The Power of Myth Study Guide

The Power of Myth by Joseph Campbell

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

"The Power of Myth" is based on the interviews between Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers that became a famous television series. It deals with the universality and evolution of myths in the history of the human race and the place of myths in modern society. Campbell blends accounts of his own upbringing and experience with stories from many cultures and civilizations to present the reader with his most compelling thesis that modern society is going through a transition from the old mythologies and traditions to a new way of thinking in which a global mythology will emerge.

Campbell draws on material he has gathered from over forty years of teaching comparative mythology. His lifelong quest for legends and myths of different peoples and cultures started when, as a boy undergoing religious instruction in the Roman Catholic faith, he realized that the mythology of American Plains Indians corresponded with those of the Christian tradition. Later he studied the sacred Hindu writings of the Upanishads and the Arthurian legends of the Holy Grail and in doing so, he developed the concept of the universality of all mythologies and legends, constituting the fundamental spiritual beliefs of mankind. In the transcripts of the discussions that are the basis for this book, he traces the origins and development of different religions and how they relate to the mythologies of the different emerging social cultures.

The subject matter and development of ideas does not follow a formal systematic scheme. Instead Campbell presents his ideas as a cornucopia of glittering poetic images with Bill Moyers summarizing and clarifying the topics that disappear and reappear in the discussion, rather like musical themes in an orchestral work. The scope of the work encompasses Campbell's previously published books and includes creation myths, the Goddess religions of the Oriental world, the transformation of mythologies as cultures develop, the universal myths of hero legends and the historical basis for the contemporary Christian religion. Identical themes and symbols from Christian beliefs and Hindu and Buddhist traditions lead to the juxtaposition of images of the crucifixion of Christ and the Oriental deity, Bodhisattva, from whose fingertips the ambrosia of compassion drips down to the lowest depths of Hell.

The chapter entitled "the Masks of Eternity " outlines the universal concepts of God and Eternity as found in the Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu traditions. In all of these philosophies there is the idea that the deity is within each individual and that this internal being also embodies eternity. This concept, which Campbell calls "the Christ within," along with his personal philosophy of "follow your Bliss!" and the necessity for the emergence of a global mythology, constitute the major conclusions of the book.

Chapter I, Myth and the Modern World

Chapter I, Myth and the Modern World Summary and Analysis

"The Power of Myth" is based on the interviews between Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers that became a famous television series. It deals with the universality and evolution of myths in the history of the human race and the place of myths in modern society. Campbell blends accounts of his own upbringing and experience with stories from many cultures and civilizations to present the reader with his most compelling thesis that modern society is going through a transition from the old mythologies and traditions to a new way of thinking where a global mythology will emerge.

Some of the material in this chapter comes from Campbell's previously published books, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" and "The Masks of God." The main theme of the book is the universality of myths that occur throughout the history of mankind, no matter which epoch or whichever culture or society is considered. Myths are the body of stories and legends that a people perceive as being an integral part of their culture. Before the invention of writing, these stories and legends were handed down from generation to generation in the form of rituals and oral traditions. The reappearance of certain themes, time and again, in different mythologies, leads to the realization that these themes portray universal and eternal truths about mankind.

Campbell defines the function of a mythology as the provision of a cultural framework for a society or people to educate their young, and to provide them with a means of coping with their passage through the different stages of life from birth to death. In a general sense myths include religion as well and the development of religion is an intrinsic part of a society's culture. A mythology is inevitably bound to the society and time in which it occurs and cannot be divorced from this culture and environment. This is true even though Western society previously learnt from, and was informed by, the mythology of other cultures by including the study of Greek and Roman writings as part of its heritage.

The record of the history of the development of a culture and society is embodied in its mythology. For example, the Bible describes the evolution of the Judeo-Christian concept of God from the time when the Jews were in Babylon and the god they worshipped corresponded to a local tribal god, to when the concept became that of a world savior as a result of the Hebrews becoming a major force in the East Mediterranean region. The geographic context of a specific mythology also plays a role in its evolution. The physical scope of Biblical mythology was limited to the general area of the Middle East but in other parts of the world, Chinese and Aztec religions and cultures emerged as separate and distinct belief systems. When different cultures expand their spheres of influence they eventually come into contact with each other, and the outcome of the collision, be it conquest, subjugation, or amalgamation, will be evident in the resultant mythology.

The form and function of mythology in the modern world is the main topic of this chapter and to illustrate his ideas, Campbell recounts aspects of his own earlier life. Without specifically stating it, the assumption is made that the modern world under consideration is that of Campbell's world—the Christian-based, urbanized culture of North America, the so-called Modern Western Society.

Campbell describes his own upbringing as a Roman Catholic and his early fascination with the myths and stories of the American Indians. He recalls the excitement he felt when he realized that the motifs of creation, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, which the nuns were teaching him at his school, also occurred in American Indian myths. This was the beginning of his lifelong interest in comparative mythology. Later on in life he found the same universal themes in Hinduism and in the medieval Arthurian legends.

The discussion considers the role of myth and ritual in contemporary society. Contemporary rituals are carried out to mark special events in private lives, such as an individual's marriage or enlistment in a branch of the armed forces and, on public occasions such as the inauguration of civil and national leaders. In the Introduction to the book, Moyers recalls Campbell's description of the solemn state funeral after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, as an "illustration of the high service of ritual to a society," and where Campbell identifies the ritualized occasion as fulfilling a great social necessity.

In general, however, Campbell and Moyers, reach the conclusion that there is a lack of effective mythology and ritual in modern American society. They find nothing that compares with the powerful puberty rituals of primitive societies. They claim that the exclusion of classical studies from the modern educational syllabus has led to a lack of awareness of the mythological foundations of western society's heritage. This, combined with an increased materialism and emphasis on technology, has led to modern youth in New York, becoming alienated from the main stream of society and inventing their own morality, initiations and gangs.

It is of course true that the ancient rites of passage, such as circumcision, are no longer practiced in American society, but the consideration of their replacement by the Jewish celebration of Bar Mitzvah or college graduation ceremonies could, and perhaps should, be made. Likewise, as a form of ritualized warfare, the weekly college and professional football games serve to provide a socially acceptable outlet for controlled aggression. The community support for local teams certainly functions to give individuals a sense of belonging to a larger social group. It is disappointing that Campbell and Moyers do not even consider these social pageants and trends as possible components in a new emerging set of myths and rituals.

Marriage, as an example of a paramount modern social institution, becomes the next subject of discussion. Campbell differentiates between marriage and love affairs and imparts some very lofty ideals to marriage, in contrast to love affairs, that he categorically states inevitably end in disappointment. True marriage, in Campbell's opinion, embodies a spiritual identity and invokes the image of an incarnate God. In

doing so he appears to limit the discussion to Christian marriages and to preclude the possibility that love affairs might lead to marriage.

Campbell and Moyers agree, somewhat surprisingly, that the main objective of marriage is not the birth of children and the raising of families. They discard the concept of perpetuation of the human species as being the primary function of marriage and relegate this to a first stage. This first stage is followed by a second one where the offspring have departed into the world and only the couple is left. Campbell invokes the image of marriage as being an ordeal in which the ego is sacrificed to a relationship in which two have become one. This, he states, is a mythological image that embodies the sacrifice of the visible for a transcendent good. Campbell labels this stage of marriage as the alchemical stage.

On the subject of the ritual of marriage, Campbell and Moyers complain that it has lost its force and has become a mere remnant of the original; they contend that the ritual that once conveyed an inner reality is now merely form. That this is part of a general secularization of religious sacraments is not discussed, neither do they acknowledge the modern fashion for individuals to design and enact their own nuptials independently from the inflexible liturgy of the established churches.

The interviews between Campbell and Moyers are recorded at George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch. Campbell and Lucas became friends when Lucas publicly acknowledged the influence Campbell's writings had on the development of his hugely successful film "Star Wars." Campbell expresses great enthusiasm for this film; a film that he says conforms to classical mythological legends. So it is not surprising that there are many references to the characters from "Star Wars" throughout the book. In a similar fashion, John Wayne is identified as a modern myth and Campbell recalls Douglas Fairbanks as having been a boyhood hero.

