

1. **What does Thaleia mean when she says to the old priest Diokles and all the men of Delphi, “You can’t kill the song?” What is the song?**

There’s a secret I want to share with you that I learned from the ancient Greeks. In fact, I first learned it from Homer, the blind poet. I found it in the first three words of his epic poem, *The Iliad*. Some of you may groan: I read that book in high school or for humanities in college. It’s filled with death and gore and long lists of dead heroes. That’s all true. But there are those three short words at the beginning of the 15,000 lines that make up his story of the Greeks at Troy fighting for the return of beautiful Helen, fighting even the gods: *Menin aeida thea... sing to us goddess of the wrath.*

Now, Homer didn’t say, “Yo! Send me a text message. Or even... just email me about that anger of Achilles.

He asked the goddess to *sing* about the wrath of Achilles. And that was not a mistake. That was not even just an idle phrase that Homer used without really thinking about it. Homer asked the goddess to sing the entire song of Achilles, all 15,000 lines because ancient Greece was a song culture, a world in which they knew in their hearts the universal language and power of song. Young people know this. Whether it’s Adele singing, “There’s a fire, burning in my heart.” Or Mick Jagger singing, “I can’t get no satisfaction” it’s the same as the Greek song culture.

***The Greeks called it Thumos—Heart. Longing. Yearning.***

*Thumos* brings us together in community. It urges us to write songs and poetry and books. It’s the reason man walked on the moon. The younger generation usually lives that way. They live by their hearts. They understand the power and secret knowledge that is found between the words, in the magic of the music’s yearning shared between the performer and the audience. But as we grow older, as we worry about mortgages and bills and aching muscles, some of us forget to listen to the song surrounding us.

This secret understood by the ancient Greek song culture survived for over two thousand years: **You can’t kill the song—that power caught in the subtle resonance between musical notes and words, between the artist and the audience. That song is heart and yearning... it is everything. It will lead us to the stars. It will guide us to ourselves.**

So, don’t text me or email me. Walk along a dark sand beach beside the sea and let’s sing and dance together... and don’t ever let anyone kill your song.

2. **Do you think *Night of Pan* is a “real” story? Was Thaleia a real person? Did an Oracle declare the four prophecies about the Persian invasion 480 BCE? Was there ever an Oracle of Delphi who stopped the Persians?**

*Night of Pan* is based on history. While Thaleia, my young Oracle of Delphi is a fictional character, her prophesies about the Persian invasion 480 BCE are all based on real oracles declared by a young girl who was a respected seer. We know about her from translations from the famous Greek historian Herodotus. That's one of the amazing things about all this! The young *Pythia*-Oracle actually declared all the prophesies found in *Night of Pan*. They are translated word for word... and an entire civilization listened to the young girl's words.

You probably have heard about the million Persians invading and defeating three hundred Spartan warriors at Thermopylae. Before King Leonidas of the Spartans went to meet his death, he asked the Oracle what he should do about the invaders. She answered, "Either a great king or a great kingdom will die." Many historians believe that this is the primary reason King Leonidas sent most of the soldiers away and sacrificed himself and his elite guard of three hundred. He thought it was the only way to save his kingdom—by sacrificing his own life instead of the kingdom of Sparta.

When the Persian army was only a day's march away from the small village Delphi, the citizens came to the young Oracle and asked if they should hide the women and children and treasures. She said, "Trust Apollo, he will protect his own." What really blows me away is that they listened to her and did exactly what she commanded.

This is true history. Incredible. When the Persians marched through the narrow mountain path into Delphi, there was a huge earthquake and thunderstorm. King Xerxes and his army ran away never to return, because they were convinced that the gods were against them. Do you find that as amazing as I do? There were four prophesies in all about the Persians invading, and I incorporated them throughout my book.

Many of the characters in *Night of Pan* are also historical. Parmenides, the wise seer, was real. He lived around 480 BCE and many of the words I have him speak are based on translations of fragments that were found in southern Greece. Valmiki, Thaleia's guard in the Persian camp was alive during that time also. He was the poet who wrote the Hindu epic poem, The Ramayana.

### **3. Why doesn't Pan just tell Thaleia what to do? Why does he give her a choice?**

The ancient Greeks strongly believed in free will. This is (in my opinion) a reason they were one of the first civilizations to create a democratic government with their system of city-states. (Keep in mind, only citizens who were men and land holders could vote! Not women or any non-citizens. It was not a democracy as we define it today.)

