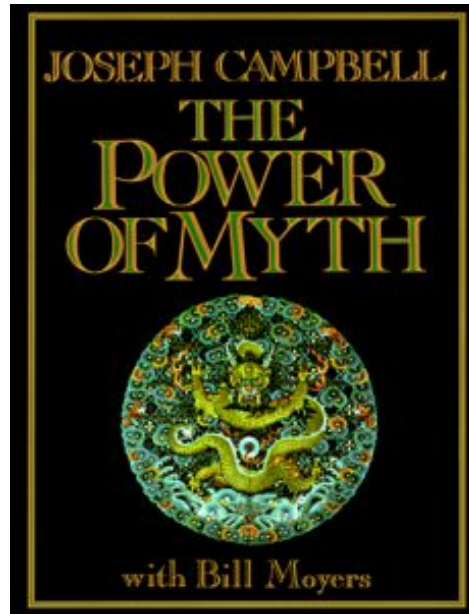


Joseph Campbell and The Power of Myth



Just before his death in 1988 Joseph Campbell, a world-renowned author in comparative mythology and religion, was interviewed by Bill Moyers for the TV series *The Power of Myth*. The interview took place on the ranch of movie director George Lucas, where they discussed the nature and function of mythology and its relevance today. Campbell's most celebrated work is probably *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, where he presented the universal story of a hero's journey from various mythologies across the world. With it he demonstrated the significance and power of myth for human development.

The first question is, 'why myths?' Myths are useful for putting our lives in harmony with reality. Those stories reveal what we as human beings have in common. They express our search for truth throughout the ages. "Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of human life" (Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*). Myths can help us to turn inward and to be able to start reading symbols, therefore the myths speak of our inner worlds. Their message is that "from the bottom of the abyss comes the voice of salvation... at the darkest moment comes the light." (*The Power of Myth*).

They speak of something very deep inside us, it is a mystery in itself, which takes time to uncover. What we see around us are symbols for something beyond, that transcends language and images. That is what we are trying to experience, the experience of the ineffable. In many traditions and cultures they would call it God, but unless there is a profound experience of that sacred element which pervades everything that is, then it is only a word. "Truth is one; the sages call it by many names" (*The Power of Myth*). They speak and touch upon our inner mystery, inner life, the eternal life. Campbell said very clearly that when you get older and you don't know what inner life is you will be sorry.

Although mythological stories of heroes contain many battles and adventures, the ultimate hero's journey is to overcome the dark passions, the ability to control the irrational savage



within oneself. And in reality there is no end to the journey. The end is not one's own salvation, an escape from pain, from the troubles of this world; the aim of the quest is wisdom and the power to serve others.

When a society loses the connection with its own mythology and rituals, we create a society with violent and destructive young people. There are no rituals in society that would enable young people to become members of a 'tribe', so they create them by themselves through gangs with their laws, initiation tests and other forms of belonging to the groups.

So we can say that myths are here to help bring us into more spiritual consciousness. They are a collection of information from inner experience that has "supported human life, built civilizations and informed religions over the millennia" (The Power of Myth), and they have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passages in life. As myths relate to our innermost being in a language of symbols, they will continue to accompany us through their eternal archetypical structures on a journey to recover our true self until we accomplish our quest. That's why we will continue to look for those inspiring heroes who have gone on the journey and through their own efforts became victorious. The solution lies within us. "Technology is not going to save us. Our computers, our tools, our machines are not enough. We have to rely on our intuition, our true being" (Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth).