Myths to Live By Study Guide

Myths to Live By by Joseph Campbell

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Myths to Live by by Joseph Campbell is a compilation of his lectures compiled into comparative examination of each of the world's major religions, as well as its lesser-known primitive religions, all of which Campbell calls mythologies. Describing the origins of each, Campbell points out the understandings of each culture's immediate surroundings and how those understandings informed the development of that culture's mythology. As he moves through his examinations, he discusses the purposes the mythologies served within each culture, and whether or not those objectives are still useful in a post-enlightenment, scientific age. His larger purpose throughout is to use the consistencies between each mythology to find the themes common to all of humanity, written on the human mind and there for the purpose of pointing to the divinity common to every member of humanity. His ultimate thesis is that humanity is the mind of the universe, born of the earth and able to observe, think, dream, feel and affect the world in a way that has never been possible before. And so, instead of living according to literal interpretation of mythologies based on ancient understanding, he proposes that humanity is on the brink of an awakening to the poetic and eternal truth contained in the mythologies of humanity taken as a complementary whole, instead of conflicting, divisive literal histories of tiny, ancient groups.

He opens his book with a discussion of how science, in its continual march forward into the depths of every observable facet , undoes the necessity of mythologies to explain and make sense of human existence and its perpetual interaction with nature, death and other cultures. Each culture observes the laws of nature around it, and makes from those observations a set of theories about God, which explains how the livelihoods and geographies of each culture informs the style and law of each respective mythology, both the primitive and the complex. Campbell discusses the rites and ceremonies that evolve out of each culture's philosophy and points out that each culture's observations of how they interact with their world influence their ideas about the gods that guide that culture. The culture subsequently designs their rites to please the gods based on those primitive conclusions. He discusses how these mythologies are necessary to the human mind to teach children—whose ability to function is not fully developed—to which things they should be loyal and of which things they should be guarded against in order to preserve the social order into which they are born.

He devotes another two chapters to the distinctions between Eastern and Western mythologies and points out how in Eastern thought, the mythologies are understood to be informant of the inner workings of the individual, while in the West and the Levant, or the Middle East, mythologies are regarded as record of literal, external history. These differences are both reflective and informative of the sociological differences between the East and West. In the East, the highest priority is the society, and the individual's submission to his role within that society; in the West, priority is given to the individual, his uniqueness and his freedom from obligation to any ideology or social status but what he may choose. From that point, it is a natural evolution to Campbell's discussion of the dedication of Easterners to their individual arts and tireless honing of their own potential as a discipline dedicated both to posterity and eternity.

In discussing Zen, Campbell discusses its transfer from India to Japan and then to China, and its goal of releasing the individual from the net of his conception into the freedom of no mind. Evolved from the Hindu yogic practice of Om meditation, Zen is the practice of moving mentally beyond one's individuality and into the consciousness shared by all of humanity, explained by the analogy of the difference between each individual light bulb and the light that many bulbs create together. He discusses several teaching approaches to this state and concludes with the idea that God is contained in every individual, available to each for wisdom both from one's own understanding and from the teaching of the people one encounters.

Next follows a discussion of the mythologies of love, where Campbell contrasts the loves of compassion and of passion, one serving the objects of love and the other the individual. He further discusses the absence of love as a romantic thing, eros, in the early mythologies while marriages were still politically and economically motivated. For that particular kind of love, Campbell finds his wisdom in places such as the story of Tristan and Isolt, and moves from there to illustrations of love as compassion and charity.

In his chapter on war and peace, Campbell points out how thoroughly the Judeo-Christian scriptures are histories of wars fought under the banner and protection of the Hebrew God, and points out the calls to war on those who are not Muslim in the Koran. His observations on teachings in favor of peace come from Jesus' teaching to love one's enemies and pray for one's persecutors. The remainder of the chapter is a discussion of the various eschatological suppositions about the time when wars will culminate and end, and peace will rule on earth.

The final three chapters, on schizophrenia, the moon walk, and no more horizons, contain Campbell's uniting all of his themes into a cohesive proposition that men are all made to be taught in the formula of myths, based on their being parts and packages of the divine mind. In an age when science has given humanity a perspective of itself as the inhabitants of a singularly miraculous planet, it will become necessary to allow our unity and intellectual evolution to carry us forward to an age when our philosophies and mythologies teach and unite us with their poetic truths instead of dividing us by remaining statical, regional dogmas.