The Greeks viewed their relationship with the gods as a partnership between mortals and immortals. *Nothing in Excess* was carved in stone on the Temple of Apollo for all pilgrims who came seeking advice from the gods to see. What was the basic, universal idea that led the ancient Greeks to carve this maxim in marble on the temple at Delphi where both Apollo, the god of reason and Dionysus, the god of reckless abandon were worshipped?

This saying was called the golden mean—

[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_mean\\_\(philosophy\)](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_mean_(philosophy))— and was cherished by a passionate people who understood how difficult moderation could be to achieve. The Golden Mean warned knowledge-seeking pilgrims to walk the “thin line” between a hero’s pride in accomplishment and *hubris* (over-weening pride), between admiration and envy, and at a more basic and universal level: between love and hate. Find the balance in our actions: Nothing in excess.

The Greeks believed that the gods might help or they might deliver death. Don’t be reckless, Zeus warns in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Book 1. “Ah, how shameless—the way these mortals blame the gods. From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes, but they themselves, with their own reckless ways, compound their pains beyond their proper share.” (Fagle, translation)

**I suggest that each mortal is that thin line. It’s up to each of us to balance our actions, to follow our hearts. The gods of the Greeks meddled in wars and stirred up great storms, but the hero—we are all heroes— with honor and dignity must always struggle to find our destiny amidst life’s challenges. The character of a person is determined not by the gods, not by how we act in easy, fun-filled times but by what we do in those hard times that arrive for us all.**

4. **How does *Night of Pan*, a story about an ancient time (about 2500 years ago!) relate to us today? And how can words of those in power sway people to do things they may not have dreamed of otherwise? (This may be both for the good and the bad.)**

It is easy to paint things in black and white. To simply say the Persians were the “bad guys” and the Greeks were the “good guys.” As they say: History is written by the winners.

We know the story of King Leonidas leading his brave Spartan three hundred to protect our fledgling democracy, but 5<sup>th</sup> century Greece was also a land of slavery and wars and exile of unpopular public figures. King Xerxes of Persia lusted after power and trade routes and, simply put, wealth. History depicts him as a ruthless king who beheaded unlucky engineers whose bridges failed in a storm. But the Persian Empire was also a land of masterful poets and scientists and extraordinary artists.

So, ask yourself what things you’ve done... amazing, wonderful things to help others or mean-spirited and hurtful acts because someone in a position of power (sometimes a bully) told you to. Here’s where that carving in stone on the Temple of Apollo can hopefully guide us: Know Thyself. Whether an individual or a collection of cultures forming a nation, when someone in power tells us to do something, run it by that wise advisor inside yourself. If it feels right, go with it. **If there’s that shiver up your spine that feels like a warning, never, never ignore it.**

5. What does it mean when some Greeks carry earth and water to the Persians?

It means to surrender. Before the Persians invaded Greece in the second Persian War 480 BCE, they sent envoys around the Greek countryside to request “earth and water” as a symbol of surrender. They did not go to Sparta, where two Persian ambassadors had been thrown in a well before the First Persian War.

Wikipedia provides an interesting summary: “In Book 4, Herodotus mentions for the first time the term *earth and water* in the answer of king [Idanthyrsus](#) of the [Scythians](#) to king [Darius](#). In Book 5, it is reported that Darius sent heralds demanding *earth and water* from king [Amyntas I](#) of [Macedon](#). In the 6th book, Darius sent [heralds](#) throughout [Hellas](#) bidding them demand *earth and water* for the king. In Book 7, he recounts that when the [Persians](#) sent envoys to the Spartans demanding the traditional symbol of surrender, an offering of soil and water, the Spartans threw them into a deep well, suggesting that upon their arrival at the bottom, they could “Dig it out for yourselves.”<sup>[1]</sup>  
[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth\\_and\\_water](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth_and_water).

## 6. Do you think you’d like to be the Pythia-Oracle? Why or why not?

This is an answer for you to find on your own. While you are considering your choice, think of some pros and cons:

**Pro:** The Oracle was given great respect and the power to help change her world. It was the Pythia who changed the way the Greek civilization viewed guilt. No longer would someone who killed another be judged by the mere fact that a person was dead. If the death was an accident, then the one who killed was judged differently from someone who murdered on purpose. Intention was everything. This was not true before the Oracle declared this difference. Families murdered one another for centuries because of a relative’s accidental death.