At the beginning of this chapter, and in other parts of the book, Campbell states that modern society lacks the stability it previously derived from being educated in the mythology and legends of the Greek and Roman classics. Campbell and Moyers agree that there is no effective mythology in modern society by which individuals can relate to their role in the world. However, this opinion seems to contradict the phenomenon of the large numbers of films being viewed by the general public. The contemporary film industry has many examples, in addition to "Star Wars," of films that incorporate the retelling of tales from the life of Moses, of Christ and of Greek and Roman heroes. In addition to these cinematic epics, there are films in the speculative fiction genre such as "Star Wars," and the classical Cowboy Western tales depicting the hero figure in defense of the community against powerful and evil villains. Thus, in spite of Campbell's and Moyers' contention, it could be argued that the ancient myths and their modern counterparts are alive and well in modern society. On the other hand, it may be that the problem Campbell and Moyers are addressing is the paradigm shift in religious beliefs that is becoming more evident each day as the established churches continue to lose their relevance in modern western society.

An analysis of the national symbols of the United States is used by Campbell to illustrate the ability for myths to incorporate the beliefs of a whole society and to provide the mythology to unify a nation. More recently, when the image of the earth, taken from the lunar landings, was published, it led to the universal realization that human beings must identify with the entire planet. This concept of the emergence of a new mythology based on global aspects of life is reiterated several times by Campbell. The fact remains, as he himself admits, that this new philosophy has not yet fully developed and it is not clear whether or not an effective global mythology will emerge from the concept of Gaia, the Earth Mother.

Chapter II, The Inward Journey

Chapter II, The Inward Journey Summary and Analysis

The focus of this chapter is on the origin of myths and mythic images which emanate from an individual's inner being. The universality of myths and their associated images arises from the commonality of an individual's life experiences with other fellow members of the human race and the transmission of these ideas from generation to generation. The interaction of an individual with members of his own society is also an important component in the development of a mythology. Thus a myth will embrace both an individual's internal images and those of his society manifested in external forms.

Campbell discusses dreams as manifestations of the subconscious mythic images of an individual. When individuals share their dreams with others the symbolic images and metaphors with which they express them become part of a society's mythology. This concept is very close to that of Jung's archetypes. Campbell identifies dreams as a source of information about an individual and characterizes a myth as the dream of a society.

Some universal themes in myths occur in all societies and all epochs, namely, birth, death, the identification of god, and the concept of eternity with the attainment of immortality.

The first of these universal themes is that of birth. The birth of an individual becomes transformed into the myths and legends about the creation of mankind. The context of the myths is generally confined to a specific people and their vision of the world but in its content it describes the creation of the whole world and all living things. In a brilliant exposition of the ideas and concepts embodied in this book, Moyers reads sentences from Genesis in the Christian Bible and, for each sentence, Campbell counters with a quotation from a different culture. Campbell's quotations come from the Pima Indians of Arizona, the ninth century B.C. Hindu Upanishads, and the Bassari people of West Africa.

The origin of man and woman and the role of gender in a society are an integral part of the myths of creation. Campbell introduces the possibility of the simultaneous existence of different, contradictory versions of a myth existing in the same culture. As an example he identifies two distinct versions of the creation myth in the Bible. The first story is borrowed from the ancient Sumerian culture and is told in Chapter 2 of Genesis. In this account God creates man and then draws the soul of the woman out of the man's body. This account is similar to the Hindu story where the Self feels fear, then desire and then splits into two. The second story is told in Genesis Chapter 1 in which God, the primordial androgyne, creates man and woman together in the image of itself. In this story, which originates in the fourth century B.C., it is man not God who divides into two.

On this same subject Campbell recounts a third creation story from Greek mythology. In Plato's Symposium, Aristophanes tells how in the beginning there are creatures of three sorts: male/female, male/male, and female/female. The gods then splits them all in two but after they have been split apart the separated creatures embrace each other in order to reconstitute the original beings. So now, according to this Greek legend, humans spend their lives trying to find and re-embrace their other halves.

The creation myths of the Christian tradition incorporate the Garden of Eden and the role of the serpent in precipitating the fall from grace of the original humans. The Christian tradition is the only one to portray the serpent as seducer and the woman as the original sinner. In other cultures and societies, the serpent is regarded differently. In India the snake is considered a sacred animal and in the Buddhist tradition the Serpent King is on the same level as Buddha. In the snake dances of the Hopi Indians, the snake is considered more benevolently. A clue as to the original myth of the Garden of Eden, before it was transformed by the male-god oriented Hebrew society, can be found in Sumerian seals from the period 3500 B.C. These depict the goddess, the serpent, and the tree from which the goddess gives the fruit of life to a visiting man.

The topic of mankind's relationship to the deity is a fundamental part of any society's mythology. In primitive societies the god or gods are associated with actual objects, often the sun, moon and stars all of which had a benign, or otherwise, influence on life.

As human societies develop and become more sophisticated the concept of god evolves into that of the Supreme Being, the Creator of the World, the ultimate Lord of the Universe who sits in judgment on the souls of the dead. The image of the deity is an intrinsic part of the mythology of a society and assumes the characteristics imbued on it by the society. Thus the God in the Judeo-Christian group of cultures is referred to as a male figure, whereas in the preceding societies the form of the deity was female, the Mother Goddess. In the Buddhist tradition and in the Upanishads, god assumes no specific gender characteristics; the deity is neither male nor female and yet is both.

As to experiencing God, all mythologies have in common the idea that God is unknowable and is the ultimate mystery. The deity is believed to be exterior to and beyond nature and the real materialistic world experienced by mankind. As an example of this idea, Campbell recounts a legend from the Upanishads about the god Indra. The characters in this somewhat convoluted story include Brahma, Vishnu, the Lord Protector, Shiva, the Creator, and Destroyer of the world and Indra's beautiful queen Indrani. However, a direct connection between the story and the concept of God is somewhat nebulous and is not fully explained by Campbell.

Various but related subjects are now included in the discussion, such as the role of religion in society, and the difference between a priest and a shaman. The idea that the act of life involves the killing and eating of other living beings is illustrated by the Indian legend of the god Shiva and the monsters. In this story, the lean monster devours himself until only his face is left and this face has become symbolized as Kirtimukha, the face of glory. This symbol, of life living on life, is found on both the Indian shrines to Shiva and on the portals of Buddhist temples.

The end of the inward journey to find god in the subconscious is part of the teachings of all the great religions. In the Buddhist tradition all living beings are considered manifestations of the Buddha consciousness. In the Upanishads the meditation of the yogis in the Himalayas leads to each individual identifying themselves with Shiva. In the Christian tradition Campbell propounds the concept of metaphorically understanding that Christ exists within an individual. This idea, "the Christ within," he expounds in this chapter and throughout the book.

Chapter III, The First StoryTellers

Chapter III, The First StoryTellers Summary and Analysis

The main topic of this chapter is that of the First Story Tellers. Before the discussion turns to that topic, however, Campbell and Moyers digress to focus on the stages of human development. The underlying assumption is that human development has not changed since the evolution of Homo Sapiens and accordingly the myths that spring from this development are an unchanging part of mankind's experience. In previous chapters the experience of birth is equated with the myths of creation of the human race. Here the experience of death is discussed along with the associated idea of a life after death. Grave burials from as early as the Neanderthal period have been found to include weapons, possessions, horses and even boats, all of which are included in the grave to ensure a safe and successful passage to the after life. The burial rituals and the accompanying monuments dramatically portray the embodiment of the myth of life after death.

From a personal point of view, Campbell tells Moyers that myths have helped him to deal with the feelings he experiences as he moves into his own last years. Myths have taught him to view his body objectively as a vehicle of consciousness which he suggests is the basic theme of all mythology as it identifies an invisible plane supporting the reality of life.

The First Story Tellers are the original hunter-gatherers of the human race and their myths and legends are found in the cave paintings and rock art, which are the evidence of their activity. The myths are then handed down from generation to generation, as part of an oral tradition and just as flint weapons and tools are found the world over, so traces of these myths and legends are found in cultures all over the world.

As we know from accounts of his early years Campbell becomes fascinated by the legends of the North American Indians. However, now his range of sources for legends extends to the Bushmen of Africa and the hunters of the eland in South Africa. The accounts of these legends all highlight the basic relationship between the hunters and their prey. This relationship does not portray mankind as a superior being but recognizes animals and humans as being equal under the rule of a supreme deity. The Bible-based western philosophy of the superiority of man over animals is in direct contrast to that described by the legends of the Plains Indian legends. This is illustrated by the Pawnee legend where Tirawa, the one above, tells man that he will show himself to them through the animals as well as the heavenly bodies. Campbell goes on to label the wholesale slaughter of the buffalo herds by white men in the second half of the nineteenth century as a sacrilege.