Characters

Joseph Campbell

Joseph Campbell gave a series of lectures, delivered without notes and full of eloquent understanding, according to Johnson Fairchild, who wrote the forward to his book, between 1958 and 1971, on the topic of mythology and gathered them all into this book. He has an exhaustive knowledge of the world's religious mythologies, as well as their histories and the anthropological information available about the way men lived and thought before the conception of those religions. He deals even-handedly with each of them, save for a mildly-transparent resentment of the Christian faith in which he was raised, comparing each to the other in its usefulness for affecting wisdom and understanding in the human psyche.

Psychology is, clearly, the science by which he evaluates each of the religions, as it is the psyche from which he proposes that all religious philosophies originate. He points to the psychology of dreams and of the images common to all men, since the themes behind those images take the basic shape and storyline of a pattern common to all human minds, as the source of the world's religious philosophies, and suggests that since they are sprung from the psyche, they should be allowed to inform us about the psyche, instead of forced to continue to represent literal, external histories that cannot possibly be true to history.

He also spends a good deal of time contrasting the Eastern philosophies with those in the West and discusses the ways in which those philosophies shape the thinking of both cultures in dramatically different ways. He shows an evident affinity for Zen Buddhism in its self-motivated and self-discovering bent and for the dedication to cultivating one's craft and livelihood as one's personal responsibility to the balance of the universe and one's community that is found in the East. He contrasts it with the mentality in the West that inspires people to form unions to demand more pay for less work.

He presents his ideas with relative objectivity and obvious fascination except in the moments when he is asking his audience to come to a conclusion based on what he has presented. He frequently incorporates poetic literature as reinforcement of his conclusions, frequently citing Dante, Walt Whitman, Thomas Mann and William Blake, and thus presents the thesis that asks mankind to allow themselves to be informed by all of the world's mythologies and find God as common to every human and everything in nature.

Ancient Man

Much of what humanity holds to as religious truth comes from the impressions formed and handed down from cultures that peopled the earth hundreds of thousands of years ago, and formed as they, without the benefit of scientific understanding to guide them,

sought to understand the world they were living in. Campbell talks about Native American and Japanese Bear cults believing that the animals they killed were visiting spirits, and in killing them, they were honoring them. He includes cultures living in communities set deep in the rain forests with plenty to eat and sheltered from any other group to war against, who observed that plant life thrives with the decay of other dead plant life, and concluded the same must be true of human life, so developed a mythology requiring human sacrifice so that life might increase. The Aztec people, similarly situated in fertile South America, thought that the planets would stop moving and day and night stop coming without blood sacrifice, and "harvested" humans to sacrifice from the surrounding civilizations. Similar histories come from ancient Aryan and Hebrew (Haribu) cultures, who warred against peaceful agricultural communities because they believed it was what their deity wanted them to do.

Peaceful mythologies came from the more recent Levant with the life teaching of Jesus, asking his followers to love their enemies and refrain from judgment, and from the Orient and teachers such as the Buddha, who taught that a life of non-violence would allow a person to attain enlightenment and so escape the vortex of death and rebirth. Since ancient times, the mythologies of men have been re-interpreted and adapted to new cultures, but have remained the major moral guidelines for entire cultures. The same instinct that says there is a Supreme Mind overseeing creation is still in humanity today; it is only now a question of harmonizing that instinct with a global culture and an age of exponentially greater scientific understanding.

Subconscious Man

Common to every human subconscious, whether it is reached by way of chemical help, such as LSD or mescaline as in the cases cited in the book, or by yoga meditation or by a schizophrenic experience, there is a blueprint for a strikingly consistent story. The story includes the idea of a savior originating from God and humanity together, who lives a life of supernatural understanding and power to affect positive change and healing, and dies but is reborn, and returns to bring final redemption to humanity. This story is so often repeated in the world's great mythologies that the psychologists Campbell learns from (John Weir Perry, M.D., Carl G. Jung, Danish scholar and explorer Knud Rasmussen and Dr. R.D. Laing, author of "the Politics of Experience") believe them to be integral parts of every man's understanding of himself and the world at large. Campbell takes that conclusion a step further and suggests that that is the place in the human mind from which all of man's mythologies have sprung. Even the Buddhist mythologies, in which God is common to every created thing, and Hindu mythologies, in which the gods are many, share themes of this single, common story.

