

“Mythology is not a lie, mythology is poetry, it is metaphorical. It has been well said that mythology is the penultimate truth - penultimate because the ultimate cannot be put into words. It is beyond words. Beyond images, beyond that bounding rim of the Buddhist Wheel of Becoming. Mythology pitches the mind beyond that rim, to what can be known but not told.”

~Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth

Understanding life is fraught with difficulty.

Do you remember as a small child how you lived in a world of your own imagination and believed with all your heart in Santa, the Easter Bunny, ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,’ the ‘Big Bad Wolf and the Three Little Pigs...?’” Do you remember how these stories had to be repeated over and over again, and each time you would be emotionally caught up in them, gave them rapt attention, and could recite them word perfect before you could even read. Do you remember playing the role of Mom or Dad, or being a horse or living the character in a story you identified with – a princess, or a white knight, or Superman?

I remember my nephew, Carl, once climbed on to the roof of his house as a little boy, dressed in his superman outfit. Luckily his mom caught him before he jumped. He was so identified with the character, who was completely real to him, that he believed he had the powers of this hero figure in a very literal sense. Over identification like this happens when there are still poorly developed ego boundaries and defenses in early childhood. There is little sense of difference or separation between self and other or the outer world, and so it is known as the age of innocence or unawareness. Luckily Carl survived his childhood and the story is at once cute and frightening. He was identified with the imaginative world and also understood it very literally. This level of understanding can be a big problem – it can lead to death as this little example illustrates. We see this happening in adulthood in different ways. People will have a dream and believe it literally as a prophecy of something about to happen. eg. I dream of my spouse dying. Instead of understanding that my spouse is an inner representation of some aspect of my own being, for instance the masculine function of ongoing criticism, that is dying in me, due to a new level of awareness and expansion, I take it literally and believe my spouse has got cancer that has not been detected yet and keep urging him to go to the doctor for a check up. Of course, this can be a very compelling experience, if it turns out that my spouse actually does die within memory of this dream. Another common misunderstanding would be in an example of having some abstract, deeply symbolic archetypal image come to mind that represents some current condition, dynamic and process and attributing it to a literal “past life.” For instance, I may imagine myself to be tortured in a medieval dungeon on a rack. This is a marvelous symbolic image that one has read about with horror in the past that I now use to describe my current or childhood experience of feeling torn in all directions, double bound between feeling shame no matter which decision I make, and so on. It would be pointless, meaningless and miss the point altogether to attribute the image to a past life. It would not help in this life!

I hope your experience of childhood was one of being allowed and encouraged to be in the wondrous realm of stories and plays, ‘dress up’ and ‘make believe,’ but even if it was not, you may remember a time when you believed whole-heartedly in things in which you no longer believe. Something happened at a certain age, somewhere in middle childhood.

My grandson Ethan had a favorite story as a little boy about a cat who lived under the sea. It is a marvelous parable about acceptance, kindness, not judging others on how they look, and understanding feelings. It never occurred to him that cats cannot breathe under the sea and that there are no ‘sea cats.” But at a certain age he lost the meaning of the story. He started questioning the facts of the story and wanted to debate that “it didn’t make sense.” In other words, it wasn’t rational, logical, factual or linear. Something had shifted in him. And what shifted was his attention. His attention as he entered school was now focused on using his left brain

and pre-frontal cortex – the executive functioning of the brain and developing this aspect of experience and knowledge of the ‘real’ world.

This is an essential shift. If we continued understanding the world of meaning, imagination, abstraction, symbolism and metaphor in a literal sense we would not survive very long in a material, physical world. Knowledge, reason, facts, information, invention, and cause and effect in the physical world are essential for progress and to enhance and lengthen the life span.

It is a rare parent that can help a child retain the wonder and awe of myth and fairy tales by explaining to the child that these stories are closer to Reality than all the facts in the world because they teach us about relationships, feelings, dynamics, growth, and the life journey in a highly symbolic way. They teach us about what cannot be proven by facts and reason, figures and information. They teach us about life and love, the growth of our own soul, the qualities required to evolve, like dignity, courage, kindness, risk taking and humility. They teach us how to create joy and peace, reconcile differences, see below the surface, and what happens when we act in ways that serve fear rather than love. They teach us about where we want to go on our life journey and what it is like there. They are essential, meaning they teach about the essence of life, rather than the superficial facts of life. And every one of them teaches about love. The facts are actually quite irrelevant in a myth, and so we can create larger than life archetypal representations of the energies of heroes and villains, cats that can live under the sea and beasts that turn into princes.

Unfortunately, most parents accept that the child no longer believes the stories of childhood and says, “Yes, that was just make believe.” A child experiences a kind of betrayal and lack of trust in adults and feels shameful for having believed what is now seen as silly, and “just imagination.” In desiring to be grown up and not feel shame they readily discard this way of knowing for the “real” knowledge, (meaning physical) world of facts, figures, math, reading, and the sciences. Some parents feel a sense of sadness and try to prolong the child’s belief in Santa and the Easter Bunny. Some kids are happy to play along because they themselves feel sad at the loss of this state of innocence.

