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Spirituality 101 – Jedi Mythology

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Lesson 1 – The Meaning of Myth

At first glance it may seem odd to begin our exploration of spirituality with mythology. Yet I believe the foundation of all religions and spiritual practices find their roots in sacred stories, mythology. Some traditions speak of their founders encountering divinity. Others use special rituals, often reenacting a story, to connect with something greater than oneself. Additionally, it is (in) the sharing of a story that brings a community together. After all, it was something about the “Jedi” story that brought us here. Let us, therefore, look into the power of myth.

We live by many myths. However, they are not always painted in the most positive of lights. Too often, a myth is seen only as a work of fiction. These stories have no place in our analytical world. Yet, these works frame our worldviews. For example, in the United States there is the narrative of the pioneer taming the wilderness, bringing about civilization and progress. Much of that spirit and behavior is still reflected in its citizens. Throughout this course we will examine the power in myths, and specifically the myth that bring this particular community together – Star Wars.

The Greeks saw myths, or *mythos*, as an “authoritative word”¹ that did not need any justification. They were simply believed to be true. It was logic, or *logos*, that required the validity of supportive statements. These notions run contrary to our current views of myth and logic. Moreover, myths were seen to be timeless in that they exist outside of time; there is no beginning and no end. They also live in a different realm – the imagination, a place full of power and wonder. For it was the Greeks who saw the world of thought as what was real, and the physical merely a shadow of that thought.

Nowadays we view myths as a form of entertainment. Yet, they served different purposes for our ancestors. Creation myths told the story of how a people, a city, or a world came into being (i.e. the 6 days of creation for those of the Abrahamic faiths.) Some myths were etiological; they gave explanations for the phenomenon people could not otherwise clarify given their present knowledge (i.e. Why does the sun rise in the east and set in the west?). Some provided the justification or sanction for an already existing tradition or custom, cultural myths (i.e. the American pioneer used earlier). The last major form of myth, and the one which we will cover, is the hero myth. This narrative typically focuses on a central character and the journey she or he undertakes often facing many challenges. Hero myths can be seen as a metaphor for our own personal, spiritual, and psychological growth. They are designed to inspire us to look inward at ourselves and determine our purpose in the world. They are a product of the belief that we were created for a higher purpose. Still, the common thread with all of these myths is that we discover things about ourselves, what we value, or what we strive to be.

¹Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande. *The Eternal Self and the Cycle of Samsara*. (Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing, 1996), 1:1.

Joseph Campbell was an American mythologist who contributed much to the field of mythology. He studied many narratives and found a pattern. He then outlined the hero's journey, or as he termed "monomyth." Campbell believed the world was advancing so quickly that it had no time for the creation of new myths. Yet, it was in serious need of one that will "identify the individual not with his local group but with the planet."² I would posit that George Lucas answered that call with his arrival of Star Wars. We will see how Episodes IV, V, and VI are an excellent representation of the monomyth.

For your assignment: What are some of your earliest memories of watching Episodes IV, V, and VI? How did you feel? With what character(s) did you identify? What about the story resonated with you? What images remain with you to this day?

² Joseph Campbell. *The Power of Myth*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 30.

Lesson 2 – The Hero and the Call

As we undertake this journey it would be beneficial to understand the “hero” (or heroine). Campbell saw this main character as “someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself.”³ It could be argued that a mother does this in her process of giving birth. In many cultures motherhood is highly revered, particularly when having a child brings danger to the mother. However, one need not always perform some physical act to be a hero. The acts could be spiritual/psychological in nature as well, such as bringing a profound message. One may think of Isaac Newton or Albert Einstein who, through their contributions to science changed our perceptions of the world.

Luke Skywalker is our archetypal “hero.” Throughout Episodes IV, V, and VI we find him sacrificing his own wants and needs for a greater cause, overthrowing the Empire eliminating tyranny and oppression. However, it was not easy. He encountered many trials and tribulations, including the loss of loved ones, before he accomplished his goal.

There are 3 major sections to the hero’s journey – Departure, Initiation, and Return.⁴ In the first section, the hero encounters numerous situations before the quest has even begun. During the initiation section, the hero accepts the mission and continues with his/her unique experiences. Lastly, the hero returns home with the knowledge and power acquired from this journey. The original trilogy itself mirrors this 3-fold categorization. *A New Hope* is our “departure,” *The Empire Strikes Back* as the “initiation” of the hero, and *Return of the Jedi* already aptly named. Additionally, each major section contains many steps or stages. Campbell enumerates 17 stages.

Our journey begins with (1) “the call to adventure.” This stage signifies that “destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown.”⁵ The hero receives some call to action, such as a threat to the peace of the community, or the hero simply may blunder into it. Our hero, Luke, lived the everyday life of a moisture farmer on Tatooine. Every year he grew with greater resentment that his guardians would not let him join the Academy. However, that would change with the arrival of two droids leading him to Obi-Wan “Ben” Kenobi.

