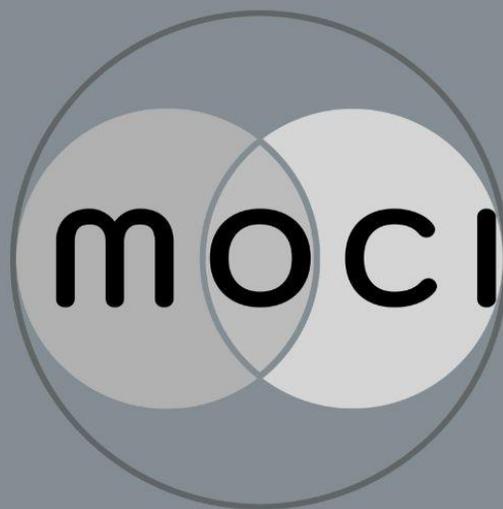


Journey to Sitara



By James Mahu | E2 : S2

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Journey to Sitara

E2 : S2

The journey was not easy for the visitor. She was on the back of a camel, approximately ten-feet above the desert floor, and with each step her camel took, she nearly lost her balance, especially as they went up a sand dune. It was early evening. Her hosts consisted of two women and one man who were escorting her to a place where their revered teacher lived, an elderly woman like herself.

They only traveled at night to stay comfortable. The desert would cool down between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m., to a chilly temperature, if there was no wind, and a surprisingly bone-chilling cold, if there was wind. Between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., it was not a good time to travel in the desert, not even for camels, let alone humans. It was only during the transition times, that the temperatures were comfortable.

"The times between 9 p.m. and midnight were their favorite times to travel, at least when the sky was clear of clouds. One could see remarkably well at night if the stars were out, especially if the moon was at least half full. And stars were navigational signs in the eyes of desert nomads.

The man stopped his camel and raised his arm at a 90-degree angle. "Do you hear that?"

The other two camels stopped and listened. There was a distant moaning, as if an animal was in pain.

"What do you think it is?" one of the women asked.

"It's a mountain lion," he offered. "Or, possibly a goat..."

"It would have to be a very large goat," she said in a lowered voice. There was a subtle chuckle hidden underneath her words.

"I'm guessing it's right over that dune," he pointed to his left. His camel knelt down and the man got off. He grabbed his rifle and started off to the crest of the sand dune he had just pointed to. "I'll go have a look."

The sky remained a beautiful violet-blue. The galaxies of stars were already pressing their faces to earth.

"I would like to go, too," the visitor said.

"It could be dangerous," her host replied. "Stay with us. Let's see what he finds, first. If it's a mountain lion, let's not give it options for attack. It won't attack camels, we're safe."

The visitor shuffled off the side of the camel with grace, landing almost silently in the soft sand. "I'm more curious than I am compliant. My apologies." the visitor walked off in the direction of the man. At this point, the other two women dismounted from their camels and followed the visitor. "Wait for us!"

The visitor slowed her pace, but continued forward in the direction of the man.

The moaning became noticeably louder, unnerving them more as they neared the crest of the sand dune. It was a mournful sound, and in the expanse of a desert with the infinite overhead, its mournfulness was amplified.

The man, when he reached the crest, signaled back to the women to approach. As they did, he pointed to a place at the lowest point between two sand dunes, a rock outcropping on one side where the dunes converged. There, on a hollowed out spot near the highest point of the outcropping was a mountain lion.

"It must be injured," the man said. "Seems like it's in a lot of pain."

"It's suffering from here," she pointed to her heart, "not pain of the body."

"Well, whatever it is, we should make a wide berth around this place. If that lion is suffering from malnutrition, it might see us as supper. Better to get back on our camels."

As they turned around, they noticed the visitor was no longer with them. "Where'd she go?" one of the women asked.

"She's there!" the man said, pointing to the visitor walking in the direction of the lion. "It's not safe," the man half-yelled and whispered. "If you want to stay alive, come back now! I'm really not good with this rifle...especially at night, at this angle, with a running, hungry mountain lion."

The visitor turned her head, but continued walking. "I'm more interested in learning than I am in walking away. And that," she pointed to the lion, "is my next lesson."

As the visitor got closer to the mountain lion she raised her arms out from her sides and her hands open to show their emptiness. The mountain lion repositioned itself, facing the visitor as she approached. The mournful sounds, quieted to silence.

The visitor came to a stop, and sat down on the sand, looking up at the lion. She spoke to it, addressing it as one would a friend. "Why are you moaning?"

"I want attention, I suppose," the lion said.

"For what purpose?" the visitor asked.

"I'm bored...I suppose."

"And why are you bored?"