Campbell also explores how the subconscious is programmed by the cultures in which humans as children are raised, and how those upbringings affect that central story and each person's perceived part in it. The subconscious can, in effect, get hung up at certain points in the story and be forced, through a schizophrenic regression, back to that point in the story to repair the place at which development was damaged and then be able to proceed healthfully from that point. It is the subconscious that manages all of

a person's impressions, priorities and understanding of himself and the role he plays in the world, and so is enormously important both individually and as it contributes to the culture in which individuals exist.

The subconscious is also the part of a man to which Campbell posits religious mythologies are addressed. Since they originate in the subconscious, they are intended, or are most useful, to teach that undercurrent in men. And, when each group can align itself to the most positive and universal aspects of their mythologies, Campbell suggests, a cooperative and global community will at last be possible.

God

God is a force always just beneath the surface in Campbell's explanations of each mythology. Campbell keeps his examination of God as an attainable knowledge limited to his discussion of Zen and the discovery of the divinity that is common to the make-up of all men, and that which men share in common with nature. In his discussion of Christianity, God is criticized for telling men not to murder and then murdering and commanding wars himself, but the character of Jesus is praised highly for his gospel of peace, grace and generosity. In Hindu, Campbell gives similar praise to the characters Shakti and his son Ganesha as examples of the love of heaven descended to earth. The obviously preferred vision of God is that of the Mind at Large present and attainable to all of humanity.

Leo Frobenius

Leo Frobenius is an anthropologist Joseph Campbell frequently cites in his discussion of ancient cultures and the development of humanity. He is the source Campbell cites when he first discusses the openness of man's psyche to being taught by the natural world that surrounds him, inspiring ancient cultures to base their mythologies on the patterns of plants and animals they observed.

Frobenius also conceived an outline of the history of mankind that projected that, following a "childhood" and "adolescence," there would come an "adulthood" and then a decline into decay. He identified the childhood of man as its primitive days of hunting and gathering, its adolescence in what he called the Monumental Period of Rome, Egypt and Greece, and its adulthood will be the then dawning global age, lasting hundreds of thousands of years and bringing with it boundless horizons. While other thinkers (Oswald Spengler in his book "The Decline of the West" and Irish poet William Butler Yeats in his "The Second Coming") were foreseeing decline and destruction for humanity, Campbell was encouraged by the perspective of a man with a broad understanding of the development of man and the optimism that came with it.

Dante

A major source of archetypes common to several regions' understandings of heaven, earth and man's relationship to the divine come from Dante's "Divine Comedy".

L.S.B. Leakey

Professor Leakey is the source of most of the knowledge about the earliest hominids extant at the time of Campbell's writing (1969-71), gathered from his research in East Africa.

Dr. John Weir Perry

Dr. Perry is the psychologist whose work first introduced Campbell to the idea of a the common human mythology by way of its usefulness to people having a schizophrenic experience.

Commodore Jesse Watkins

Formerly a Commodore in the Royal Navy and since turned sculptor, Mr. Watkins is the man who described his schizophrenic experience as having been so similar to the classic mythological archetypes and storyline.

Walt Whitman

Whitman is the poet whose work, "Leaves of Grass" is the piece Campbell chooses to be the the culmination of his thesis that God is present in everything at the introduction of the final chapter of the book.

Objects/Places

The Garden of Eden

Campbell believes it is the place in the soul (psyche) where mankind communes with God or the Mind at Large. The Biblical teaching about the garden is that men were kicked out, and the Buddhist teaching about a similar place, at which the Buddha attained enlightenment, is that men are invited in.

The Bible

Campbell characterizes the Bible as an archaic record of myths from the Hebrew race, its Old Testament full of scientific impossibilities and unjust wars, but its New Testament a poetic collection of compassionate teaching and Zoroaster-type eschatology.

The Upanishads

A part of the Hindu scriptures called the Vedas. There are several, each teaching a different part of Hindu discipline, from yoga to meditation to the art of war and rulership.

Golden Bough

Written by Sir James G. Frazer in 1890, it is a book that predicts that religion will fade away when scientific thought refuted its credibility.

Gnostic Gospel According to Thomas

A gospel not included in the canon of scripture, Campbell frequently cites this gospel as a source for the teachings of Jesus that are most similar to Buddhist ideas.

The Masks of God

Joseph Campbell's previous book on the topic of mythology.

The Decline of the West

Oswald Spengler's book predicting that the West would decline into disorder following the discrediting of their religious orders.