The call is often announced to the hero by another character who acts as a “herald.” The herald, often represented as dark or terrifying and judged evil by the world, may call the hero to

³ Joseph Campbell. *The Power of Myth*. (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 151.

⁴ Those familiar with the works of folklorist Arnold van Gennep or anthropologist Victor Turner see the exact same elements reflected in a rite of passage. In these rituals, one leaves the community, experiences some type of change, and comes back to the community as a new being. Birth, Puberty, Coming of Age, Marriage, and Death are some of the major milestones.

⁵ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 58.

adventure merely with his arrival. Upon recovering the full message from R2D2, Obi-Wan “Ben” Kenobi instructs Luke “You must learn the ways of the Force, if you are to come with me to Alderaan.”⁶

Even though earlier Luke wanted to leave his home, he gives several excuses as to why he cannot go. In so doing he fulfills the next step of the Hero’s Journey – (2) “refusal of the call.” Often the hero will decline out of a sense of fear, insecurity, duty, or any other myriad of reasons. However, with the refusal the hero may suffer somehow, until he chooses to answer in the affirmative or keep denying the quest. Returning to our monomyth, the Empire burns down Luke’s home and kills his guardians, thus eliminating his option of returning to a “normal” life. Our hero decides to accompany the herald signaling the beginning of the quest.

For your assignment: How would you define a “hero/ine”? Is one a hero/ine for only a moment or is it something that is ongoing? What are his/her essential qualities?

⁶ “Leia’s Message.” *Episode IV: Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1977; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

Lesson 3 – Help in Passing

The hero does not face the challenges alone and unprepared. He will encounter a protective figure (often elderly) who serves as a “guide” or “mentor.” The guide carries the dual responsibilities of “guardianship and direction”.⁷ This character attempts to shield the hero from outward forces until the hero is ready to face them. At that time, the guide must then lead the hero into danger from which the hero may not survive. In addition to offering advice, the guide also provides special tools, such as an amulet or a weapon. These tools are usually designed for the protection of the hero or to defeat the opponent(s) in the adventure. All of this assistance is the next step in the hero’s journey, known as (3) “supernatural aid.”

Not only does Obi-Wan “Ben” Kenobi” play the archetype of the herald, but that of the guide as well. He warns Luke of the dangers that lie before them as well as instructing him in the ways of the Jedi. To assist with this training, he hands Luke a unique weapon, a lightsaber. While Luke receives a tangible tool, it also represents something immaterial – the Force. Each will be essential as Luke continues with the quest.

Though the hero is now equipped with tools, knowledge, and support, there is still much apprehension about the adventure. “The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored.”⁸ Yet that next step in the journey must be taken. The hero must pass from the known world, that which is familiar, into the unknown – (4) “crossing of the first threshold.” One can think of early sailors going across uncharted waters. However, the journey need not always be so physical. Studies within the mind, delving into its deep recesses, can also prove to be quite challenging and frightening.

Often, this crossing involves facing a “threshold guardian.” It is an entity that works to keep all within the protective confines of the world. However, if the hero is to break through the *status quo*, this guardian must be overcome in order to enter the new zone of experience. Some common images of a guardian would be the fabled troll standing on a bridge or the three-headed dog, Cerberus, at the gates of the underworld. Then again, the guardian need not be so monstrous. In fact, it could take the form something much more seductive, like that of a siren. Still, nothing is more alluring and persuasive as our own selves.

The self was precisely the guardian that Luke confronted during his lightsaber training aboard the Millennium Falcon. He was instructed to “let go his conscious self” and battle a remote with his blast shield down using the Force instead of his eyes. It was his eyes that could “deceive him” and therefore should not be trusted. Yet, once he did as he was told, he did begin to sense

⁷ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 73.

⁸ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 78.

his environment in a new way. Obi-Wan would affirm this realization telling Luke that he had “taken your first step into a larger world.”⁹

Entering (5) “the Belly of the Whale” is the last stage in our hero’s departure. For Luke, that creature is represented in the figure of the Death Star, a very foreboding environment. The ship carrying him, the Millennium Falcon, is pulled into the Death Star with a tractor beam. During his rescue of Princess Leia, we find Luke going deeper into the bowels of the ship by means of a trash chute. Seeing him covered in garbage and pulled into the liquid by some tentacle gives the appearance of having been swallowed by this great beast.

It is interesting to note that the whale is a representation of the worldwide womb. In this space, one undergoes a transformation. Not only is a life prepared for a new state of being, life itself is created. Yet, for this “new” life to begin there must be a death of the old. The hero could die physically. More often is the case where “instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again.”¹⁰ Therefore, the death could also be more psychological or spiritual. Luke saw the passing of his own mentor. With Obi-Wan’s demise, Luke could no longer afford to act like a child relying on someone else to care for him. He had to mature and carry on the mission himself. Thus, our hero is transformed and becomes ready for the next section of the adventure.

