

The Hero Myth - To Thine Own Self Be True!

*“This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”
William Shakespeare – Hamlet*

When we think of life, we think of many things. We think of the life force coursing through our veins. We think of life everlasting as charted for us in religious texts. Without life, our world is devoid of meaning. The absence of life is nothing, not death, but nothing. Can we actually conceive of nothing? Of course not! Not even death. Because with death, its contemplation has to occur from the context of life.

There simply is no absence of life. We acknowledge that to contemplate life from the point of view of life is a tautological argument. We have to be alive to contemplate its presence and absence. In mythology, all struggles are about life and death. Heroes and heroines conquer one polarity in order to fully grasp the other. They face death, or rather, their fear of death, in order to become filled with life.

This is the eternal cycle – life, death and rebirth. All heroes learn this and accept this. It is part of their struggle and their destiny. They must overcome fear to gain this truth. Fear is the enemy of life. It is fear that needs to be embraced. Life without Death is not life and life without consciousness of life is mere existence.

Death does not exist except as a counterpoint to life. Death gives life its meaning by framing it within a limited context. But this death we speak of is not a real death; it is merely an absence of incarnate life. Life without death is illogical; but death, in and of itself, is simply an abstraction. Nothing dies; it only transforms. The first law of thermodynamics states that no matter can be created or destroyed, it can only be transformed. All heroic journeys are journeys of transformation. From one form to another, from one dimension to another, until graduation occurs again, we move on to another form.

In ancient times these transformations were charted in myths. Myths described and explained the needed energies, flights of fancy, whimsical adventures and demons to

confront. Myths provided guidance to a population hungry for answers, in need of charts and graphs, glyphs perhaps, to move them along. A living, breathing mythology became legendary, leading scores of men and women through the trials and tribulations of life's important transitions. Recall that most myths are about transformation in particular, and this became the sine qua non of all myths. This was especially true for those tales that described the hero's welcome return from confronting death in the "underworld," to his or her regaining of more conscious life on the plane.

The Hero Myth is the most favored of them all, and the one we see replayed today in many action-adventure films. Heroes and heroines lead the way into the New Age. They are the groundbreakers of our future. Currently, we are on such a threshold again, preparing to leap toward a new cosmic unity, ready to break new ground and chart a new course. So how can we apply classic mythology in today's world and toward what end?

Jesus Christ, Buddha and Mohammed, among others, implored us to listen to our hearts. Plato and many fellow Greek philosophers advised, "Know Thyself." Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet: "To Thine Own Self be True." And over the years of our recorded history, many teachers, prophets and mentors repeated the same advice. This very guidance comes to us again through modern day psychologists, psychiatrists, artists and spiritual advisors.

Before the above mentioned proponents had their say, mythology was pronouncing the same advisement. In fact, many modern day proponents of "getting to know your self" refer back to certain myths to underline their point. Freud did it. So did Carl Jung, along with numerous others over the last century. Myths are still guideposts to the Modern Era. They're not so visible anymore. They've suffered from the bad press of being synonymous with fiction.

Joseph Campbell*, an anthropological researcher from the latter part of the 20th century, demonstrated how myths and parables crossed cultural boundaries and were recycled through succeeding generations. He pointed out, for example, how the Hero Myth appeared in most ancient cultures and has survived through untold generations, to be recycled again and again. We find these myths today in movies, television, books and musical lyrics. We still rely on the Hero Myth and one of my favorite examples is "The Deer Hunter." The main character, Michael, goes through every aspect of Joseph Campbell's heroic triad,

separation, initiation and return is well documented in this brilliant story; separation from himself and familiar referents, initiation through trial and tribulation, and return in the form of greater awareness and appreciation of himself and the world around him.

There are also comparisons to modern psychology. Carl Jung spoke of the “Collective Unconscious” which in mythical lore was related to “Psyche”, a goddess, whose function it was to inform humans on their condition and plight and advise on possible solutions. She, too, was instrumental in imploring heroes and heroines to “know themselves”. Modern psychology is, in part, derived from this source and owes its very name to a mythical goddess, Psyche, from antiquity!

Psychology, which is my field, is about getting to “know yourself,” using the tools of the trade – testing – psychotherapy – counseling – clinical investigations – and so on. Pop psychology is about getting to know yourself for \$15.95 over a weekend. Getting to know ourselves isn’t going to happen that easily or economically. My own experience, both personal and professional, is that the process is long term, with every step of the journey having its own challenges and rewards. A good book can help but is only one chapter in the entire process of getting to know ourselves.

What we are witnessing today, as the new Millennium unfolds, is transformation and getting to know ourselves on a grand scale. Already we are being told about this. Economic structures, social structures, religious structures and therefore, personal structures are changing dramatically. Like it or not, the process is upon us. The New Age sections of bookstores are full of such references, and these also cross over into Pop Psychology, Para-Psychology, Philosophy and Religion. Just check out your favorite bookstore. Looking through these sections in today’s bookstores begs the question: “Why is there such a plethora of mythically based reference material being delivered to us right now? To announce the advance of the New Era is the answer! It is already here and our choice is whether or not we deal with it.

Our current structures for understanding life do not account for this New Age information. We need different reference points to guide us through this transitional period. Guideposts that override the limits of modern terminology; that trace their roots back through

the mists time and can consistently be relied upon like the needle in a magnetic compass; always pointing in the same direction – towards the Self, the true north and center of our spiritual and feeling nature.

It is “To Thine Own Self be True” over and over again. Right here, right now. That is the Sine Qua Non of our era. We cannot move forward as individuals and as a species without this most important central resource. Our Self is our guide to our personal creativity, our life purpose and the Creator. And this true and authentic self will take us to the core of our being, our Soul! That is where we are headed. That is what defines the current challenge.

When myths are alive they breathe spirit into the population. They help all who will listen, to understand their true purpose in Life is much larger than what they’ve witnessed thus far. Behind the scenes of our common everyday life, there is another “play” unfolding. One that will see us reach the greatest of heights, which in our regular circumstances, we would have not thought possible.

From the perspective of myth, such achievements are always possible. Within that context, we can and do supersede our highest aspirations. We confidently go where we never thought we would. And we go deeper within than we could ever have conceived. As Christ said: “greater things that these shall ye do”. There are no limits in either direction. Only greater levels of accomplishment, satisfaction, personal growth and conscious awareness.

We are at an important threshold, a crossroads of purposes, if you will. We can live out our life in our everyday circumstances or we can transcend these and go further than we ever thought possible. The Hero Myth can lead the way. This has to be a myth grounded in the soup of Spirit, imbued with Divine fire, and sustained by love. Only such a living, breathing myth can lead us forward. Let us see what this vehicle of myth looks like!

Why did you send me?

When you were young how tired could you be running all over the place, chasing rainbows, calling His name, wishing for a turn at the helm of your own life?

“Why did You send me?” you asked. And He replied: “because we agreed. We projected your Self into this scene to give you a chance at Life. You answered “yes” and it happened. Here you are! Are you lonely? Are you scared? Are you sure you want this opportunity? I have other ways for you to learn. But, this is it. This is what you chose and I honored that wish.

“I love you and need you. Be proud of whom you are. You are a sacred being and I entrusted you with your Soul. Let it shine. Let it glow. Let it soar to the heavens above. There I’ll catch glimpses of it as it sails over that rainbow.

I am honored that you came. Come Home soon. Come Home safe. Come Home happy.”