The hunting rituals all have in common the notion of appeasement for taking the life of a wild creature, and quite often, as in the case of the Blackfoot Buffalo dance, include

elements of cooperation between the hunter and the prey resulting in the prey returning to life to continue the cycle. In modern terminology this would be called ensuring a sustainable source of food.

For a myth or ritual to be preserved it must adapt to the changing environment or social conditions of the culture from which it evolves. Campbell identifies two principal contributors to the preservation and evolution of myths and rituals. These are artists and shamans. The prehistoric cave paintings in Southwest France are a prime example of the role of the artist in preserving and recording myths. It is not certain whether the individuals who produced these murals were simply satisfying their own aesthetic urges to depict the life around them, or whether there was a formal religious purpose to the paintings. In any case, the sense of wonder and stirrings of imagination, felt by modern viewers of these works of art are universal. Campbell justifiably compares these caves to cathedrals, with the darkness pierced by dramatic images. He calls the paintings landscapes of the soul and a cathedral the mother womb of a person's spiritual life.

Myths and legends often record cultural transitions in their content and form. When the invading Spaniards expose the Indians, living along the Mississippi, to the horse, the tribes quickly adapt to this new form of transportation and leave their agricultural settlements to roam across the prairies and hunt the buffalo. Even today the mythologies of the Pawnee and Kiowa Indians contain vestiges of the earlier agricultural based culture.

As examples of myths adapting to changes in culture and society, Campbell compares the brutal ritual of circumcision of the Australian aborigines with the gentle slap on the cheek of the Roman Catholic confirmation ceremony. The Roman Catholic Church provides another example of ritual evolution with the mandated replacement of Latin as the language of the Mass. In this particular case Campbell objects strongly to the change, he contends that the original Latin-based ritual served an important function in elevating a participant from the distraction of familiar surroundings

Both Moyers and Campbell see the reduction in ritual in modern society as being widespread. They do not comment on mankind's propensity to invent rituals and pageantry that may be emerging in an increasingly non-religious society.

Turning to the other agent in the preservation of mythology, the discussion now considers the shaman. These figures are found in cultures throughout the world, from Siberia through the Americas, down to Tierra del Fuego and across to the Bushmen in Africa. A shaman is a person who experiences trances during which a revelation is experienced. The shaman then shares his experience and in this role the shaman becomes the vehicle of an evolving mythology. The example given in this chapter is the story of a young Sioux called Black Elk who, before his tribe comes into contact with the white soldiers in South Dakota, experiences a vision foretelling the tragic fate of his people.

This chapter derives material from Campbell's earlier work, specifically "The Way of the Animal Powers." It differs from other chapters in that there are very few references to

the eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Campbell's personal life and beliefs emerge in his description of the debasement of ritual in the Roman Catholic Church and, most significantly, in his description of the comfort he derives from mythology when contemplating his own death as he moves into his last years.

Chapter IV, Sacrifice and Bliss

Chapter IV, Sacrifice and Bliss Summary and Analysis

The first topic in this chapter is the relationship between early plains dwellers and the landscape in which they lived. These early societies mythologize the animals and plants of their world and attribute spiritual powers to the land itself especially in high places and in mountains. In doing so they sanctify their local landscape. The Navaho culture of the American Southwest is an example of this. The Navaho pay attention to the orientation of their hogans, and include mythologized animals figures in their sand paintings. Similar land oriented rituals occur among the Sioux who include the sky and the four cardinal directions in their pipe smoking ceremony.

The same universal sanctification of the land extends to all cultures throughout the world from the early Icelandic settlements to the cultures of Ancient Egypt. Mexico City, or Tenochtitlan as it was known, was a sacred city with great temples prior to the invasion by the Spaniards. The invaders realize the importance of the temple to the Sun and tear it down and replace it with a Catholic Cathedral. In doing so they symbolically replace the mythologies of the conquered people with their own and cemente their spiritual domination over the landscape and city.

Campbell and Moyers then go on to consider sacred places in today's world. They identify the Holy Land as a place people go to because of its historical association with their religious origins, but as for sacred places in the rest of the world Campbell states, "They don't exist." Neither he nor Moyers mention the obvious examples of the Vatican, of Mecca, whose image is available to infidels via television, nor of the great congregations of Hindu worshippers along the Ganges. Nor do they give any reason for excluding these locations from contemporary sacred places.

The architecture of a city is an expression of the spiritual tenets of a society. Campbell gives Salt Lake City in Utah as an example. Here the original temple, built by the city's founders is overshadowed, first by the taller political palaces and ultimately by the modern office skyscrapers. Thus architecture forms a tangible record of the history and transformation of Western Society.

Places of worship are obvious examples of sacred places, whether they are the sacred mountains of early societies or the cathedrals, mosques and temples of more recent civilizations. Campbell addresses the medieval Christian cathedrals of Europe and specifically, the cathedral of Chartres in France. He visits Chartres many times when he is a student in Paris and he tells Moyers he considers it to be his parish church. He finds it an ideal place for the meditation and contemplation of the beautiful objects it contains and contrasts it with the architecture of modern churches that, he says, are built like theatres with visibility as the main design criteria.

Like the medieval Christian cathedrals, other places of worship, such as those found in ancient Assyria, include symbols representing their spiritual principles. The Assyrian temples incorporate the four signs of the zodiac into door guardians at the entrance. These same four symbols become the four evangelists of the New Testament in the Christian tradition. Campbell extends the image by suggesting that these four entities "represent the veil of Space-Time with Christ in the center representing the second birth, the coming of the Lord of the World from the womb of the universal goddess."

Continuing the discussion of European Cathedrals, Campbell points out they also record the part played by religion in medieval times. They speak of an era where the clergy controlled the lives of ordinary people by claiming their authority is derived from inescapable supernatural laws that rule over the natural world. This tyrannical religion suppresses the mother-goddess beliefs of older cultures and emphasizes that natural ways are the result of the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden. In doing so the established religion denies the possibility of nature being part of the revelation of the divinity. Campbell does not comment on the discrepancy between the peace and solitude he finds in his "parish church" and the ecclesiastical tyranny he says the cathedrals embody.

The next major topic in the discussion deals with the transformation of mythology occasioned by mankind's transition from a world of hunter-gatherers to a society that subsists on planting and farming. Although this transition takes place over many generations, the change in mythology and ritual is profound. No longer are the rituals concerned with appeasement of the animal gods and the assurance of successful hunts, instead they become concerned with the success of the harvest and the effects of drought and insect plagues. With the planting cycle comes the realization that the seed has to die and be buried before a new plant could emerge and be harvested. It is not clear, as Campbell implies, that the advent of the plough leads to the motif of a male inseminating mother earth, or whether the division of labor between the sexes is a purely practical matter. In any case, coincident with this cultural transformation the male emerges as the dominant figure and the magic of birth and nourishment is acknowledged as the role of the woman. The driving force of the mythology takes into account the fact that the life cycle of the plants, which sustains mankind, now more closely resembles that of human beings.

During the transition to agricultural civilizations there appears the motif of the consumption of the dismembered and buried body of the plant deity. This motif still occurs in many cultures throughout the world as is evidenced by the Polynesian legend of the origin of the coconut tree and a similar legend about the origin of maize from the North American Algonquin Indians. This motif evolves into that of the death and resurrection of a savior figure and the ritual associated with that myth includes the act of killing a god and then consuming the food that originates from the dead savior. This motif is found in such diverse cultures as Northeast American wood dwellers and, more significantly in the Bible. Campbell's most dramatic example is that of the Roman Catholic Mass where the Eucharist is specifically believed to be the body of Christ and is consumed in the ritual of communion. It is interesting to note that in this same Mass

the theme of "The Lamb of God who washes away the sins of the world" could be considered a vestige of an earlier hunter-gatherer mythology.

The discussion goes on to identify common universal legends and myths such as those of the Chosen People, the Hero figure, and the Labyrinth motif. The sources of these myths and legends can be found in the sayings of Sufi mystics, the creation myths of the Pima Indians, the writings of James Joyce and modern stories of heroism in the Vietnam conflict.

The chapter ends with Campbell's declaration of his personal philosophy for a successful life, namely the concept of "following your bliss." To explain how he came to discover and follow his own bliss he describes a period in his life when he returned from Europe in 1929 just in time for the Wall Street crash and the Great Depression. There were no jobs available but he remembers it as a wonderful time. He discovered Frobenius and devoured everything written by him while living in a little chicken coop place in Woodstock where the rent was twenty dollars a year. Campbell adds that he took the idea of "bliss" from the Sanskrit term "Ananda," which means bliss or rapture.

