

TAROT DREAM INCUBATION

Dream incubation is the process of using an image or idea before going to sleep, and see if the image or idea appears in your dreams. It is best to have a journal, pen and flashlight or tape recorder handy so that you can write or record the results down immediately upon waking. As a writer, seer, and ritualist, dream incubation is an inspirational tool, and the Tarot can be a valuable part of the process.

You can choose any Tarot card that you want to work with, or pick a card randomly from the oracle. For this exercise, I picked a card at random from the deck – not one I would have chosen – the Eight of Swords. I meditated on the card before I went to sleep and slipped it under my pillow. (I have made a special packet for my miniature Tarot cards by punching two holes in a luggage tag with a cellophane front. I can wear it as a necklace of sleep with it under my pillow and keep the card from being damaged.)

This is the story the oracle sent me, which I continued to develop after waking the next morning:

I was sent back in time, and found myself soaking wet, standing in water, bound and blindfolded. My mind was blank, I didn't remember who I was or what was happening. The water was actually warm and soothing as it lapped around my scantily shod feet. I wiggled out of my bonds – a long piece of white cloth wrapped around me, and pulled off another piece of white cloth that was my blindfold. I noted that I was surrounded by two columns of magnificent swords, eight altogether. Turning around and looking beyond them, I realized I was just off the shore of a strange little island. Above me, I could see a castle and church, and a woodland path leading upward through the rocks. Below me was a stone path that led through the waters from the mainland to the island. The tide, at the moment, was receding and the path was emerging. I took off my green slippers and felt the warm smooth stones with my feet.

Then my memory came flooding back, I had been bound and blindfolded and brought here, surrounded by the Eight Swords of the Order of Saint Michael. If I survived the night, and freed myself when the waters had loosened the bonds, I would have passed another test of my arduous initiation.

I thought back over the most difficult days of my life, commencing with my supplication to join the ancient Order of Saint Michael, which has been dedicated to guarding the portals of the spiritual realms. I had brought the sword of my father, bequeathed to me upon his recent death, wrapped in a wooden box filled with strange dried herbs and flowers. The crossbar had gems embedded – rubies and emeralds on one side, sapphire and topaz on the other. There was a note inside, addressed to me. It simply read: *Return me to the Mount*. I knew at once the mount he referred to, the most significant mount in Cornwall – Saint Michael's Mount at the southwestern tip.

The first test of initiation had been to wait for the receding of the tide and cross the pilgrim's path barefoot to the island in the middle of Mount's Bay. This was easily accomplished, and I noted the warm soothing stones under my feet, giving me a sense of energy. Upon arrival, I presented my father's sword, and it was taken from me. I was asked to do vigil, blindfolded on the shore that night, and contemplate my request to join the order. As a test, I was given two swords to hold, one was my father's, who had himself been a knight in the Order of Saint Michael, and one was another identical to my father's. By morning, I would be required to identify which one had belonged to him.

I held the swords tight, over my shoulders through the night. By morning, I knew. The one in my right hand felt familiar, the other did not, even though they were identical. When the officers came to relieve me, they asked me, "Have you chosen?"

I handed them my father's sword and said, "This was my father's. He bequeathed it to me."

"You have chosen well. Keep it with you always. But you must still earn it for it to be truly yours."

The next ordeal was The Interview with the chaplain of the Order of Saint Michael. He wore a strange pendant over his tabard – a large red heart pierced by three swords. He asked me to review my life, and

release my emotions – the death of my father and loss of my childhood. I cried a torrent of tears, but in the end, I felt great relief. I felt ready to put the past behind me and to move forward with my life. That night I was required to do vigil in the Knight's Chapel, by the stone form of the founder of the Order Saint Michael. I noted the sword along his sarcophagus and the three swords mounted on the wall. Then I noted the remarkable stained glass window with the image of Christ blessing a supplicant, and the word PAX – peace - above his head. I truly began to feel a sense of that peace within my heart.

The next day I met some of the other candidates being tested to join the order. I realized that I was not the only one, and that my success was not guaranteed. Humbled by that fact I joined the others, and we decided to engage in friendly combat, mainly to get some exercise, sword practice, and release our tensions. Things got more vigorous, and we became more combative. What began in friendliness soon became aggressive. In the end I won out, collecting all their swords, and watched gleefully as they retreated, beaten and disappointed. Suddenly, I didn't feel so good about myself.

I went back to talk to the chaplain, and he shook his head sadly. He told me that it was a test of humility, and I did not do well. I showed off my superior warriors skills, but showed little compassion for my fellow candidates. Consequently, I had made enemies in an order where I would need friends and allies.

"How can I make amends?" I asked, fearing that I had failed and disqualified myself, shaming my family and lineage.

"Through service to those less fortunate than yourself." He answered. He explained that the mount was, among other things, a healing sanctuary, and there were many who were not able to travel the stone passage to the isle. Boats were provided for them. That day, I was a humble ferryman, bringing pilgrims to and fro from the isle to the mainland. The candidates I had vanquished watched me from the shore, pointing and laughing at me. I grinned back at them and saluted. Suddenly the hostility between us vanished and there were no hard feelings. As the day wore on, I heard the stories of the pilgrims – the hard luck, losses, illnesses, and injuries. I began to forget my own troubles as I learned of theirs, and wished I could do more to help them. But it was enough that I eased their passage to sanctuary, and they were grateful.