**Con:** With this power there came jealousy and hatred by others who wanted to seize that power. In *Night of Pan*, the old priest Diokles tries on several occasions to murder Thaleia so he can claim her power.

**Pro:** The Oracle has vast wisdom: visions others never see that reveal the future; glimpses of the *kosmos* that unveil a startling beauty; an ability through the interconnectedness of all life to heal others.

**Con:** Because of the Oracle’s sacred connection to the Divine, she must be pure. She must not have a lover or husband or child.

7. **When I wrote the scene about Thaleia’s initiation with Pan in a cave, I thought I made up the cave. About a year later, I discovered there actually *is* a cave on Mt. Parnassos about seven miles above Delphi called the Cave of Pan! I couldn’t believe it. Have you ever written something or said something you thought you made up only to find out later that it is real? Why do you think this happens? (Hint: Have you ever heard of synchronicity?)**

Those seemingly magical events happen to everyone all the time. We just need to pay attention. Keep our minds and hearts open, and we will begin to notice them. We think of someone and tell ourselves that we ought to call. The phone rings and—of course—it’s

the friend on the line. Ever watch a pitcher wind up to throw a baseball, and you know before he lets go if the hitter will smash it out of the park? Or my own favorite: every time I look at the time, it is 11:11, 1:11, 12:12... you get the idea. Carl Jung, a fascinating Swiss psychologist born at the end of the nineteenth century acknowledged this phenomenon and coined the term synchronicity. (Here's a link, if you want to read a little more about this phenomenon. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synchronicity>)

Much like remembering our dreams, paying attention to moments of synchronicity can enrich our lives. As Parmenides says to Thaleia, "Magic comes on the wind to all of us. A spider weaves its web in our doorway, and we walk past without really seeing it. Maybe on that day there is a call from Pan's flute. You chase up the mountain to find the god. *You* don't ignore his call. Another might think it is only a dove in a tree."

**Listen and watch for those magical moments, and you will discover we are not alone and separate from one another. We are all part of life's web. When that web trembles, we all share the grace of the kosmos. Besides, it's fun!**

**8. What different meanings do you think the saying carved on the Temple of Apollo—*Know Thyself*—has? (Hint: Does it refer only to an individual knowing whether she/he is out-going or shy? Or is there much, much more to it?)**

This question is the heart of my story. I think I'll let my Oracle Parmenides explain: "Hear me, Thaleia and remember this well. Your yearning may tremble the web." His voice deepens. "But the gods *are* the web. You may be a drop of water as it spins in a powerful vortex; spins and whirls, until you feel you will burst from the power of the whirling water. But the gods are the vast sea in which that whirlpool forms."

So, what is this "self" we are encouraged to know? Is it the person who walks to school and checks text messages, buys some fries and tries to be a good friend? Yes. But I think it's also more. Some modern physicists think that we are like a drop of water in a spinning vortex—a consciousness in a greater field of Consciousness. A soul or *psyche* as the ancient Greeks called it that is connected to all life. To mention Jung again, he called it the collective consciousness. Physicists also talk about the butterfly effect: the idea that even the gentle flap of a butterfly's wings can change the outcome of the future. I suggest it is this larger Self we should begin to understand.

What does this really mean? What does this matter?

I can tell you why I think it's important. What if we walk through our daily lives knowing that every decision we make, every action we choose can have a dramatic effect on our lives, our families and friends? What if a friend snaps at you? Your first reaction is to respond with anger and verbal abuse. What if that friend was really down and just needed you to listen, truly listen? You have a choice in that instant: swear at your friend and storm away or tell that person that it's not like them to be so cranky and ask them what's wrong? That decision could change everything. You could not only strengthen your friendship, you might even save a life.

**Know thyself. Know that in every moment, we have the free will to choose and every choice matters. We are the butterflies.**

**9. Why were both Apollo and Dionysus worshipped at the Temple of Apollo? Were they worshipped at the same time or different times? What is the relationship between the two gods?**

Apollo and Dionysus are like two brothers, two sides of a coin. Apollo is known as the god of light and was worshipped during the summer months, a time of warmth and sunshine in the temple. Dionysus is a wilder god of mysteries celebrated by dancing maenads in the dark of night.