"If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Wherever you are, if you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time."

The topics dealt with in this chapter range far and wide as do the references and stories used by Campbell to elaborate his ideas. The exposition of the various themes follows the flow of the conversation in the original interviews by Bill Moyers and leads to a sometimes-haphazard development of topics. Perhaps the informal nature of the discussion led to the rather startling omission, by Campbell and Moyers, of contemporary, world famous sacred sites, prior to their discussion of Chartres cathedral. As it is, the tone and character of the work is not that of academic treatise but more the teachings of a poet philosopher.

There are strong autobiographical elements in Campbell's description of his experience of Chartres cathedral and in the eloquent account of how he apparently experienced an epiphany in his early life and subsequently acknowledged and accepted his nascent life script: "to follow your bliss".

Chapter V, The Hero's Adventure

Chapter V, The Hero's Adventure Summary and Analysis

This chapter contains references to Campbell's previously published book "The Hero with a Thousand Faces." As the chapter title indicates the subject is a specific form of myth or legend in which a single individual leaves his existing world and embarks on a journey to find something or someone. In the course of his journey the individual faces challenges, dangers and temptations, all of which he overcomes to return, as a hero, with the object of his quest. As pointed out by Otto Rank in his book "The Myth of the Birth of the Hero," this generalized sequence of events could be considered to encompass the development of an individual's life from the trauma of leaving the womb at birth, throughout the various stages of life until the final conclusion. With this in mind it is easy to understand the universality of myths and legends. Campbell draws examples from his vast array of legends and stories to quote the Greek legend of Odysseus, the Celtic myths of the princely hunter and the story of Don Quixote. Whether the object of the quest is a golden fleece, a Holy Grail or even an individual's true love, depends largely on the society or culture from which the legend emerges.

Variations in the generalized hero legends can be found by considering the myths that surround the founding of the major contemporary religions of the world.

Common elements occur in the stories of the lives of Jesus Christ, the Buddha and Moses. They all makes journeys into the wilderness from which they return to choose and instruct disciples who then propagate the spiritual message of the new religion. Buddha goes into solitude and emerges to sit beneath the bo tree, the tree of immortal knowledge. Jesus, after his baptism, goes into the desert and when he returns, begins to preach his message. Moses meets with Yahweh on the summit of a mountain and returns with commandments, which form the foundation of a new society. In addition to religions, the legends of heroes also describe the founding of nations and cities or they describe the rescue of people from danger or destruction.

Campbell describes the form of the hero quest, whether it is consists of spiritual or physical deeds, as being the same in every mythology. The hero or heroine has to overcome physical or spiritual challenges and dangers and in doing so the virtues of a culture are extolled and a role model for a society or community is developed. Likewise the description of evildoers and villains and their fates teaches the members of a society about the dire consequences of contravening its moral standards and conventions.

Moving on from the specific hero legends, Campbell gives examples of myths and legends that provide guidance in dealing with death and suffering. He retells the ancient English tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and, in a similar vein, recalls the Iroquois legend of the beautiful young maid and her many suitors. From Buddhist teachings comes the notion that, though there is suffering in life, an individual should

confront and endure pain and sorrow. In this tradition, release from the fears and sorrows of the world comes with the attainment of a psychological state of mind called Nirvana. Also in Buddhist mythology there is the Bodhisattva, a being who, though immortal, voluntarily participates in the sorrows of the world. This, of course, is directly analogous to the story of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith, but instead of the harrowing account of the Crucifixion, the Oriental tradition describes the Bodhisattva as embodying boundless compassion and "from whose fingertips there is said to drip ambrosia down to the lowest depths of hell."

In terms of present day life, the example provided by the Tibetan Buddhist monks is used by Campbell to demonstrate the exemplary nature of true religious spirit. Expelled from their own country and monasteries by the Chinese Communist military, the Dalai Lama and his followers have never uttered a word of recrimination or complaint nor have they shown any hate towards their persecutors.

As in previous chapters, Campbell and Moyers repeat the complaint that modern society does not provide adequate mythic instruction to young people so that they can overcome the psychological problems prevalent in modern life. Campbell recalls that he derives much benefit from reading the works of Thomas Mann and James Joyce and suggests individuals seek the help of teachers, or find books, that deal with their specific problems. He examines, in detail, parts of George Lucas' film "Star Wars" and identifies it as an example of a mythical story and recognizes its success in introducing widely acceptable terms and hero figures. Neither Campbell nor Moyers pursue the obvious path of examining the cinema and film as a source or avenue to mythical instruction

The necessity remains for modern society to have heroes and role models even as more and more people are becoming dissatisfied with conventional religions and belief systems. It is true that society is experiencing a fundamental transformation from the religious point of view but, as Campbell's writings show, the fundamental values and principles will remain constant, embedded as they are in very essence of the human race.

Chapter VI, The Gift of the Goddess

Chapter VI, The Gift of the Goddess Summary and Analysis

It comes as a surprise to many people in modern western society to discover that the depiction of god as a male figure in modern Judeo-Christian and Moslem religions is a relatively recent development in the history of mankind. In this chapter Campbell describes the foundation for the myths of the Great Goddess and then traces the historical development of societies and cultures, leading to the present day domination by males of both the dogmas and administration of western religions.

The inescapable biological fact that it is the woman who gives birth and nourishment to an infant leads to the concept of the mother being the prime source of life and hence the identification of the mother as the supreme being. Evidence of the very early origin of this belief can be found in the hundreds of figurines of the Goddess which have been unearthed in Europe and which date back to the Neolithic period. Campbell does not address the issue of whether these figurines represent an object of worship or whether they are tokens used in fertility rituals but the fact remains that there are no male counter parts in prehistoric cultures. Subsequent mythologies, especially in the Mediterranean region, have symbols of the bull and the boar representing male power but the dominant theme is that of the Goddess.

The identification of the Goddess with that of the earth itself is also symbolized in the concept of mother earth. In the Egyptian temple to the Goddess Nut, there is a depiction of the goddess swallowing the sun in the west and giving birth to it in the east. This is a very powerful union of symbols, combining both the principal heavenly body and the image of mother earth.

Goddess religions in early history are found mainly in the societies and cultures that arose in the great river valleys of the world. In addition to the Nile in Egypt there was also the Tigris-Euphrates river system in the Near East and, further east again, the Ganges and Indus rivers of the Indian subcontinent where the name itself, Ganges, is that of a goddess. The previous chapter describes the transformation of mythologies as mankind evolves from hunter-gatherer to farming cultures and, coupled with that transition, the emergence of legends concerning the earth as being the source of life and renewal. It is easy to understand why the Goddess religions arise in areas of the world where the fertile river systems lead to successful farming societies.

As Campbell portrays it, the suppression of the Goddess religions came about when, starting at about the time of the fourth millennium B.C., Semitic and Indo-European invaders conquered the established societies. The invaders were primarily hunters and nomads and their religions, with their male gods, replaced those of the agricultural societies whom they had overcome. Among these invaders were the Hebrews. The account in the Old Testament of the Hebrew triumph over the people of Canaan

includes the description of the Canaanite Goddess as "the Abomination" and the condemnation of worship on mountaintops that were symbols of the Goddess. If one considers that Christianity evolved from Hebrew and Judaist religions, it is not surprising that male dominated gods and mythology permeate Western society to this day.

The suppression of the Goddess myths in the Christian tradition was not complete however, as is evident from the reemergence of the female figure in the legends of the Virgin birth. Campbell suggests this is a result of the influence of Greek culture in the development of Roman Catholic religion. Certainly the dogma of Mary being the Mother of God is formalized by the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. and by the time of the Middle ages in France, there is a preponderance of Cathedrals all dedicated to "Notre Dame." The role of intercessor to God on the behalf of mankind and the source of compassion to all beings now places the Goddess as a counterpart to the male God who judges and punishes mankind.

An indication of how Western culture might have evolved had the Hebrew mythology not survived can be seen in the religions of India where the Goddess symbol is dominant to this day. The interplay of the male and female roles is much more subtle in Oriental mythology. For example, the Indian name for the Being of all Beings is "Brahman" which is a neuter noun, neither male nor female. In China the yin/yang figure graphically describes the inextricable roles of male and female. Even in the creation myths of the Book of Genesis, as outlined in a previous chapter, there is the possibility of God being both male and female. This simply reflects the development of the human fetus where there is a point before which the gender of the child is undetermined.