Development requires this desire for growth to entice the child forward. At this stage this desire is rooted not only in a genuine, innate evolutionary impulse but is also motivated by fear of not being accepted, valued and loved – in other words, the fear of feeling shame. At each stage of development there is this innate evolutionary imperative urging us forward, and the suffering of fear and shame to motivate us forward from behind. Spirit and humanity working together to achieve the goal of developing and evolving. Every stage of development is experienced as a push / pull – “I want to, but I am scared.” And so all growth requires courage. The courage to risk stepping into a realm that is not yet known, it requires obedience to the soul’s desire rather than the ego’s fears.

And yet, we can help a child understand that the stories they heard were *Real* in terms of values, qualities, dynamics and processes, even if not factual – that it is paradoxically a both/and – not literally an either/or. How wonderful for them to understand the facts of life and the meaning of life at the same time. Carl was taught that the fact that Superman could fly in the story meant he had inner power to see very far and very deeply into what is happening. He had the power of a loving heart to help those in need and the way we can talk about that is to make him fly, because it is birds that can see much further than humans, but that no human can really fly like a bird. He understood the metaphor and symbolism even at 4 and he still loves Super-Heroes! The movie “Room,” depicts this transition point in a little boy of five powerfully.

Some of these conversations of explaining the difference between the concrete and the abstract with children can get very complicated, but with time and intention, even children can understand the both/and of seeing a situation both literally and symbolically. How wonderful it would be if each stage of development could

include the previous one *with awareness* instead of repression, denial, judgment or ridicule of the previous stage? Children will naturally start developing the capacity for abstract reasoning which includes using metaphors, analogies and symbols, understanding the relationships between verbal and non verbal ideas, spatial reasoning and imaginatively manipulating and moving objects in the mind, and complex critical thinking between the ages of 11 and 16. So many of us missed this crucial bit of information and integration about consciousness and awareness and remained confused as we were sent to church and religious instruction to learn about the greatest myth of our culture, the history of consciousness and evolution outlined in sacred texts. Suddenly we were told the Easter Bunny is not real and nor is Santa, but Satan and angels are real. When we questioned if the stories we heard could really happen – like Jesus coming to life again after he was dead - we were given all kinds of answers to try to convince us to believe this literally and have “faith.” We were shamed for not having faith. We were indoctrinated to believe myth as fact. Our religion was interpreted to us through the lens of people who themselves did not understand the metaphorical, symbolic language of the texts. This is further confused by the fact that the stories that were used to teach universal truths with deep meaning *were* rooted in historical facts. How does one sort out the historical fact from the mythic meaning of the stories? But then we were often not even invited to do so. We just had to swallow myth, meaning and symbol as fact, just as Carl did when he believed he was Superman and could actually fly.

In middle childhood around 7, children in the Catholic tradition are initiated into drinking the cool-aid with their first communion. One of the greatest initiations of childhood is often reduced to expecting children to believe this highly symbolic and deeply meaningful ritual, literally. It becomes an act of terrifying cannibalism for a child who is told they are drinking the actual blood and eating the actual flesh of the son of God and that by believing in this God, they will one day go to heaven, which is another place, not *state of consciousness*. I remember one client, who has long since died being terrified in old age that if she bit the wafer at communion, the blood of Jesus would be running out of the windows of her house when she got home. It didn't help that she intellectually knew this was not true, she still emotionally felt guilt, shame and fear if she did not follow the exact rules of the church, that translated for her as a little girl, the story of the evolution of consciousness in a literal and senseless way.

You may not have been told this exact version but think back to your own first communion. What did it mean to you? How did you understand it? When symbol and meaning, myth, metaphor and ritual are understood literally it has devastating consequences to the evolving soul. It is the same as Carl believing he could fly and wanting to jump off the roof.

The damage done to the human psyche in retarding its evolutionary progress, through this very young understanding, is legion. Some of us did not drink the cool-aid, were bored by the instruction we were getting, and after confirmation never went back to church. Or we tried, but finally when our souls were not fed, we left, disillusioned, frustrated and hopelessly trying to make sense of our experience. Some of us were so spiritually, mentally, emotionally and sexually abused by the system that we left angry, hurt and broken by the experience. Others of us started understanding a deeper meaning and found we were not welcome. Some of us tried to stay within the institution to try to make a difference and shed some light for others. We often felt caught in guilt and fear, not knowing whether we could go to “hell,” for our lack of faith. For most people the great sacred text of the Western religions was left behind, misunderstood and discarded and never mined for its deep meaning, that shows the path of human evolution, growth and freedom. It became a cramped prison cell that we longed to escape.

For those people who recognize themselves in what I have just said, I offer my own understanding in the hopes that you can find a new level of awareness and freedom in the greatest myth of the Western world and can reclaim your own path informed by a new way of understanding the stories.