For your assignment: Who have been your own mentors? What skills or tools did they give you that you used in your own journeys? How did they help you take steps into “the larger world”?

⁹ “Lightsaber Training.” *Episode IV: Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1977; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

¹⁰ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 91.

Lesson 4 – The Trials

We have now entered the next section of the hero's journey – Initiation. It is here where the hero will face many challenges designed to bring about a transformation in the character. Incidentally, it also means that we have moved into *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*.

This section starts with (6) “the Road of Trials.” There are numerous myths concerning this stage of development. It may be that this step is the most easily represented through art and story. Although, it may also be our own human nature to seek challenge that finds the road of trials so appealing.

We first encounter Luke on the ice planet of Hoth. While there he is attacked by a large, white wampa and stored as food to be eaten at a later time. He found a way to escape only to be caught in the frigid weather far from any sense of security. Even so, “[t]he hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region.”¹¹ In a state of exhaustion, Luke has a vision of his dead mentor, Obi-Wan. He is told to go to the Dagobah system. There he would “learn from Yoda,”¹² another instructor to complete his training. Shortly thereafter, his friend, Han Solo discovers him and builds them shelter for the night.

It is important to notice that one may encounter many mentors or guides in the journey. Each serves a particular purpose or is only meant to help for a specified period of time. Whereas Obi-Wan introduced Luke to the Force, it would be under Yoda's tutelage that Luke would learn to use the Force effectively.

Dagobah is a drastically different from either Tatooine or Hoth. Luke is highly doubtful that he will be able to complete his training in this location. It is covered in swamps with creatures running wild. There appears to be no signs of human civilization. “Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials.”¹³ Dagobah is so “fluid” that even his ship has no place to land safely and sinks in one of the bogs. Nevertheless, he must continue to find the Jedi Master of which Obi-Wan spoke.

Luke was surprised to find that Yoda was such a diminutive character. Yoda had his own reservations about Luke as well. Despite his misgivings, Yoda agrees to train Luke. Luke would come to learn that all his assumptions about what it means to be a warrior are just that,

¹¹ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 97.

¹² “Obi-Wan's Instructions.” *Episode V: Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1980; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

¹³ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 97.

assumptions. He would have to “unlearn” all that he had previously held as true. Yoda would show him that regardless of stature, one can do great things if only your mind stays focused.

We then find our hero undergoing much physical, mental, and emotional training. He would climb vines and run through the swamp while carrying Yoda on his back. He learned more about the Force. He began to understand “that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage.”¹⁴ We also find him being able to levitate objects and have visions of the future through use of the Force. It would be his love of his friends that would eventually pull him away from completing his training. Yet, I believe it was his spiritual encounter that would be one of his most difficult trials and where he fails.

At one point Luke is drawn to a cave, strong in the dark side, where he was meant to go in unarmed. Not heeding Yoda’s advice, he continues and battles a figure looking like his enemy, Darth Vader. Yet, when he sees behind the mask, he finds his own face looking back at him.¹⁵ Psychologist Carl Jung would call this an encounter with “the shadow.” The shadow is the embodiment of one’s own fears or deficiencies. The less it is acknowledged, the more power it has over one’s life. In destroying it, Luke only succeeds in killing a part of his own identity. Therefore, one would have to recognize and integrate the shadow, which can be a life-long process, to become a complete individual.

For the student of the Jedi Path, all of Luke’s training is noteworthy. In it one can see elements of the Jedi Trials that one may face on her or his way to becoming a Knight. They will be particular for everyone as each has their own strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, once you overcome these trials, there is a transformation as we will see in the next lesson.

For your assignment: What are some trials that you have overcome? What did you learn about yourself? What are some trials you are yet to face?

¹⁴ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 97.

¹⁵ “Failure at the Cave.” *Episode V: Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1980; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

Lesson 5 – Encountering Divinity

The last trial is significant and given its own step. This stage is often represented as a marriage between the hero and a queen-like or mother-like figure. When the hero is feminine, she encounters the male counterpart. (7) “Meeting with the goddess” (or god) is a marriage of opposites; it “unites the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’”, life with death.¹⁶ It is an awareness of the totality of existence. Now here is where our story takes a slight derivation. The ultimate trial is not with the mother, but with the father. Nevertheless, the theme of opposites still holds true. Luke is a symbol of the Jedi and the Rebellion, of life and vitality. Whereas Vader stands for the Sith and Empire, of death, stagnation, and uniformity. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous lesson, Luke’s confrontation with Vader is also an acknowledgment of the shadow side of his nature.