The chapter ends with Campbell digressing from the topic of the Goddess to describe the vastness of the universe with respect to the possibility that the ultimate destiny and salvation of the human race lies in space. This is a recurrence of an idea presented in the first chapter where he proposes that a global mythology will emerge to replace the old traditional mythologies. In this case it seems that the global connotation should be replaced with a galactic one.

Chapter VII, Tales of Love and Marriage

Chapter VII, Tales of Love and Marriage Summary and Analysis

The subject of Love and Marriage was first considered in Chapter I where Campbell presents some lofty ideals concerning marriage and is critical of love affairs. Here Campbell and Moyers take up the theme again and identify the development of the cult of the individual as an important milestone in the evolution of modern western culture.

The concept of romantic love originates with the troubadours in France in the twelfth century. The troubadours are members of the nobility and become known as the "singers of love." The movement quickly spreads to other royal courts in Europe and in Germany, for example, they are called the "Minnesingers." The psychology of love and the consideration of it as an all encompassing person-to-person relationship eventually extends to the knights' code of chivalry and even to the rules of engagement in tournaments and duels. This pioneering movement becomes a wellspring for myths and legends, such as those of the Arthurian court, where the philosophy of romantic love is grafted on to the underlying saga of the Celtic resistance to the Anglo Saxon invasion of Britain.

Before the troubadours define love as a personal ideal, only sexual desire and traditional marriage are identified as possibilities for individuals. Campbell describes sexual desire, as a biological urge and, because of this, it is impersonal. The family arranges for traditional marriage and often the bride never even sees her groom before the ceremony. The Church in the Middle Ages sanctifies this kind of union when it justifies marriages that are political and social in their nature. To the Church the ideas of the troubadours are heretical.

Campbell describes how the troubadours and their transformation of the idea of love become associated with the Manichean heresy of the Albigensian movement, which is, itself, a protest against the corruption of the clergy of that time. In 1209 Pope Innocent III crushes the Albigensians and the troubadour movement along with them by launching the so-called Albigensian Crusade.

However the concept of romantic love persists even to this day in Western culture, where it stresses the preeminence of an individual's experience over the constraints and demands of the society of which the individual is a member. When followed to its logical conclusion, the almost fanatical insistence that two souls are uniquely destined to join in a physical and spiritual union at the expense of all else, inevitably, leads to emotional trauma on the part of these individuals when they discover that love, in fact, is not eternal. The acceptance of the concept of romantic love by contemporary western society is not, however, unconditional. Ultimately a society has to protect itself from the chaos that can result from excessive indulgence in the cult of the individual.

Campbell and Moyers trace the continuous development of the ideals of romantic love through history by examining the romantic stories of Tristan and Isolde, and Paolo and Fransesca and by recounting the affirmation of the traditions of Knightly Chivalry in the legend of the Holy Grail. While it is true that this movement, started by the troubadours, coincides with the gradual disintegration of the monolithic and despotic Roman Catholic Church, to try and equate the Reformation as being based entirely on individual romantic love, as Campbell does, is misleading. Campbell's characterization of Martin Luther as a "troubadour of Christ" appears to be an exaggeration.

The discussion now turns to the problem of marriage and extramarital love affairs. According to Campbell the conflicting demands of marriage and romantic love should be resolved by invoking the virtue of loyalty to an individual's spouse, and, parenthetically to the greater good of society. The dilemma of sacrificing a true meeting of soul mates on the altar of stability of, a possibly erroneously arranged, marriage is a matter for the individuals to resolve. The myths and legends which arise from this eternal dilemma provide no easy answer and they mostly portray only pain and sorrow in the unfolding saga.

The cult of the individual as demonstrated by western traditions in matrimony is not evident in other modern societies such as India or China. Whether or not it will permeate these cultures as well, depends largely on the ability of these emerging world powers to maintain a balance between individual freedom and the demands of their nation states.

Chapter VIII, Masks of Eternity

Chapter VIII, Masks of Eternity Summary and Analysis

Before addressing the main subject of this chapter, Campbell and Moyers undertake a wide-ranging discussion of many topics, some of them digressions and some revisitations of topics from previous chapters.

The evolution of the archetypical stages of human life are restated and the concept of man being an image of god who is the archetype of man, and the related idea of the "Christ within" are reiterated. The underlying message of the book, the universality of the myths and legends of different cultures in different epochs, is also reaffirmed.

Campbell recalls his own experiences as a teacher of comparative mythology when he describes the reinforcement of the personal beliefs of his students as he exposes them to images and symbols of religious traditions other than their own. In doing so he invokes the clown figures of Germanic and Celtic myths and the story of the Nigerian trickster god, Edshu. This autobiographical theme continues when Campbell describes his own personal peak experience as an athlete, which he then compares to the epiphanies described in James Joyce writings.

The knowledge of God and the concept of eternity are dealt with by Campbell and Moyers in a rather haphazard fashion. The ideas are expressed in an almost poetic manner rather than by following a logical progression. The basic conclusions while not concisely stated are, however, clear.

Man's view of God depends on the encompassing culture. In the West, God is a male figure who is the creator of the universe while in Oriental cultures the deity is the manifestation of the universe and includes both male and female identities. What is common amongst all cultures is the need for identification and union, in some fashion, with God. There is a universal recognition that in life, as experienced by mankind, a dimension exists beyond mankind's cognizance. These ideas are revealed in different but similar ways in the Upanishads, the New Testament, the teachings of Buddha and in the Gnostic gospel.

All the great religions advocate union, in some form, with their deity. The Christian faith describes God as being embodied in the human form of Jesus Christ to reconcile mankind with Him, while in the Buddhist and Hindu traditions mankind is identified as being included and participating within the deity. The role of religion in the realization of these concepts is more likely to be an obstruction rather than a means to that end. Jung is quoted as saying "religion is a defense against the experience of God." Each religion has doctrine and dogmas that instruct an individual in the manner in which he is to lead his life and the incentives for obedience and the sanctions for disobedience have always been part of religious mythology. In ancient Egypt the god Osiris sat in eternal judgment of the dead, in the Christian tradition there are graphic descriptions of heaven

and eternal hell, and in the Buddhist tradition souls are condemned to a cycle of reincarnation until Nirvana is achieved.

Campbell and Moyers then turn to consider the circle, a powerful symbol that appears in all religions and cultures. The circle's universality is demonstrated by the fact it is an important symbol for both American Indians and also for the Western culture that supplants them. Western cultures inherit the circle from the Judeo-Christian traditions and from the Sumerian cultures of the Middle East. In a similar fashion both the Chinese and Aztecs use the circle to represent the embodiment of the center of their mythology and their concept of cosmological order. In the Buddhist tradition the mandala is prominent in rituals and in the representation of myths and the term itself, mandala, is Sanksrit for circle. Campbell describes a very elaborate Buddhist mandala, in which the deity, as the source of power, is portrayed at the center of a circle surrounded by peripheral images that represent manifestations of the deity's radiance.

Allied to the universal need to know God is the concept of eternity and the desire for immortality. The cycles of the planets around the sun are the basis for the concept of time and can be measured and recorded, even if the sun is erroneously assumed to revolve around the earth. However, eternity implies a dimension beyond and, exclusive of, the experience of time. Campbell evokes the image of the mythological god Shiva to illustrate what he is trying to convey when he discusses the concept of eternity. Similar images and symbols occur in Christian and Buddhist teachings, but because mankind is irrevocably bound by his universe and physical world it is impossible for anyone to describe the Eternal God. A universal desire for immortality and the ability to transcend death and the limitations of the physical world can be considered a fundamental aspect of the human psyche and a desire rooted deep in the subconscious. The limitations of language are all too apparent when trying to describe such concepts and poetry and mythological images seem to be the best way to encapsulate these subconscious desires and emotions.

As an example of the expression of complex ideas, Campbell describes the symbol of the Net of Indra in which, at each point where a thread crosses over another, there is a gem which itself reflects the images of all the other gems. Another facet of the expression of metaphysical ideas is Schopenhauer's description of life as being part of the one great dream of a single dreamer, a dream in which all the characters dream as well.

All major religions include in their liturgies techniques and practices for transcending conscious thought and for breaking through the barrier of language and linguistic processes. The Roman Catholic Church uses the constant repetition of specific prayers in the rosary in the same way, as does the "japa" of the Sanskrit tradition where the holy name is repeated time and again. The technique of the constant repetition of a phrase or sound is best known from the chant of "AUM" intoned by Tibetan monks. In all these instances the objective is to achieve a sense of meditative calm in which the individual awakens to the realization that all living beings are united in a single universal entity. These techniques of prayer and meditation are the ways religion offsets the formal

doctrines and dogmas that exist within its framework, but which often constitute obstacles to the attainment of the divine experience.

