, I have tried to deviate from his structure to make my story as playful, accessible and personal as possible. In that respect, I am perhaps as stubborn as my main character Jason Leonard.

My background as an author, but certainly also my daily work as a coach, supervisor and advisor, has led me to use authors from various walks of life as a source of inspiration. Management authors such as Tom Peters, Peter Drucker and Simon Sinek have also inspired me, as have popular spiritual authors such as Paulo Coelho, Isabel Allende and James Redfield.



Quest

Writing *The Labyrinth of the Soul* has been a journey through my bookshelves, memory and creativity. I don't want to distract my readers from what I want to be an enjoyable reading experience with footnotes or a barrage of literary references. This is not a scientific study but a story designed to inspire and enlighten, a piece to be read and reread.

The inclination to come up with a handbook of tips and tricks was great, but my experience is that people are rarely touched by roadmaps, methods, techniques and formulas. Wisdom comes to people not by the size of their bookshelves or the thickness of the books contained in them, but by the pages they actually read. What I certainly did not want was for this to become a pedantic book that imposes a "this is how we do it" approach to its readers. The book stands on its own and it is up to the reader to read it, interpret it and make use of it.

Footprint

Everyone will probably recognize in their own life's journey something in the challenges Jason Leonard has to overcome. Life isn't always a bed of roses and is often complicated by competing challenges that seem bigger than the person living through them. This book is therefore mainly about personal integrity, about carrying yourself through the most difficult circumstances under harsh conditions. How does one do this while staying true to one's self?

At the same time, this should never take place at the expense of others. How can you grow and become happy by making decisions for yourself and at the same time ensuring that the people around you benefit from this and become happier as well? *The Labyrinth of the Soul* wants to support you as a reader in realizing this dream, and to give you the power to leave a footprint that you can be proud of. This book is dedicated to all life artists in the world, to all people who want and dare to get the most out of life. I wish my readers a safe, fulfilling and happy life journey.

May I now invite you to enter the labyrinth with me?

The author