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

James Joyce's novel presenting the essential qualities of the Greek tragedy by which the way is opened to a mystical form of humanistic spirituality.

The Divine Comedy

Dante's work imagining heaven, hell and their relationship to earth, frequently referenced throughout the book.

The Laws of Manu and the Institutes of Vishnu

The Hindu books of law in which every detail of a Hindu's life is prescribed, so Hindus can be sure to behave properly according to their caste and role in every situation.

the Bhagavad Gita

The Hindu Scripture describing the spiritual disciplines of yoga and the chakras.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell

The novel by William Blake in which he suggests that heaven and hell will be so perfectly suited to their occupants that while angels may see the occupations of people in hell as being tortured, they will in fact be reveling in the pleasures they enjoyed in life.

Parzival

The Wolfram von Eschenbach novel about the king guarding the Holy Grail and the knight who could have saved the king from his agony had the knight been willing to listen to his own conscience instead of the affectations of knighthood that were his training. The novel also contains an analogy to the two brothers Ishmael of the Muslim faith and Isaac of the Jewish faith in a reconciliatory scene.

the Odyssey

Homer's Odyssey is a post-war mythology Campbell cites as parallel to the reprogramming of men's psyches necessary to return to civilian life after war.

Leaves of Grass

The Walt Whitman poem that describes a world where God is in everything and every moment is imbued with meaning is used to introduce Campbell's thesis in the culmination of the book.

Themes

The Imprint of Mythology on the Human Mind

Campbell deals compassionately even with cultures who performed ritual sacrifice of people living in villages surrounding their own, and burn the wives of dead husbands on the funeral pyre because he understands that man is designed to identify and worship a divine mind, and without formal education available about what the mind our minds long to connect with is, humanity will make something up to fill in the gap. He reaches this conclusion about the human mind after having spent the greater part of his life studying mythologies and finding among them a common mythological structure, and then having the idea presented to him that the very structure he was finding in common between religious mythologies could be present in human dreams and psychoses as well.

He also points to mythological stories such as the Garden of Eden in the Bible and the Buddhist story of the enlightenment of the Buddha sitting under the tree as analogous to the part of the human psyche that understands how to commune with God and how to circumvent the filter in the mind that keeps out everything but what is necessary to survive. Campbell proposes that it is a part of the mind that mythologies ought to serve to invite humanity back into. He cites anecdotes from Inuit dreams and shamans' understanding of the mind's ability to heal itself when expanded, and psychological studies of men who have come out of schizophrenic experiences healed of neuroses or psychological trauma as demonstration of the mind's capacity for broadened understanding when pushed or invited to it.

Universally, Campbell strives to draw parallels between the most useful parts of the world mythologies to emphasize the point that they can serve as complementary insights into the part of the psyche from which they all spring and to which they all speak.

Peace as Something Moralizing Mythologies Ought to Teach

In Campbell's very first chapter, and recurring throughout the book with a chapter devoted to the topic in the second half, the author points out the disconnection most people recognize to be disturbing between a scripture that teaches individuals how to live in a way pleasing to their creator and one that records wars sanctioned by god, and in the case of the Muslim, scripture that perpetuates war. Campbell points out that in the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses, God commands men not to murder, but in that very same book of scripture, and throughout the Old Testament, God wages war on groups of people Campbell characterizes as peaceful farm communities. There are also the examples of the jungle communities that warred with their neighbors in order to allow life to come from death as they saw it happening in the plant world, and of Jihad

being commanded for adherents to the Muslim faith against anyone who does not subscribe to their faith.

Campbell recognizes and gives voice to the resistance in every man to a discipline or philosophy intended to bring people closer to the Creator of their consciences and everything beautiful in the world while simultaneously sanctioning the murder of innocents. He points to the fact that children must be taught to value what is native to their community and to be careful of what might endanger it, and that while communities were separated by rarely-surpassed distances, such ethnocentric mythologies could be excused. But on the verge of a global society, as the world was just beginning to become in the late 1960s when Campbell wrote this book, it becomes much more necessary for cultures to be able to peacefully coexist. The doctrines of death must be allowed to fall away as destructive to the general good.

He admires the teachings of Jesus and the Zen Buddhists, who pledge to live lives of non-violence. Campbell offers as a closing thesis that religions can be useful for opening the human mind but must not be used as weapons against each other.