Characters

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is, in the Christian religion, the Son of God. The Christian belief holds that God the Father sends his son down to earth where he is born of a virgin and after spreading the word and recruiting 12 apostles he is crucified, resurrected, and ascends into heaven. The accounts of his life and his teachings are embodied in the four New Testament gospels, which Campbell describes as being contradictory. A fifth gospel, the gospel of Saint Thomas, is excavated in 1948 and is the basis for Gnostic teachings.

From the point of view of mythology, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ are the ultimate savior hero legend. Campbell declares that Christ on the cross represents a type of father quest and, furthermore, his crucifixion and resurrection are the fundamental elements of the prototypical hunter myth and ritual. Likewise the Catholic ritual of communion corresponds exactly to the consumption of the essence of the resurrected divinity in the ancient agricultural societies.

Jesus Christ is such a fundamental part of the Christian belief system, that it is not surprising that references to his teachings, as recounted in the Gospels of the New Testament, are frequent and widespread throughout this book. It is interesting to note that though Campbell describes a completely objective view of Christ as an example of a mythic hero, when it comes to his delineation of the ultimate god and experience of eternity he relies on the expression "the Christ within". It is as though he is unable to extricate himself from the fundamental bedrock beliefs of his western culture.

Buddha

The founder and prophet of the religion and belief system named after him, Buddha is born a prince in India and is raised by his farther in luxury and isolation from the realities of life. However, when the young prince eventually becomes aware of the suffering that was an intrinsic part of life, he leaves his father's house and goes into the world to seek a release from life's sorrows. The teachings and precepts that are now attributed to Buddha are promulgated throughout the Eastern worlds and are the counterpart to the Western Christian teachings of the New Testament.

The main tenet of Buddhist faith is that death and resurrection of the soul are a continuous cycle in which an individual is reincarnated to experience life in another cycle until the soul is released to experience Nirvana. Nirvana itself is not a place as in the Christian faith, but a state of mind or consciousness, it is the center of peace. The word "Buddha" has come to mean "the one who waked up."

In Buddhism each individual is a manifestation of Buddha consciousness. Campbell describes the Tibetan Buddhist painting called the Wheel of Becoming which, among other symbols, shows souls descending into darkness and others ascending into

illumination. He explains illumination in this sense as being the recognition of one eternity through all things.

Campbell cites the calm and forgiving acceptance shown by the Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees from the Chinese Communist persecution as being an example of a true religion. He also declares that, in his opinion, Buddhism is the closest religion in the world today that could be the basis of a global religion.

North American Indians

The myths and legends of the North American Indians became a lifelong interest of Joseph Campbell, when as a small boy, in New York, he witnesses Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show. His realization that the myths and legends of the North American Indian tribes have their counterpart in the religious teachings given to him by the nuns at his school awakens in him, what is to become a lifelong study of comparative mythology.

In this book, prime examples of his use of these legends are the creation myths of the Pima Indians of Arizona and those of the Pawnee Indian tribe, the sayings of whose god Tirawa, he uses to contrast the Indian relationship with animals with those of the biblical western culture which regards animals as a lower form of life.

Campbell also quotes the Blackfoot tribal legend and dance of the Buffalo to illustrate a hunter ritual and myth. In this the humans obtain the cooperation of the buffalo in driving them over the rock cliff by guaranteeing the buffalo a return to life.

The example of the young Sioux boy, Black Elk, is used by Campbell to illustrate a classical shaman experience. Before the white soldiers encounter his tribe, Black Elk has a prophetic vision of the terrible future of his people. His vision includes the image of a sacred central mountain that is the center of the world.

During his lifetime Campbell builds a collection of the works of Chief Seattle. He describes the chief as being one of the last spokesmen of the Paleolithic moral order. The chief's letter to the United States Government in 1852 is quoted verbatim in the book.

Hindu Gods

The Hindu gods are embodied in the sacred writings of the Hindu religion, the Vedas and Upanishads. These writings are widely quoted by Campbell to give examples of various myths and legends.

The legend of the god Indra is given to show that an individual can make a choice to either reject life altogether and go into the forest and meditate, or stay in the world, carrying out his job and enjoying a loving life with his wife and family. This intricate and

exotic story includes the whole panoply of the Hindu gods: Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and Indrani.

Shiva is the one Hindu god of whom Campbell gives some details. Shiva is a very ancient deity perhaps the most ancient in the today's world. There are little stamp seals showing images of what is probably Shiva from 2000 to 2500 B.C. Shiva's dance is the universe. Images of Shiva show a little drum in one hand, which is the drum of time that shuts out the knowledge of eternity and in the opposite hand there is a flame, which burns away the veil of time and opens the mind to eternity. In some of his manifestations Shiva is a really horrendous god who represents the terrific aspects of the nature of being but he is also the creator of life, its generator, and illuminator.

Campbell illustrates the idea of the act of life being the killing and eating of other living beings by recounting the myth of Shiva and the monsters. The monster, who offends Shiva, is about to be eaten by the lean monster, and he throws himself on the mercy of the god Shiva. Shiva commands the lean monster to consume himself, which he does until there is nothing left of him but a face. Shiva declares he has never seen a greater demonstration of life's meaning than this and names the face as Kirtimukha - the face of glory. That mask, the mask of the face of glory, is found at the portals of shrines to Shiva and also at the shrines of Buddha. It is an image of life living on life.

Jung

Jung was a psychologist and author. In his major work "Myths and Symbols" he introduces the concept of archetypes. His basic premise is that the human psyche, which is the inward experience of the human body, is the same all over the world and in all epochs. Jung defines the elementary ideas of myths that have come out of the common experience as archetypes.

The main thesis of Campbell's writings is the concept of myths being the expressions of the elementary ideas of life and beliefs of a culture and hence they correspond to the universal values of all mankind. This thesis coincides with that of Jung's archetypes and concept of the archetype is widely used and referenced in the book.

James Joyce

James Joyce was the author of "Ulysses" and "Finnegan's Wake." Among Campbell's previous works is "A Skeleton Key to Finnegan's Wake" which he writes with Henry Morton Robinson. Campbell quotes Joyce's development of the theme of compassion in his hero Stephen Dedalus. Campbell claims that St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans contains sentences about God's mercy that epitomize what Joyce has in mind in "Finnegan's Wake."

On the topic of peak experiences, Campbell introduces Joyce's concept of "epiphanies." This Campbell describes as an aesthetic experience that does not move an individual to want to possess an object but rather to simply behold it.

Luke Skywalker

George Lucas, the creator of the "Star Wars" trilogy, acknowledges his debt to the works of Joseph Campbell, who, in turn, is enthusiastic about the depiction of ancient themes and motifs on the modern wide screen images of the "Star Wars" trilogy. He cites Luke Skywalker as a classical hero figure engaged in a mythical adventure, part of which is a father quest. The other characters who accompany Skywalker in "Star Wars," Solo, Darth Vader, and Ben Kenobi, are also counterparts to classical heroes.

Sir Gawain

As an illustration of one of the great messages of mythology, namely that the individual must know himself and accept that he is not in the final form of his being, Campbell recounts the legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

This tale is set in the court of King Arthur of the Round Table. In it Sir Gawain, one of Arthur's knights, accepts the challenge of a mysterious Green Knight to cut off the Green Knight's head and to meet him in one year's time, when the Green Knight will behead the challenger. Just before the year is up, Sir Gawain goes to find the Green Chapel and meets a hunter and his beautiful wife. After many challenges and temptations, Sir Gawain lays his head on the block but is spared by the Green Knight, who is also the hunter, because Sir Gawain has shown the knightly virtues of loyalty, temperance and courage.

The Troubadours

The Troubadours are the nobility, first of Provence in France, and then of all Europe. They are the singers of love who recognize romantic love as a divine visitation superior to all else. They are destroyed, along with the Albigensians, in 1209 during the crusade launched against them by Pope Innocent III.

The Troubadours, with their idea of romantic love, start the cult of the individual that persists in Western culture to this day. This philosophy contends that the individual is more important than the monolithic society of which he is a member. It is particularly evident in the way marriages are arranged. In most contemporary cultures, apart from the Western culture, marriage partners are chosen by the family or society and not by the individuals themselves.