"Because my mate is gone."

"And why is that?"

"He left me and I don't know if he was killed, or injured, or lost, or simply found a new mate. I don't know which of these it is, and it makes me miserable...and so I moan."

"For how long has your mate been missing?"

"I don't know. A long time."

"Do you feel you have completed your grief?"

"No. How can I? I have no definitive answer to my mate's disposition."

"Some things you have to leave in the mystery."

"Why?"

"We are all things, as much as we are one identity — in your case, a mountain lion in the desert."

"A hungry, lonely mountain lion," the lioness interjected.

The visitor smiled, remaining silent.

"I'm aware that I am more than a mountain lion. I know I am a part of Nature."

"Then you see how Nature adapts and moves on," the visitor said.

"Yes..."

"Then you have learned the lesson of grief. Why not try a new lesson?"

The lioness sighed, and then chortled her breath. "A new lesson, I am not a child."

"You are no different than me. You are not a child, adult, lioness, woman, you are not these things, and you know it. And I know it. So it is time to move on. To allow yourself to move through new experiences and expressions. It is in those things that you honor your life and those around you, including Nature. If you allow yourself to be stuck on one lesson, you simply elongate time within the boundaries of that lesson. It's a choice. It is always a choice."

"If I am not a mountain lion, then what exactly am I?" the lioness asked.

"You are we, just as we are you."

"Who is *we*?"

"Nature."

"So Nature is me and I am Nature...that's what you're saying?"

"You're both. The *I* part of you is *you*. The *we* part of you is *us*. And us is all. All is Nature. Nature is held within the unknowable, which is the only name that rightly defines it."

"But still, even if I agree with you, I am a lion without a mate, and the knowledge of what you just said...it doesn't change that reality...nor my mood."

The visitor started to say something and then stopped, and put up her index finger. "It isn't whether it changes your reality, it's whether *you* decide to change your reality. It's always your choice. All I'm doing is to remind you of that. Sometimes it's easier to move on if you look at life as learning for one and all, and not some bitter fate or punishing loss meted out to you, and you alone."

"Why? What difference does it make?"

The visitor paused for a brief moment, but kept her index finger raised, as if it were pointing to some celestial object, quite independent of her thoughts. "Because we embody, in whatever form we're in, to learn. And learning is always new, it is not a repetition. Repetition is mastery of a pattern. Learning is the art of evolving the scope of your reality, and this is different from mastery. Patterns engage the memory in the brain and body. Learning engages the imagination and intuition — the mind and heart — living through change as if they are one consciousness set within this reality of spacetime to learn and shine.

"If you place yourself in the cage of fate or punishment, then the scope of what you are, is held within that cage. It is this diminishment that causes you to struggle and lose hope. Is it not?"

"It is, perhaps, a part of it," the lioness answered. "What I feel is the loss of a partner that was half of me. And no amount of learning can erase that sense of emptiness...that hollowed out space I feel inside me."

"Then don't erase it. Honor it by moving on to the next lessons. You are here as you are, and Nature is in front of you as it is, and you can either turn away from it, in the memory of loss for you, or embrace it in the learning of evolution for the one, many and all consciousness. You cannot do both simultaneously. If you embrace it, it will embrace you."

"How?"

"It will lead you to the next lesson. It will slowly fill that empty space, new experience by new experience."

"And what if I don't want the next lesson?"

"Then you turn away."

"My choice?"

"Yes." The visitor nodded.

"You either live in the cage you have created or you move on to the next lesson. The newness that awaits you is there to fill that emptiness. All it needs is spacetime and our willingness to step forward, out of that emptiness and embrace Nature for all that it is, allowing its magic and mathematical precision to avail itself in our life."

"To basically give it permission?" the lioness said.

"Maybe not permission, but rather partnership."

"How can I be a partner to something that is All? How could my measly little life matter to the thing that is all? It doesn't make any sense?"

Whether her arm got tired or somehow the celestial object had disappeared, the visitor's arm came down in a sudden gesture, landing in her lap, clasping her other hand.

"The complexity of Nature is incomprehensible to our senses and intellect," she said. "Even our imagination and intuitive natures are unable to understand it. And we love to

project our capacities upon Nature, believing it is like us, when it is not. And yet, Nature co-dependes on all of us. This is its complexity and why it is infinite in every dimension.”

“And how does that answer my question?” the lioness asked.

The visitor stood to her feet. “I have already answered your question. You get to decide how I answered it.”

With that she turned and began to walk away.

“Wait...wait...wait.” The lioness stood to her feet. “Where are you going? You’re the first human who has ever spoken to me. I want you to stay.”