Heaven and Hell as Continuations of Life on Earth

Several of the literary sources Campbell incorporates into his discussion posit the notion that heaven and hell are places men enter into during their lives on earth, and so when they pass into them in the afterlife, they are just continuing along in familiar territory, already having arranged their priorities and values in such a way that the things that have been most important to them are the things they continue to serve in the afterlife. Dante's "Inferno" sends its protagonist past some of the world's most famous lovers in hell, suggesting that they had chosen those passions over their devotion to God and so are allowed to continue serving those passions in the afterlife. William Blake asks in "the Marriage of Heaven and Hell" whether it might be possible that while people are enjoying the pleasures they enjoyed in life in hell, the angels might be looking on and only suppose that what they are seeing is torture. While people are enjoying their existences separated from God, engrossed in the activities that engrossed them on earth, beings whose happinesses come from their communion with God would see them as torturous. The idea, however, is that a life shapes its appetites and so would be satisfied serving those appetites in perpetuity. Conversely, in Jean-Paul Sartre's "No Exit" and Bernard Shaw's "Man and Superman," people are simply in hell in situations that will teach them the lessons they failed to learn in life.

"No Exit" puts three people together in a room who died following after appetites that had no hope of being satisfied by the other two people present. The suggestion is that hell is a perpetuation of the circumstance most fitting your weaknesses in life, leaving the question unanswered about whether, once there, learning the lesson would be a ticket out. Similarly, "Man and Superman" makes the suggestion that people acclimate themselves to a certain amount of discomfort and discontent, and so in heaven, a place of such grace that there was no discomfort, guilt or discontent, those people would be miserable, feeling as if they were neglecting a duty by being happy.

Drawing this idea together with the Mind at Large that is so often Campbell's encouraged priority, the idea becomes to align oneself in this life to those energies and sources of wisdom that will establish patterns and habits of thought that will align the thinking with the light instead of the dark, bringing about an acquaintance with the compassionate, healing parts of consciousness instead of the self-destructive, warring energies that are their balance. Campbell follows his discussion of the various literary interpretations of heaven and hell with a recounting of the story of Parzival and his replacing his compassionate instincts with the affectations of knighthood, and in following his training, he neglected his instinct to ask what ailed the king. In turning his attention away from what he knew was right according to his own character, he allowed the training of a temporary social order to keep him from a glorious reward. The apparent conclusion, then, is to retain one's contact with his original good, being careful that that is the aspect that is amplified over the course of his life.

Style

Perspective

Joseph Campbell delivered the lectures that were the original material for this book as an expert in the subject of mythology to a lecture hall full of people who admired his work and perspective as a man with a comprehensive understanding of all of the world's mythologies and histories. He speaks as an American raised in the Christian religion; his disillusionment with the institution of the Christian Church and its presentation of the Bible as a literal historical record is evident. His tone when he describes Old Testament accounts is one of unveiled disdain. He talks about Christian rites and rituals having been too explained until they have become exclusive and legalistic prerequisites for entrance to what amounts to a social club, instead of being allowed to speak for themselves, interpreted by each follower as their truth is relevant. He is addressing Americans, for the most part, who are most likely also from Christian backgrounds, and he is trying to jar them out of their passive acceptance of what he sees as an incomplete mythology. He bases his preference for unexplained ritual on his observation of Oriental rites, and the Buddhist leaders calling their rites a dance instead of claiming any theology at all. He loves that the Orient only seeks to show people to the divine in themselves.

He is also speaking from the perspective of an intellectual living at the time of huge breakthroughs in science and technology. Man has just landed on the moon, and in recent years, he has seen the advent of television, universalized electricity in America telecommunication breakthroughs, and with those advances, a general sense that man would overcome whatever difficulties arise in the future. He sees religion from that perspective and in the same attitude with which history looked back on the archaic beliefs that the world was flat and at the center of the universe, and he is sure from that perspective that the intellect of man will inspire humanity to reassess the role religion plays in individual lives and collective cultures. Campbell hopes to inspire humanity to make its judgments about how it will think of religious literature in the future based on a rational analysis of where those mythologies (as they are sure to understand them to be) came from, what their historical impacts have been on the cultures that entertained them, and what will serve humanity best for the future.