Both gods balance one another. While worshipping the sun and light of reason embodied by Apollo, the ancients also honored the importance of creative freedom found in the night, in wild dancing and in dark caves deep in Mother Earth. The Greeks honored balance in all ways. Remember, even massive oak trees' roots burrow deep in the earth's dark mud and find nourishment but also need the sun's light to grow.

**10. Why don't the gods help Thaleia, when she commands them to destroy Brygos and the soldiers up on the mountain? (Hint: What is *hubris*?)**

This was a very important lesson for Thaleia to learn on her hero's journey. *Hubris* is over-weening pride. A false sense of self based solely on the ego, on a misguided feeling that everything we do is accomplished by each of us independent of anything else in the universe.

If you read question and answer number eight, then consider this question in relationship to our place in the world and the effect our actions have. If we embrace the idea of the butterfly effect—the idea that every action we take affects the world around us—then we must also understand that the world around us also affects us. The ancient Greeks described this relationship as an interwoven web existing between gods and immortals. We need to be careful to not think of our individual self as unique and separate from the world around us so that we believe we can control nature and boss around the gods. This worldview is distorted by a false sense of power... something like: "Oh, aren't I special!"

**We can change our lives and the world around us because we are connected to all life, but this does not mean that we are superior to nature just because we are a human walking this earth.**

If you want to learn more about *hubris* check out: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubris>

**11. What does Thaleia mean, when she tells the fake Pythia, The Child of the Clouds: "Then I would dig two graves... one for you... and one for me?"**

This is a saying attributed to the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius. The full saying as quoted by Phil Cousineau in his wonderful book *Beyond Forgiveness, Reflections on Atonement* says: "If you are hell-bent on revenge, dig two graves"—one for your enemy, one for you. Revenge buries us in bitterness, hate immerses us in anger."

Many people walk through their lives filled with hatred, jealousy and a burning desire for revenge for every perceived slight. We've all been there. There is so much anger in the world. We see it on our streets. We see it in Sudan and Ukraine and Iraq... we see it here in our own towns resulting in sorrow and death. And all too often, we see it in our homes.

**What do we do when faced with anger? We all will encounter it sometime. It almost always takes us by surprise. Try to remember: Don't dig two graves.** You may want revenge and to hurt the other person. It may even feel good for a moment, but you are digging your own grave. Will you live your life consumed by that same anger? Live your days thinking constantly about how mad you are at someone? Spend a sunny afternoon by the sea never seeing the wave-froth or smell the salt air or hear an osprey's hunting cry? Not feel the life around you, because your mind is preoccupied with the idea that someone wronged you? That then will be your death.

## 12. What is the Python? Is it a snake like the massive serpents in the Tropics?

The Python described by the ancient Greeks was a mythological creature that resembles what we think of as a dragon rather than a large snake. As I describe the Python (ancient companion of Gaia, Mother Earth) in *Night of Pan*: "It has sea-green scales, shimmering like ocean water over stone and red eyes on either side of its monstrous head that swings side to side, glaring around the Sanctuary. Long talons, black as onyx, curve from its knuckled fingers."

The Python is very important in the myth of Apollo (representing a male-dominated religion) slaying the Python (representing the Sacred Feminine) as Gaia's familiar and the one who proclaimed the prophecies at Delphi in ancient times before Apollo. The legend is a story depicting the struggle between the Sacred Feminine and the Olympian gods.

## 13. How do you determine your role in the world if you don't have a satyr-god like Pan telling you what to do? (Hint: There is no right or wrong answer here... just *your* answer.)

The Greeks have a word very dear to me: θυμος (thumos). It means heart and yearning. Θυμος is my passion to understand an ancient world peopled by bold mystics and philosophers and poets. Θυμος led me to write this book. This longing brought me to unexpected places and friendships.

Joseph Campbell said in his insightful book *The Power of Myth*, "My general formula for my students is 'Follow your bliss.' Find where it is, and don't be afraid to follow it." Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* pp. 120, 149.

So, my questions for you as you try to find your role and your way: Where is your bliss? Where does your heart urge you to go?