



Your Personal Hero Quest

HOW TO SOLVE THE DOING VS. BEING PARADOX AND LIVE MORE IN FLOW

BY ERIK SEAN LARSON

About 4,000 years ago, young Sumerians dutifully copied wedge-shaped symbols that had been pressed into clay tablets with a reed stylus. The tablets they copied recorded a poem about King Gilgamesh, a tyrant who ruled Uruk in what is now Iraq. The poem is about the king's quests for immortality through great deeds, but it's ultimately about transformation: a man who finally conquered his own inner fear of not being good enough and gained the strength to be. The "Tyrant King" grew to be called "The King Who Saw the Deep."



ART BY ANDREA D'AQUINO

Even 4,000 years ago the poem was ancient. Something about the Epic of Gilgamesh had kept the poem alive around cooking fires for a thousand years before it was first pressed into clay. Then, as Andrew George noted in his excellent modern translation, it became a common practice for Sumerian and Akkadian schoolchildren to press this epic story into their own minds as they practiced cuneiform. It was the unearthing of these ancient homework assignments in 1853 that allowed new generations to rediscover this ancient quest for wisdom, compassion, and kindness.

Nowadays, the Epic of Gilgamesh is known as the first recorded Hero Quest. Like Dante's *Divine Comedy* and *Star Wars*, these timeless quests are ultimately as much about confronting our own ego shadow as they are about slaying monsters. That's not to say we ever get rid of our shadow—or should even try. As Carl Jung famously wrote, "How can I be substantial if I do not cast a shadow? I must have a dark side also if I am to be whole." Instead, these great tales remind us that, like Gilgamesh, each of us must befriend our own version of the fear that we are not good enough and become more fully alive.

"The great paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change," wrote psychologist Carl Rogers.

In other words, to allow oneself to *be* is to get unstuck and feel the flow. Our consciousness expands and we can do more—if that is what we choose. Indeed, because of its simple power, the Hero Quest path has become the central tool I use in my work as a therapist and coach to help guide others toward more joyful and creative life paths.

I encourage you to honor your own Hero Quest by exploring this simplified version of what is typically a weekend workshop. The main point here is not to try to slay monsters "out there" but rather to take the time to sit with the chattering voice of your ego shadow. And when you are feeling those old fears, talk them down with your heroic inner voice, which states, "I am free to *be* and *create* as I am." And then simply notice whether you have cut the edge off an old irrational fear—or maybe even slayed one of those old inner monsters that have held back your joy and creativity and compassion.

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YOUR HERO'S QUEST MAP

On all great Hero Quests, the most important moment comes not when the hero slays the monster, but rather when the hero honors his or her strengths, virtues, and fears. This map was designed to unleash your hero mind and to honor your personal quest to create a more joyful and unbridled future for yourself and others. And, like all great Hero Quests, it follows a basic path:



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1. WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Joy has many facets, and each can be a marker for living in flow. Highlight your most potent Facet of Joy, which you will rely on in your quest.

In the past week or so, I experienced the following facets of joy:	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALMOST CONSTANT 5
PLEASURE: Experiencing any of the 5 bodily senses: taste, touch, sound, vision, aroma					
RELIEF: Reduced fear or stress over pain or potential suffering					
EXCITEMENT: Doing something new or challenging					
EXULTATION: Accomplishing a difficult or daring task					
AMUSEMENT: From a giggle to a belly laugh					
CONTENTMENT: A calm, kind of inner satisfaction					
BLISS: Not thinking about my worries, my lists, my shoulds/should not's					
ELEVATION: Witnessing or doing an act of kindness, play, creativity, or compassion					
RADIANT HONORING: Celebrating another's journey or success or being					
UNHEALTHY JUBILATION OR SCHADENFREUDE: Relishing in other's suffering or laughing at their expense					
GRATITUDE: Appreciation of a selfless act or circumstance from which I benefit					
REJOICING: Honoring and being deeply moved by another's happiness or experience					
ENCHANTMENT: A lightness and celebratory kind of contentment					
SPIRITUAL RADIANCE: A serene joy born from deep well-being, giving to others and compassion					

Adapted from research of Paul Ekman, Matthieu Ricard, and *The Book of Joy* by the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Abrams

Circle your least potent Facet of Joy, the lack of which brings a wince or triggers regret. You'll need to strengthen this one on your quest.

Elevated Joy Facet to Maintain
(e.g., Radiant honoring or exultation)

Low Joy Facet to Strengthen
(Bliss or enchantment)

2. ACCEPT THE CALL TO EXPLORE AND CREATE

Because this quest is internal, the call is from where you are right now. Choose a personal, relationship, or work goal—or all three.