Tone

Joseph Campbell's tone is one of skepticism of religion's historical validity, admiration of some of its most compassionate teachers and hope for humanity in the future to keep what is positive in religious mythology and shed what is destructive. He opens with a deconstructionist approach to Biblical history, since he is an American raised on Christian mythology and addressing, in the lectures on which the book is based, a dominantly American audience. He speaks with disdain about the most implausible stories such as Adam and Even in the Garden, Noah's ark full of every kind of animal

and the flood that covered the earth. He also disdains the historical Church's inhumane treatment of the people who questioned its evaluation of how the world worked in its early history.

Continuously throughout the book, though, he draws the mythologies out to their practical application to the human psyche and finds in them applicable truths for acquainting man with the part of his mind intended to commune with the divine. He speaks with admiration of the historical teacher Jesus, of the Buddha and of several Hindu Ideas, taking lessons in compassion, peace and spiritually attentive living from each of them. There are also several instances when he incorporates classic literature and poetry to corroborate the truths he gleans from each of these schools of religious thought, always, however, as they apply to the human psyche. He is very careful to restrain his comments to what is psychologically useful, since that is the crux of his thesis.

Structure

Joseph Campbell's book is organized as one would expect a book that was originally a series of lectures to be organized: each chapter is its own compartmentalized category, so that each could be taken as its own independent work, but they serve, collectively, to completely present his perspective and his means of arriving at his beliefs. The book's first half serves to explain the history of man and what about its beginnings inspired groups of men to devise mythologies. He also explains how the diversion of the Occident from the Orient resulted in two completely different approaches to life and to religion, so that the reader is well prepared for his discussion in the second half, of several religious topics in depth.

Campbell spends an entire chapter on Zen Buddhism, it being the most psychologically-applicable approach to considering the divine, and its placement before his treatment of the other topics he addresses proves useful, as he continues coming back to concepts such as the Mind at Large, and God-in-everyone theme throughout the second half. He also gives a chapter to Oriental art, illuminating how differently the East thinks of art from the West. The placement of this chapter after the chapter in the first half regarding the separation of East from West is also helpful for its having introduced the reader to the Oriental idea of a culture made up of individuals more dedicated to the collective culture than to their own individuality or happiness. So, when he discusses the emphasis in the East on deity, nature and types of people contrasted with the Western priority on capturing individual likenesses in portrait, the reader is completely ready to understand.

He also presents the world's philosophies about war, peace and love, each chapter moves thematically through the subjects, so he establishes a complete vision of one perspective before moving on to the next, and frequently summarizing points that have taken a lot of time to establish. He incorporates a good deal of modern literature in his chapter on love, but only to emphasize the evolution in thinking that has happened in that subject since the old mythologies were written. By the end of the work, he has

effectually presented the tools for a new anthology of scripture that would keep the best the world has to offer and graciously, compassionately and with understanding of the purpose it once served, throw out what is no longer helpful.

Quotes

"According to this teaching, no actual cherub with a flaming sword is required to keep us out of this garden, since we are keeping ourselves out, through our avid interest in the outward, mortal aspects both of ourselves and of our world." Chapter 1, page 27

"Only there is no room today into which we might scatter away from each other, and just there, of course is the rub and special problem of our age." Chapter 4, page 62

"When he sought for analogies in the classical world, our moment today corresponded, he found, to that of the late second century B.C., the time of the Carthaginian Wars, the decline of the culture-world of Greece into Hellenism, and the rise of the military state of Rome, Caesarism, and what he termed the Second Religiousness, politics based on providing bread and circuses to the magalopolitan masses, and a general trend to violence and brutality in the arts and pastimes of the people." Chapter 5, page 84

"And how do we confirm in life our relationship to that one and only God-Man? Through baptism and, thereby, spiritual member in his Church: which is to say, once again through a social institution." Chapter 5, page 98

"...In Japan, in the native Shinto religion... no attempt has been made to reduce their 'affect images' into words. They have been left to speak for themselves — as rites, as works of art — through the eyes to the listening heart." Chapter 5, page 104

"...The experience of the Anahata, at the level of the fourth chakra, where things no longer hide their truth, but the marvel is experienced that Blake envisioned when he wrote, 'If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.'" Chapter 6, page 115

"...Throughout the Oriental world... the ideal of art was never... of an activity set apart from life, confirmed to studios of sculpture, painting, dancing, music or acting. Art in the ancient East was the art of life." Chapter 6, page 123