The visitor continued walking back to her hosts. The lioness climbed down the rock outcroppings and pounced to the desert sands and began running toward the visitor. The man pointed his gun at the charging mountain lion, and the visitor held up her arm. “Do not shoot!”

She then turned to face the lioness, who came to an abrupt stop, and began pacing back and forth, occasionally glancing at the visitor. “You arrive and then you leave me,” the lioness said. “Even after I told you that I had this emptiness within me. You are cruel to do this, do you not see?”

“I was your next lesson, and you were mine. I finished with my lesson, if you are not finished, that is your choice, but do not call me cruel for moving on. I wish you well. I have only good intentions for you. I consider you a newfound friend. How is any of that cruel?”

The lion continued pacing. “You have a friend who wields a gun pointing directly at me.”

The visitor turned to the man. “Please, I beg you, put the gun down, now.” Her voice, firm and resolute.

The man’s arm slowly descended, and his rifle with it.

The visitor turned to the lioness. “I do not control my friends, but you can see that I have listened to you.”

The lion stopped her pacing, and sat down on her hind legs. “Do you really want to know what is gnawing at me? The thing that is pointing the finger of judgment upon me with every breath I take?”

“What?” the visitor asked.

“That I had told my mate nothing of how I really felt.”

The visitor stayed quiet and sat down, facing the lion.

“I told him that I love him. I told him that he was the center of life. I told him that he was my dearest friend, but I never told him how I really felt. That I felt afraid of the emptiness that would result from his loss. That death and its process — either his or mine — had filled my life so vividly that I feared only that. It had become the sum of my fears, and when it actually happened, only then had I realized that I had not told him this.”

"Perhaps you attach too much significance to words," the visitor said quietly.

"Words?"

"He knows how you feel," the visitor said. "He feels it too. All life does in spacetime, because spacetime divides what we are, and we know this instinctually. Spacetime puts us into small pieces and we wander about as a piece and not the whole. And that piece, it appears to be temporal. Perhaps it's not something we notice as a child, but at some point in our life we realize our mortality, and from that point forward it only grows.

"In any relationship that we find comfort in, we know spacetime will ultimately intercede and force that relationship to end. Ending is our fear. All I'm saying to you, is that the ending can either be the cage that holds you, or the launching pad to new wonders."

The lion looked at the visitor for the first time eye to eye. "You may be right. I will think about it, and then feel out what is useful to me."

The visitor stood up. "We must go now. It was a pleasure to get to know you. Perhaps we will meet again later in our journeys."

The lion stood up as well. "Where are you going? Perhaps I could follow..."

The visitor turned to her hosts, who looked in awe of how she was so calm amid a beast that could kill her within seconds. "Where we are going, you will be hunted."

"I am hunted here, too."

"You eat the food we raise to feed ourselves. We see you as a competitor, not an important part of Nature."

"I understand, but it is how we survive. It is a hard world we live in, and we have to be enterprising and clever or we perish."

The visitor turned to her hosts. "Bring some of our food, we can share it."

One of the women ran to the camels and collected some food.

"You will share your food with me?" the lioness asked.

"We have enough."

"Thank you. Do you also have water?"

"And bring some water, please!" the visitor shouted.

"I was not expecting this..." the lion mumbled absentmindedly.

"Do you see how the wonders came to you?"

The massive, tan-colored head tilted in introspection. "...I was...I was moaning...alone in the desert...and...and you found me?"

"Only because you were moaning. You were expressing your grief. And we found you. And I came forward because I do not fear you, nor do I fear your grief. And this is because I see you as a part of me, so I can be open to you, serve you, empathize with you. This is how Nature connects itself to its Self. And if we see it this way, we can find moments

of harmony, wonder, awe, meaning, and a sense of how life evolves for one, many and all. How this evolutionary tale is spun for everyone to experience, in their own way."

The woman came with food, handing it to the visitor who took it, setting it down on the ground, atop a table cloth. She then poured a bowl of water. The lion began to pace as the visitor prepared a micro feast for the mountain lion.

"Let me come with you," the lioness said, "and I will bear the responsibility of minding my safety among your people."

"No," the visitor said in a sharp tone.

"Why?"

"I do not want to see your death. Especially to be the cause of it."

The visitor stepped back with a simple announcement. "It's ready for you."

The lioness stepped forward cautiously, but also with great anticipation of food and water. The smell and sight of food had already stirred her senses. She quickly devoured it, and lapped the water to emptiness. "Thank you," the lion said as she walked away, in the direction of her lair.

"Thank you," the visitor replied, bowing slightly.