Lao-tzu

Lao-tzu is reputed to be the author of the Tao-te Ching or Tao. The Tao is a major oriental philosophical work and quotations from the Tao occur frequently in "The Power of Myth." Lao-tzu lives in the period of 500 B.C., considered the era of the awakening of man's reason. The Chinese image of the Tao incorporates the idea of Yang and Yin.

Objects/Places

New York, 125th and Broadway

A location in New York where modern kids grow up with their own gangs and morality.

New York, Madison Square Garden

The location in New York, where the young Campbell witnesses the Wild West Show.

St. Patrick's Cathedral

The church in New York where Campbell experiences an atmosphere of spiritual mysteries.

Japan

A country Campbell visits where he discovers the Shinto religion has no cognizance of the Christian myths of the Fall and the Garden of Eden.

Beirut

The city in Lebanon identified by Campbell as the site of present day conflict between the three great Western religions.

The Great Seal

The Great Seal of the United States is national symbol that includes the symbol of the Pyramids.

Gaia Principle

The Gaia principle is the idea that the whole planet is a single organism—Mother Earth.

Genesis

The Book of Genesis is that part of the Christian Bible which describes the creation of the world and the beginning of life.

The Song of the World

The Song of the World is a legend of the Pima Indians of Arizona

Archetype

An archetype is an elementary idea that could also be called a ground idea. This construct is used by Jung in his writings and is discussed in this book.

Thomas Gospel

The fifth Christian gospel excavated in Egypt in 1948. It is the source of Christian Gnostic beliefs.

Zoroastrianism

Zorastrianism is a Middle Eastern religion which preceeded Judaism and Christianity.

Lascaux Grotto

The Lascaux grottos are the caves in France that contain Paleolithic rock art depicting hunting scenes, particularly of bison. Memories of these mythologies still survive in modern man's subconscious. They emphasize the role of the artist in the preservation and development of myths.

Paintings of the Great Western Plains

The early nineteenth-century paintings by George Catlin which show huge numbers of buffalo roaming the plains.

Harney Peak

Harney Peak in South Dakota was the central mountain in Black Elk's vision. Mythological realization transformed it from a local cult image to the universal center of the world.

Mexico City or Tenochtitlan

Mexico City was also called Tenochtitlan and was a sacred site in Central South America. It was conquered and transformed by the Spanish Invaders.

Salt Lake City

Salt Lake city is a modern American city whose architecture illustrates the increased secularization of Western Society.

Chartres

Chartres is a city in Northern France that has a famous medieval cathedral. Campbell regards this cathedral as his parish church and he visited it often when he was a student in Paris.

The Force

The Force is an idea from the Star Wars film. It is an energy field created by all living things.

The Sphinx

The Sphinx is both an Egyptian Monument near the Pyramids and also a female form, part bird and part human and animal in the Odyssey legend.

The Green Chapel

The Green Chapel is where Sir Gawain, knight of the Round Table, meets with the Green Knight.

Lhasa

Lhasa is the capital of Tibet and was the location of the summer palace of the Dalai Lama.

Nirvana

Nirvana is a major concept in Buddhism. It is the psychological state of mind in which the individual is released from desire and fear.

The Wheel of Becoming

The Wheel of Becoming is the painting of a Buddhist symbol. It is found on the western side of Tibetan monasteries.

Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia is the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in the near east.

Lingam

The Lingam is the Hindu symbol for the phallus. It symbolizes the generating god.

Yoni

The Yoni is the counter part to the Lingam. It is Hindu symbol for the vagina.

Chakra

The Chakra is a Buddhist symbol for the heart—the center.

Council of Ephesus

The Council of Ephesus was a council that met in 431 and proclaimed Mary to be the Mother of God.

The Upanishads

The Upanishads are Hindu sacred writings dating from the seventh century B.C.

Provence

Provence is a region in France, the home of the Albigensian people in Medieval Europe.

Minnesingers

Minnesingers is the German word for troubadours.

The Holy Grail

According to a legend from Medieval Europe, the Grail is the chalice of the Last Supper and the chalice that received Christ's blood when he was taken from the cross.

Japa

"Japa" is the Sanskrit word for the continual repetition of the holy name.

The Net of Indra

Indra was a Hindu god who possesses a net that, at every point where one thread crosses another, there is a gem that reflects all the other similar gems. It is a symbol denoting the universal links between all living beings.

AUM

AUM is a chant intoned by Tibetan monks. It represents the sound of the energy of the universe of which all things are manifestations.

Themes

Cathedrals of the Mind

Joseph Campbell first invokes the image of a Cathedral when he describes the spiritual mysteries he senses in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. The mystery of the cross and the stained glass windows bring his consciousness to another level. Again, in his description of Chartres Cathedral, he says that the cathedral talks to him about the spiritual information of the world. He finds it a place for meditation, for just walking around and looking at beautiful things. He points out that most of what goes on in the medieval cathedral is out of sight and only the symbols are important—the crucifix, the altar, the images in the stained glass windows and the statues.

The images and symbols in the medieval cathedrals represent more than the particular religious order which erected them. For example, on the West Front at Chartres there is a statue of the Madonna forming a throne on which the child Jesus sits and blesses the world as its emperor. This image is identical, in Campbell's opinion, to the Egyptian iconography of the Pharaoh sitting on the throne, which is Isis, as a child on its mother's lap. Cathedrals embody the supreme achievements of the artists and architects of their day and they provide a place where an individual can experience a direct connection with preceding generations. The structures transcend the conflicts and battles over heresies and religious doctrinal disputes. There is an impression of joining with one's fellow human beings and looking out towards the symbols and messages of eternity. This is in contrast to modern churches that Campbell disparages as being built like offices.

Campbell equates the caves, where prehistoric paintings have been found, to temples and he describes a temple as a landscape of the soul. He says that when an individual walks into a cathedral, he moves into a world of spiritual images, the cathedral is the mother womb of his spiritual life—mother church.

Mythological Mutations

On several occasions in the discussions that form the basis for this book, Campbell states the principle that every mythology embodies the wisdom of life as it relates to a specific culture at a specific time. He says that the transition from planter culture to hunting culture is evident in the myths and rituals of the North American Plains Indians. Elsewhere he contends that when cultures amalgamate, the mythology becomes richer and more complex as it absorbs the elements of both cultures. However, in many other examples, he cites cases where one culture overwhelms another and the overwhelmed mythology is supplanted by the dominant one. For example, he describes the replacement of the temple to the sun with the Roman Catholic cathedral when the invading Spaniards sack the ancient city of Tenochtitlan or Mexico City.

Likewise Campbell describes the birth of Western civilization as occurring when the Semite people invade the inhabitants of the great river valleys and overthrow them and their religions based on the worship of the Mother Goddess. A specific example of this is the Hebrew conquest of the people of Canaan and Campbell notes that the subjugation of the female in Western culture, which continues to this day, is a direct result of this conflict of cultures.

So it would seem that there are very few examples of spontaneous mutation of a mythology. Rather the evolutions and transformations of mythologies, and hence also of religions, are a result of the territorial imperatives of different cultures.

The Christ Within

A constantly repeated theme in Campbell's discussion with Moyers is that of "the Christ Within." By this he means that the consciousness brought to him by myths includes an idea that can be metaphorically understood as identifying the Christ in an individual. "The Christ in you doesn't die. The Christ in you survives death and resurrects. Or you can identify with Shiva—this is the great meditation of the yogis in the Himalayas." Though the expression he uses is "the Christ within you," it apparently can include any deity with which an individual is associated.

As Moyers points out in the chapter entitled "Masks of God", the heart of the Christian faith is that God is in Christ, who becomes a human being and reconciles mankind to God. In this respect, Campbell's suggestion for an individual to live out the sense of the Christ within him, corresponds to the Gnostic and Buddhist concepts and is, in Christian terms, a blasphemy. Campbell also suggests the same idea occurs in Hindu beliefs when he quotes a Hindu saying, "None but a god can worship a god."

Thus the idea expressed in the term "the Christ within" can include any deity and is certainly not the Christ of traditional Christianity. As a general concept, it alludes to the idea of the god gene and the hypothesis that human beings are genetically predisposed to believing in a god.