The next day I woke to find myself on the beach again, and there were colorful tents pitched, and music playing. There was a festival on the mount! I noted my comrades in the distance practicing their skills with staves, leaving their swords unattended. The officers had told me to always keep my sword with me, yet my comrades had abandoned theirs for the sake of play. A mischievous spirit overtook me as I gathered up all the swords I could carry, leaving only two behind. I hid them behind a rock on the shore, and sat on the rock, waiting for their discovery. Soon enough, hot and sweaty, they returned to the area and stared in dismay. Shouting "THIEVES!" they began running around in circles until one of them pointed at me, "THERE SHE IS!" as I sat roaring with laughter on the rock. Grabbing the two remaining swords they charged me, but I rolled down the other side of the rock, still laughing. They were so relieved to find their weapons unharmed, that they roared with laughter themselves as we engaged in horseplay. Then we visited the tents of the festival, testing our skills at the games booths, drinking flagons of ale and mead, and examining some of the fine wares offered. I bought a new red gown, and a new pair of green slippers, as my others had been ruined by the waters.

I'm glad we had a day of frivolity, for the initiation turned arduous. On this day, I found myself soaked after a night of standing in the waters of Mount's Bay. The night was cold, and I was shivering, but I realized that I had survived. From the eight identical swords, I was automatically drawn to the one that had been my fathers. Seven officers came down the path and pulled their own swords, escorting me back to the land, with a chorus of "Well Done!". But the worst was yet to come.

That night I was tormented by the demons of self doubt. It was a vigil of a different sort – demons of all my past mistakes. Was I worthy? Would I disappoint the spirit of my father? Did I take advantage of my comrades in moments of egotistical weakness? I felt the pricks of swords all night, reminding me of my errors in judgment. Had I already failed?

By the next night, I had spent the day feeling exhausted and ill. I no longer felt young as I looked back on my life. I was depressed and looked at a bleak future, leaving the mount in shame, disappointing my family, not living up to expectations, especially my own. I felt numb, dead. I felt the pricks of swords all along my spine, my new red gown had become my shroud. I finally realized, life as I knew it, was over. Yet as I lay on the shore, facing the mainland on that dark night, I knew the sun would rise, and so would I. I knew that I had to face the future, no matter what it brought. If it brought failure, I would have to face it and take what lessons I could and create a new future. I knew I could not give up on myself.

Once I realized that, I started to come alive again, I accepted responsibility for what I had done wrong, learned from it, and was determined to face the judgment of the day, and if need be, start on a new path, older but wiser. At that moment, the sun rose. I saw lying beside me, my father's sword. I picked it up. The sun was shining on the path leading up to the apex of the mount. I had been there many times before, in vigil, talking to the chaplain, but today, it was a shining monument, rainbow colors reflecting the sun. I took the path to the top, and found the courtyard full of people. When I appeared, they turned to see me and cheered!

My companions were there, too, with their own swords. "We passed, we passed!" they exclaimed in jubilation, pounding me on the back or hugging me. The chaplain gathered us in a ceremony of blessing and anointed us as Pages in the Order of Saint Michael.

We were all assigned to seasoned knights who would give us further training. Mine, a handsome young man, told me that he had been trained by my own father, and he had asked especially for me. I looked at him more closely and realized that he had been one of the strangers that had attended my father's funeral.

I was presented to the Chiefs of the Order, both crowned as if they were a king and queen. The queen took off her crown and held it out, above me. My knight advised me, "Put your sword through the crown." I did so, and he whispered the oath for me to repeat:

*By Sword of Light
And Holy Crown
I pledge my Might
And my Renown*

*I devote my life
To serve Saint Michael
In peace and strife
Throughout the Cycle*

*We guard the portals
Between the Worlds
Safeguarding mortals
From being thirled¹*

*With my companions
Of Saint Michael's Order
I sing the Paeon
And guard the Border*

The King then took the sword from me. He held it as the queen opened a small ceramic pot, and poured a bit of oil into her handkerchief. Carefully, she oiled the blade of the sword until it gleamed in the sunlight. Then the King handed it back to me, "Your father's sword now belongs to you, Page. Use it wisely."

¹ Thirl: bound/pierced, <http://heritage.caledonianmercury.com/2010/05/02/useful-scots-word-thirled/00630>

I learned from my knight that the Kings and Queens were chosen among the knights, and the roles were rotated after several years of service, so that no one held ultimate authority, but each got a chance to serve in that role in their own unique way.

My journey with the Order of Saint Michael had just begun.

What I learned from this incubated dream was that the suit of swords is an initiatory journey. It can be used for any initiatory scheme, I chose Saint Michael because I have been to St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall twice and journeyed across the cobbled pilgrim's path in low tide. On Father's Day this year (2011), I visited the priest, and he blessed my Saint Michael's medal. It has left an indelible impression on me, I often dream about it. It was amazing to incorporate the Suit of Swords into my memories of Cornwall and come up with an initiatory dream.

Bibliography

The idea for this article came from the *Grey School of Magic's* excellent *Tarot Storytelling 202* course by Rainbow Stonetalker. Website: <http://www.greyschool.com/>

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