The lion stopped and turned, facing the visitor who was left to pick up the tablecloth and empty, wooden bowls. "Your kindness will not be forgotten. The sound of your voice in my future will be greeted with kindness and respect. You're right, I need to find others of my kind and be with them in whatever way I can. I wish you good fortune." The lioness turned and continued to her lair, where she could rest, and perhaps dream.

The hosts had watched in amazement, as the lioness strode through the sands to her rock-faced cliff and her hidden lair. Now, emboldened by her absence, they ran to the visitor. "What was that!? Are you an animal-talker?" one of the women asked.

"Sometimes I am," the visitor answered.

"And what did you talk about?" the man asked, slightly out of breath.

"She was lonely and hungry, one of the worst combinations of life, and so, like anyone in that circumstance, she was moaning about her very existence."

"And did you solve both her loneliness and hunger, or just her hunger?" the woman asked.

"She solved it," the visitor replied. "I just reminded her." The visitor looked at each of her three hosts. "Shall we go?"

They nodded, still stunned by what they had witnessed.

As they walked over the crest of the sand dune, the camels stood to their feet and snorted their recognition that a new journey was about to begin.

Once they were settled on top of their camels, they wandered deeper into the desert. One the women turned to face the visitor, as if to confirm she was still with them.

The visitor seemed like such a strange mix of an invisible presence within a physical body, like a friendly, powerful ghost suddenly appeared before them. "How did she solve her sense of loneliness?"

The visitor looked out at the expanse of an endless desert beneath the black blanket of starlight sequins. "There is no solution to loneliness. We are separate beings, therefore we will all be lonely. No one is entirely free of this sense. It is who we are, and to hate it, is akin to hating oneself."

"Then love it? How?"

"You don't love it either."

"Then what?"

The visitor paused as she witnessed a shooting star streak cross the black canvas. "There is understanding and then reimagining. You understand that loneliness is partly who we are and we accept that. We then move to the Many, where we find relationships. And we see these relationships in the real world. They are not only relationships with other human beings, but with rocks, landscapes, sand, wind, animals, trees, air, stars...our breath. The Many is more than we can imagine."

"Everything...?" the woman asked, her words trailing into a silence woven from realization and hope.

"That's why it's called *Many*," the visitor said. "We have only to remember that the Many is Nature, and that Nature is a part of us and we it. With that understanding we can manage loneliness, that ever present sense of separation."

"What about the reimagining part?" the woman reminded the visitor.

"Our imaginations are not tuned to recognizing these infinite relationships we carry with us every single moment of our existence. Some are familiar like our daily life partners or family, but some are novel in every way like a frog or tree. So we must tune our imagination to these infinite relationships, because they are the bridge to living as both a Sovereign and an Integral consciousness.

"My sovereign and I are in a partnership with all life — the Many. We are building something that is unknown and unknowable. That has never been built before by any hands. So, we are intimate partners on an infinite road. That is what our imaginations must grasp, and once held within our mind's eye and the heart's ear, we begin to reimagine ourselves and life itself."

"Is it hard to do this?"

"It is no more difficult than not doing it. It is simply a choice. The effort is always contained in the choice. The actual doing may seem harder or easier, but the doing is just a moment in spacetime that calls you forward into the novel world of real experience and

expression. You decide how your imagination is tuned. Is it attuned to separation or interconnectedness in all of its flavors?"

"What does it take to really do that?" one of the women asked.

"Well, it helps to see what amazing creatures we all are, in our own way. That is a good place to start, and then to see that our difference is the mesh point of our wholeness. And then you simply choose this perspective over the perspective that we are separate, machine-like bodies and brains that move through spacetime purposelessly or under the control of a superior intelligence.

"We are not a mound of atoms and molecules, cells and neurons, bones and tendons, muscle and energy that is held within the skin we recognize as ourselves. These things are born into spacetime and ultimately perish into spacetime. They are temporal windows of a single lifetime. They open and close, but the home they are a part of, that is the Sovereign. That *home* is infinite in scale, yet our one window rivets us to the outside world of a single spacetime."

She paused. "If we turn around and look inside the home of which we truly are, if we set our partnership on the mind and heart, if we unsheath our imagination and intuition, if we relearn how to learn, we can do it. We can turn around and see our home. Where we live when we always are. And once this is seen, we can bring our Sovereign to any window and we can see through that window of our infinite home."

When the visitor finished her words, they met the deep silence of the oceans of sand beneath them, and the stars above them. The four travelers rode in silence for a very long time, until they could see a pale light peeking over a sand dune.

"That's where Sitara lives," the man said, excitement filling his words. And then, under his breath, he spoke as quietly as he knew how, "...this should be interesting."