Style

Perspective

Joseph Campbell taught Comparative Mythology at Sarah Lawrence College for forty years. Among the many books he wrote, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" became a bestseller. This book, "The Power of Myth" is based on a six hour PBS series that originated from the recorded interviews of Joseph Campbell by the noted television journalist Bill Moyers in 1985 and 1986. As the book's editor, Betty Sue Flowers, notes in the introduction, the opportunity has been taken to include material, which because of length restrictions, had to be edited from the transcript of the television series. She adds that she has been faithful to the flow of the original conversation and that the book is intended as a companion to the series but not a replica thereof. The intended audience is all those who so enthusiastically greeted the original PBS television series as well as the many readers who already appreciate Campbell's writings from his previously published books.

The work inevitably represents Joseph Campbell's personal beliefs and opinions. Despite the universal scope of the material and Campbell's prodigious ability to draw examples from different cultures and religions, it remains the point of view of a Western Christian instructing his fellow co-religionists.

Bill Moyers contributes to the conversational dissertation by sometimes summarizing, sometimes clarifying, and guiding the discussion with his penetrating questions. Only when Campbell elaborates on his concept of "the Christ within," does Moyers assert his more conventional Christian beliefs.

Tone

The book is an accurate transcript of a live discussion between Campbell and Moyers, sometimes to the point of including interruptions of each other's conversation. The reader feels that he or she is witnessing the conversation from a very close, almost intimate perspective. The effect is exactly the same as watching the television episodes, except now the reader has the ability to stop, rewind and fast-forward each episode.

In the course of the discussions, remarks are made, almost incidentally, that inform the reader of significant details in Campbell's life. Some of these are his early excitement when he discovers his passion for the myths and legends of the North American Indians, the graduate studies that lead to him becoming familiar with the Arthurian legends and the comfort he derives from mythology as he moves into his own last years.

Structure

As a transcript of a free flowing conversation, the material is presented as an almost stream of consciousness flow of ideas and images. This is the avowed intention of the authors and editor. However, this structure or lack of it, does lead to a sometimes-haphazard development of concepts and ideas. Key elements, for example the concept of "the Christ within," disappear from the narrative, after their introduction, only to reappear in a subsequent chapter. There is no formal or logical development of the underlying principles; they are buried in the cornucopia of legends and myths that Campbell recounts to the reader. Tracing a specific idea is rather like following a musical theme in an orchestral score that disappears only to re-emerge later, played by different instruments. Even so, as with musical themes, a specific idea does indeed remain etched on the memory of the reader.

The structure of the different chapters and their names is very helpful, even though sometimes the material resists the compartmentalization. The readers accept the fact that they are witnessing a live conversation and that this has inevitable consequences. The chapter boundaries are not as rigid as in an academic thesis, neither are there any citations or references to the different works and authors quoted in the book.

The sequence of chapters could have been re-ordered, even if this did not adhere to the original transcription. Chapter I, Myth and the Modern World, would find its place as the last and conclusive chapter, dealing as it does, with the application of Campbell's ideas to modern everyday life.

Quotes

"The only mythology that is valid today is the mythology of the planet—and we don't have any such mythology. The closest thing I know to a planetary mythology is Buddhism, which sees all beings as Buddha beings. The only problem is to come to the recognition of that. There is nothing to do. The task is only to know what is, and then to act in relation to the brotherhood of all these beings."
Chap. I, Myth and the Modern World, p. 28.

"A god is a personification of a motivating power or a value system that functions in human life and in the universe—the powers of your own body and of nature."
Chap. I, Myth and the Modern World, p. 28.

"Myth is a manifestation in symbolic images, in metaphorical images, of the energies of the organs of the body in conflict with each other. This organ wants this, that organ wants that. The brain is one of the organs."
Chap. II, The Inward Journey, p. 46.

"Every mythology has to do with the wisdom of life as related to a specific culture at a specific time. It integrates the individual into his society and the society into the field of nature."
Chap. II, The Inward Journey, p. 66.

"The Indian relationship to animals is in contrast to our relationship to animals, where we see animals as a lower form of life. In the Bible we are told that we are the masters. For hunting people, as I said, the animal is in many ways superior."
Chap. III, The First Storytellers, p. 99.

"A temple is a landscape of the soul. When you walk into a cathedral, you move into a world of spiritual images. It is the mother womb of your spiritual life - mother church."
Chap. III, The First Storytellers, p. 101.

"Every people is a chosen people in its own mind. And it is rather amusing that their name for themselves usually means mankind."
Chap. IV, Sacrifice and Bliss, p. 132.

"If you do follow your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid and doors will open where you didn't know they

were going to be."
Chap. IV, Sacrifice and Bliss, p. 150.

"Because there is a certain typical hero sequence of actions which can be detected in stories from all over the world and from many periods in history. Essentially, it might be said there is one archetypical mythic hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people."
Chap. V, The Hero's Adventure, p. 166.

"This, I believe, is the great Western truth: that each of us is a completely unique creature and that, if we are ever to give any gift to the world, it will have to come out of our own experience and fulfillment of our own personalities, not someone else's."
Chap. V, The Hero's Adventure, p. 186.

"The basic birth of Western civilization occurred in the great river valleys—the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates, the Indus, and later the Ganges. That was the world of the Goddess. The name of the river Ganges (Ganga) is the name of a goddess, for example."
Chap VI, The Gift of the Goddess, p. 212.

"A ritual can be defined as an enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are actually experiencing a mythological life. And it's out of that participation that one can learn to live spiritually."
Chap. VI, The Gift of the Goddess, p. 228.

"The troubadours were very much interested in the psychology of love. And they're the first ones in the West who really thought of love the way we do know - as a person-to-person relationship."
Chap. VII, Tales of Love and Marriage, p. 232.

"Marriage is not a love affair. A love affair is a totally different thing. A marriage is a commitment to that which you are."
Chap. VII, Tales of Love and Marriage, p. 250.

"You have to identify yourself in some measure with whatever spiritual principle your god represents to you in order to worship him properly and live according to his word."
Chap. VIII, Masks of Eternity, p. 263.

"And we are all made in the image of God. That is the ultimate archetype of man."
Chap. VIII, Masks of Eternity, p. 273.

Topics for Discussion

Campbell claims that there are no meaningful myths in contemporary society but then he identifies John Wayne and Douglas Fairbanks as his boyhood heroes. He also cites Star Wars as a mythological story. Are media such as film, television, and music providing modern society with a new set of heroes? If they are, who would be your choice of heroes or heroines and what lessons would they teach?

Throughout the book the word for the deity is capitalized when referring to Christian theology (God) and written in lower case (god) when referring to other religions. Does this indicate a prejudgment on the part of the authors?

In the creation myths of the Bible, Campbell cites two examples from different chapters of Genesis. In one example, God, as the primordial androgyne, creates Adam and Eve together in the image of himself. In the second example, God creates Adam first and then draws the soul of Eve out of Adam's own body. Is the second example the basis of Western culture's prejudice against same sex relationships and unions? Does the Greek legend of Aristophanes, in Plato's Symposium, offer an alternative philosophy?

Campbell repeatedly refers to "the Christ within" and, in Chapter II, The Inward Journey, exhorts the reader "to wake up to the Christ or Buddha consciousness within us." Would not the term "the deity within" be more appropriate as it would open up the concept to non-Christians?

Campbell describes the Navajo rituals and legends as being a sanctification of the landscape, which he defines as being a fundamental function of the mythology of the early plains hunters. Is the current worldwide concern over global warming the beginning of a global form of this mythology?

In Chapter IV Campbell describes his return from Europe, three weeks before the Wall Street Crash of 1929, and the following five years in which he did not have a job. He recalls this period as being a great time for him and during which, he came to the idea of "following his bliss." Could this episode and consequent life-forming philosophy alternatively be described as Campbell having some kind of epiphany in recognizing and accepting his life script?

In Chapter I, Myth and the Modern World, Campbell differentiates between marriage and love affairs. He states that if a couple believes they are engaged in a long-time love affair they will be divorced very soon because all love affairs end in disappointment. Then, in Chapter VII, he extols the virtues of romantic love as promulgated by the troubadours of medieval Europe. He points out the concept of romantic love persists even to this day in Western culture, where it stresses the validity of the individual's experience of what humanity and life are, in opposition to values of the monolithic system. How and where in the book does Campbell resolve this apparent contradiction?

In Chapter V, The Hero's Adventure, Campbell discusses the importance of young people developing self-knowledge and self-analysis in today's society. He contends that myths should provide fundamental instruction in these matters but that they are inadequate. As a practical matter, he suggests finding a teacher or guru who can help. Alternatively he advocates finding a book that seems to be dealing with an individual's problems. In his own life he took instruction from reading Thomas Mann and James Joyce. Is this advice relevant for today's youth?