Personal Goal (Move beyond old self limitations) Obstacle/Monster (Listening to naysayers) One Word Why (EMPOWERED)

Relationship Goal (Increase fun & Joy) Obstacle/Monster (Getting pulled into old arguments) One Word Why (JOY or LOVE or FUN)

Work Goal (Go for the promotion) Obstacle/Monster (Self-doubt) One Word Why (ADVENTUROUS)

(A "One Word Why" is what it will feel like when you achieve your goal.)

3. GATHER YOUR HELPERS

Who is helping you or will help you on your quest? How will you enlist their aid?

Who _____ How _____

Who _____ How _____

Who _____ How _____

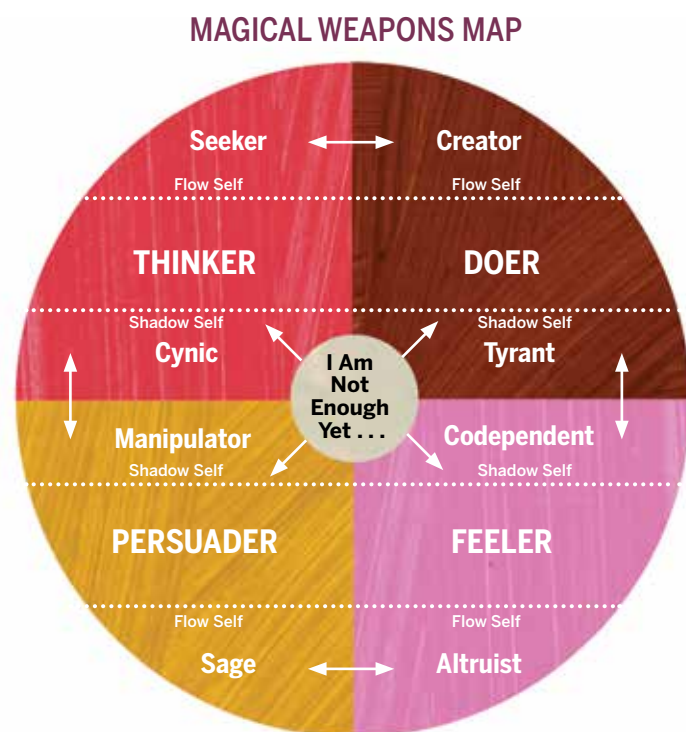
4. ASSESS YOUR MAGICAL WEAPONS

A “weapon” is a tool for winning something, and early on we arm our egos with a special set of tools to win in the quest of life. These sets of “weapons” fall into four broad ego behavioral trait categories that we can call Thinkers, Doers, Feelers, and Persuaders. Our choice is not conscious and yet it determines both how we approach a quest and what we hope to gain from it.

- Thinkers** win when they figure out the answer/truth
- Doers** win when the list is done perfectly
- Feelers** win when love is accepted and returned
- Persuaders** win when opinions/ideas are heard and accepted

We tend to become specialists with a particular set of “weapons” to keep us safe and successful. The problem is that we tend to overuse the set, and so we get lazy—which is another way of saying we tend to get stuck in our shadow mind, which keeps us from developing the other tools that would help us become more present and more fully alive.

One payoff of the Hero Quest is to move our preferred “weapon” type from the shadow mind to the flow mind (e.g., for Doers the Quest payoff is limiting Tyrant actions and opening up Creator actions). In doing so, we open up our ability to use the other tools as well (e.g., the Doer adds some Feeler skills, like empathy). In this way we open up our Whole Mind Living, which is another way of saying we become more present.



QUEST MAGICAL WEAPONS MAP USAGE EXAMPLE



Reflect on what you are currently trying to ‘win’ in life and the primary ego behavior traits you are using to do so. Then chart out your current approach on the Magical Weapons Map by marking a point in each quadrant to get a visual of your quest tendencies. Contemplate:

The strengths you gain from your Magical Weapons Usage

(e.g., Thinkers may be problem solvers; Doers may work hard)

The core values that guide your strengths

(Doers may value grit; Feelers may value love)

The payoff and positive benefits of your strengths

(Persuaders may build consensus; Feelers may have fun)

MY MAGICAL WEAPONS TOP 2 STRENGTHS

(Feeler: love-em up OR Thinker: find the answer)

- _____
- _____

Now note any weaknesses that have been revealed from your points on the Magical Weapons Map. (These typically point toward stuff in your shadow.) Contemplate:

Weaknesses or detracting behaviors from your Magical Weapons usage

(Feelers may not say NO OR Persuaders may not really listen to others)

The fearful or worrying thoughts that trigger your detracting behaviors

(Hate conflict, believe I can't do it, fear of making a mistake)

The costs and negative aspects of your shadow self behaviors

(Relationship troubles, health effects, heavier burden, inaction)

MY MAGICAL WEAPONS TOP 2 WEAKNESSES

(Persuader: talking vs listening OR Doer: burn out self & others)

- _____
- _____

5. VISIT THE ORACLE

Once you have recognized the strengths and weaknesses of your magical weapons, it's time to visit the Oracle for two sparks of real magic.