In order to unlock the secrets of the Bible, you need only to understand this:

The keys to opening doors to a deeper understanding than the rational, dualistic mind of the intellect can grasp, you must once again enter into the realm of the imagination, symbol, meaning, archetypes, wisdom and intuition. Not with the understanding of a child that takes symbol literally, but with the mature understanding of an adult that is capable of abstract reasoning, can see deeply into the heart of the matter, and discern truth, not just facts.

In thinking about what these keys might be it seems to me that stories that have stood the test of time are telling a universal story of internal development and growth which is mirrored in the external symbols of the world of physical existence. The process of this growth, and the principles and dynamics underlying this growth, is the same for all people and so the story told is my story, no matter what symbols, characters or story line is used. Indeed the story of our own lives is an outward expression of an inner state of being.

Our *inner* state is not static but growing and changing and so the external expression of our lives is dynamic and changing. Our story is powerful and filled with meaning and our story benefits and teaches all those that hear it, just as the story of the Christ, for example, can be an example and teaching about life and growth. For each of us the Hero's or Heroine's journey as Joseph Campbell calls it, is the fullest realization of our human life as both human and divine. The Christ is one example of this mythic adventure. The story of Christ's life and the stories of the Bible are meant to be a great teaching that we can apply and learn from, not a literal story to be swallowed hook, line and sinker. It is not about believing in a savior who will do it for us, it is about following this example and doing it ourselves. In this way the story becomes one of empowerment and enlightenment instead of dependency and hopelessness about our current condition.

The characters in the stories, just like all the characters of our own dream life, are personifications of our own inner states of being, qualities inherent within ourselves. The characters in the stories are all representations of inner relationships with different aspects of self. For instance, I *am* the baby Jesus, the Virgin, Herod, the Wise men, the shepherds and the donkey and this *is* the story of my birth. Everything in the myth represents an aspect of me in the story of my existence. In the same way, people in my world mirror back to me inner aspects of my own being if I am willing to look in the mirror without judgment.

Reading a story this way facilitates integration and inner communication, healing of inner conflicts and a gathering together of the scattered and disavowed parts of ourselves. To read it as a fantastical story about some historical person, is to miss the point altogether.

The story is about the inner pilgrimage, away from our Source, so often referred to as "God" and then back towards the Source, from whence we originated. The evolution of our own consciousness is depicted as the pilgrim's progress towards a fully aware consciousness. The story helps us orient ourselves and reassure us about the path we are on. In the same way, the story of the Odyssey, or The Lion King, for that matter, if not taken literally, talks about the same principles, the same journey, the same dynamics.

A good story is full of symbol - which is a representation of a deeper reality that cannot be seen. For instance, as a symbol, "a key" can be seen to mean a clue that opens our understanding to a deeper meaning, not just a metal object that opens a physical door. And a door can be seen to mean an opening, a threshold into an expanded state of consciousness, not just a wooden structure blocking the entrance to a physical room. A star is an astral body in the heavens and it can also be the reflection of light in the soul of every human.

When the intellect, rather than the wisdom of our soul, attempts to interpret myth it sees stories as linear and progressive, historical, time bound, factual, one time events about *other* people. Reading with higher mind or

wisdom is to recognize that myths represent ongoing, cyclical dynamics in our own beings. Eg. Birth and death and resurrection happen over and over again in our lives.

How then can I understand the Judeo-Christian myth as my story? How can I mine this myth for its deep existential treasures in a way that I can further my own evolution in consciousness. To this end, I will share some of my own interpretations. They are merely my interpretations – not *the* interpretation, but hopefully they will help to deepen your own inquiry and bring you greater awareness, light and freedom as well as add a dimension of meaning and intention to your life.



Simplified Tri-part Development of Perception and Understanding in Consciousness

- Early Childhood Archaic, Magical and Superstitious. Concrete and abstract imaginative confused and there is no awareness of the stage or state of experience.
- Ages 5 – 11 Archaic, Magical, Superstitious states are repressed and inhibited to make way for Concrete, Rational, Dualistic, Literal with no awareness of self as concrete
- Ages 11 – 16 Possibility arises for abstract thought and understanding that everything concrete and specific is an outer manifestation of the inner realms of reality, the blueprints that arise from the Mind of God and an integration of the outer and inner, the abstract and the concrete with awareness. Possibility of self observing and being aware of these different stages and stages and being able to discern the difference.

A large percentage of the human population has not reached the third stage of awareness and still interpret the world of physicality as the ultimate reality, instead of symbolic of Ultimate Reality. All stories are understood as literal and there is nothing in existence unless it is visible, concrete and subject to scientific proof.

“The reference of the metaphor in religious traditions is to something transcendent that is not literally any thing. If you think that the metaphor is itself the reference, it would be like going to a restaurant, asking for the menu, seeing beefsteak written there, and starting to eat the menu.”

~Joseph Campbell – Interview with Bill Moyers