"In Christian hermaneutics the crucifixion of the Savior had always presented a great problem; for Jesus, according to Christian belief, accepted death voluntarily. Why? In Abelard's view... it was an act of willing self-immolation in love, intended to invoke in response the return of mankind's love from worldly concerns to God." Chapter 8, page 158

"Essentially the Buddhist quality of 'compassion', karuna, is equivalent to the Christian of 'charity', agape, which is epitomized in the admonition of Christ to love your neighbor as yourself! — and even better, beyond that, in the words that I take to be the highest, the noblest and boldest, of the Christian teaching: 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust....'" Chapter 8, page 161

"There is a deep and terrible mystery here, which we perhaps cannot, or possibly simply will not, comprehend.... For love is exactly as strong as life. And when life produces what the intellect names evil, we may enter into righteous battle, contending 'from loyalty of heart': however, if the principle of love (Christ's 'Love your enemies!') is lost thereby, our humanity too will be lost." Chapter 8, page 173

"It is a 'forest teaching'. And what it does to the general apocalyptic theme is to transform its reference radically from a historical future to a psychological present: the end of the world and coming of the day of God, that is to say, are not to be awaited in the field of time, but to be achieved right now in solitude, in the chamber of the heart." Chapter 9, page 193

"'Being established in yoga,' the young warrior prince Arjuna of the Gita is taught, 'perform your duties, casting off attachment and remaining even-minded, both in success and failure.'... Abandoning both all fear of, and all desire for, the fruits of action, one is to perform without attachment the work that has to be done...." Chapter 9, page 202

"He can play and actualize in his life any one of any number of hugely differing destinies; and what he chooses to incarnate in this way will be determined finally neither by reason nor either by common sense, but by infusions of excitement: 'visions that fool him out of his limits,' as the poet Robinson Jeffers called them." Chapter 11, page 249

"It is an inevitable, altogether natural thing that when energies that have never met before come into collision — each bearing its own pride — there should be turbulence. That is just what we are experiencing; and we are riding it: riding it to a new age, a new birth, a totally new condition of mankind — to which no one anywhere alive today can say that he has the key, the answer, the prophesy, to its dawn." Chapter 12, page 263

"Mythologies... and religions, are great poems and, when recognized as such, point infallibly through things and events to the ubiquity of a 'presence' or 'eternity' that is whole and entire in each. In this function all mythologies, all great poetries, and all mystic traditions are in accord; and there any such inspiriting vision remains effective in a civilization, everything and every creature within its range is alive." Chapter 12, page 266

Topics for Discussion

Do you think we are in a place in history in which people would be willing to re-examine their religious ideologies in favor of a way of thinking that would bring the best commonalities of all religions together? Why or why not? What would such a change in thinking require as its catalyst?

Do you think the elements that were present at the end of the monumental age that precipitated the fall of Rome are present in such a way that could bring about a crisis and fall sometime soon as Oswald Spengler predicted?

At the time of Campbell's writing this book, the Orient had barely begun its entrance into the world of industry and technology, so Campbell pointed to the West as the culture responsible to do the world's innovating. Have the subsequent years of blending the two cultures been beneficial? Do you see any ways in which the better qualities of each culture may start to be seen in the other?

Do you think Campbell's assessment of the state of most Western churches is accurate? Do you think the evolution of church culture is moving further toward or away from the disillusionment he described and why?

At the conclusion of Chapter 9, Campbell explains the idea that "war is not only inevitable but good and also the most normal and exhilarating mode of civil action of civilized mankind, the waging of war being the normal delight, as well as duty, of kings." Do you agree that war is an inevitability? Do you think there is any intention among world leaders to make a warless society a reality in modern culture?

Christian thought, Zen Buddhism and Hindu meditation all teach that the appetites of the flesh should be allowed to drop away as priorities of the psyche. Why are fears and attachments such an obstacle to awakening the soul?

Having read Campbell's assessment of the history of marriage, have your opinions of the institution changed? Has its importance as a societal underpinning changed in your perception?

Examining the Occidental world objectively in comparison with the other major cultures throughout time, do you think the Western prioritization of the individual been a benefit to this civilization? Why or why not?

What was your impression of Campbell's assessment of the nature-loving movement since the mid-twentieth century as a sentimental and anti-progressive notion? Do you think in today's academic circles a desire to restore our culture's intimacy with nature would be guffawed thus?

In his chapter on Zen, Campbell contrasts the two ideas of "outside strength" and "own strength." Which do you see more prevalently displayed in your own culture? Explain.