First the Oracle bestows the gift of naming your shadow. Choosing a name acknowledges that your shadow exists, that it will never go away—and that it is not supposed to. Think of your shadow as your Ego Trickster. Being present means that you are alert to your shadow and ready for whatever tricks it will throw your way. The gift is to identify the core belief/fear that animates your weakness and detracting behaviors.

EGO TRICKSTER

Common Core Shadow Fears/Beliefs

1. Fear of not being good enough
2. Fear of not being lovable or loving
3. Fear of not being controlled
4. Fear of being out of control

Contemplate the root of your fears that feels like the source and write it down. It may help to give your shadow the name of a character in a book or movie who best represents your own shadow. That way, you can literally greet her/him by name.

Second, the Oracle confers the Gift of Insight in the form of a special kind of mantra or affirmation that is actually a new aspirational core belief—a “mind hack” that increases your probability for both deeper success and joy.

The Gift of Insight comes from contemplating your steps thus far: Where you are? What is your quest? Who is with you? What are the strengths of your magical weapons? With all that in mind, choose the magical words that will transform your quest. Critical here is that your Gift of Insight combines both Being and Doing—and could be as simple as “I am Content + Creating.” The goal of a new aspirational belief is to reduce the fear that has blocked your compassion for yourself and others—and thus blocks your flow.

BEING Words

Free to be blissful
Content
Empowered
Rock star
Loving
Playful
ME
Joyful
Potential

DOING Words

Creating
Exalted
Exploring
Teaching
Learning
Loving
Problem-solving
Seeking
Giving

Each of us must befriend our own version of the fear that we are not good enough and become more fully alive.

THE ORACLE REVEALS ...

MY CORE SHADOW FEAR/BELIEF IS:

(e.g., Fear of not being good enough)

MY EGO TRICKSTER'S NAME IS:

MY GIFT OF INSIGHT IS:

I AM

+

(I am Content + Creating)
BEING + DOING





“I am free to *be* and *create* as I am.”

6. YOUR 3 GREAT DEEDS

Now that you have enlisted support and are armed and ready with your Gift of Insight, it is time for the real adventures to begin! Use your Gift of Insight like a mantra to increase flow in your creativity, connection and compassion.

GREAT DEED #1 EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

Your Current State of Creativity
STUCKNESS 1 2 3 4 5 CREATIVITY

Current creative stuckness looks like
(e.g., Fear of taking risk, putting out fires, lack of discipline)

What new creative openness looks like with Gift of Insight
(Start small, overcome negativity, being honest with fears)

Core trait **DOING** priorities to make it happen:
(Be more assertive, schedule creative time)

- 1 _____
- 2 _____

GREAT DEED #2 BEING COURAGEOUSLY VULNERABLE

Your Current State of Connection
ISOLATION 1 2 3 4 5 CONNECTION

What disconnection currently looks like & costs
(Same old arguments, missing special events, not present)

What new deeper connection looks like & its rewards with Gift of Insight
(Being present, breathing, smiling, sharing time)

Core value **BEING** priorities to make it happen:
(Courage, play, acceptance)

- 1 _____
- 2 _____

GREAT DEED #3 THE POWER OF PRESENCE

Your Current State of Presence
UNFORGIVING 1 2 3 4 5 COMPASSION

Others who need my compassion and presence now with Gift of Insight
(Spouse, children, brother, partner, coworker)

Others who need my tough love and presence now with Gift of Insight
(Spouse, children, brother, partner, coworker)

New forgiveness I want to offer myself and/or another with Gift of Insight
(Myself for past fears of failure; parent for past unavailability or addiction)

7. THE RETURN HOME

Celebrate your new creativity, connections, and presence at your triumphant return.

True love & gratitude looks like
(Being honest, present & saying thank you)

Villagers celebrating looks like
(Unplugged at home, fun, speaking truth to power)

8. WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Congratulations! You have now completed a quest cycle. The best guide for knowing where you are now—and for anchoring where you’re going next—is in reference to your journey thus far.

Old hero name (Super Anxious Analyzer)

New hero name (Captain Creative)

New theme song (Free Your Mind, En Vogue)

New talisman & Image (Angry Birds figure & beach scene)

Renewed mindfulness habits (10 minute meditation each morning)