Only in bringing the battle of the opposites to the foreground can one hope to come to some revelation or truth, some resolution. The opposing force will attempt to persuade the hero to abandon the quest. As such, we come to the next step on the journey – (8) “Woman as the Temptress.” Often temptations arise based out of basic desires, such as wealth or power. Our own hero was given such an option if he would only join the Dark Side. Luke and Vader could “rule the galaxy as father and son.” Additionally, Vader continually appeals to “destiny” and that Luke has no choice but to surrender.¹⁷

Luke does not succumb to Vader’s persuasions. “The individual has only to discover his own position with reference to this general human formula, and let it assist him past his restricting walls”.¹⁸ The awareness of the hero expands so that he sees the disunity between truth (what is) and his subjective outlook (what one thinks is or ought to be). Luke recognizes how tainted the world is and how more grotesque it would become with him joining the Dark Side. Rejecting that existence, he risks his own life jumping into a chasm, choosing death over a life in that monstrosity.

We have reached the pivotal point of the Hero’s Journey – (9) “Atonement with the Father.” Everything has been leading to this movement and the future will be affected by what happens here. After rejecting the temptations, the hero has shown that he is now strong enough to hold all revealed truths in balance. “But this requires an abandonment of the attachment to ego itself, and that is what is difficult.”¹⁹ Often, one only has a skewed perception of the world and clings to it

¹⁶ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 114.

¹⁷ “Vader’s Revelation.” *Episode V: Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1980; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

¹⁸ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 121.

¹⁹ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 130.

as it brings them comfort. Yet, the hero must be willing to see the world as it truly is – beautiful and horrifying, cruel and merciful.

There is a maturity that happens in this process. It is very similar to our own adolescent development. There was a time when we viewed our parents as gods, but as we grow we see that they are only human and will make mistakes. With fresh eyes, the hero has a new understanding not only of the world around him, but of himself as well. While lying on a bed aboard the Millennium Falcon, Luke maintains a connection to his father. He repeatedly demands of his mentor: “Why didn’t you tell me?”²⁰ He has now accepted the truth of his parentage, thus also, recognizing the evil within himself. The hero is no longer naïve to the complexity of existence.

For your assignment: Examine your own parental figures. What are the positives/negatives that you share with them? How can/does this knowledge help you in your own growth?

²⁰ “The Empire Closes In.” *Episode V: Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1980; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

Lesson 6 – Becoming Divine

Delving deeper into the atonement, upon incorporating all aspects, both positive and negative, the hero reaches the next stage of development – (10) “Apotheosis.” Attaining this god-like stature is usually accomplished through a physical or spiritual death. The ego is disintegrated in a breakthrough expansion of consciousness. Quite frequently the hero’s idea of reality is changed; the hero moves beyond the pairs of opposites to a state of divine knowledge, love, compassion and happiness. Sometimes the hero finds a new ability to do things or even see a larger point of view, allowing the hero to sacrifice himself. Ultimately, it is discovered “that the hero himself is that which he had come to find.”²¹

It is in this step that much of the Star Wars myth comes together. Remembering Luke in the cave, we find him fighting an image of Darth Vader, but ends up with a vision of himself behind the mask. In his quest to battle the Empire, Luke learns much more about himself than he ever imagined, not just about his bloodline, but also on what he is capable of doing and what he values. Luke is no longer that teenager on Tatooine dreaming of the stars. Rather, he has visited multiple planets, and experienced life. It is with this broader understanding of the world that he decides to sacrifice his own life and plummet down the abyss.

Though instead of dying, Luke is rescued by his friends. Apotheosis is also a period of rest before the hero begins the return. His wounds are treated and he is given a new hand. Later we find our hero upon a medical bed being given a new hand. Finally, we see Luke gazing not at any one person but upon an entire galaxy surrounded by those close to him.²²

We have reached the last step in the hero’s initiation. Having gone through all the trials, encountering divinity, and attaining a new state of consciousness, the hero has reached (11) “the Ultimate Boon.” The hero is now ready to obtain that which he has set out, an item or new awareness that, once he returns, will benefit the society that he has left. “The agony of breaking through personal limitations is the agony of spiritual growth.”²³ All that had transpired was an effort to prepare the hero for this gift. Often we find the hero partaking of an elixir that offers immortality or enlightenment.

Yet, our hero already received his boon long before his trials for it was one of his tools – the Force. However, he is now in much better control of himself and the Force. It is with confidence that he can call himself a Jedi. With this talent he can accomplish others tasks, primarily supporting the Rebel cause to bring down the Empire and restore justice to the galaxy.

²¹ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 163.

²² “The Rebel Fleet.” *Episode V: Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1980; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

²³ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 190.

For your assignment: When did you gain greater insight into a situation? How did it change you? How might you have acted without that larger awareness?

Lesson 7 – Coming Home

We have finally made it to the last section of the Hero's Journey – the Return, which also corresponds to the third installment of our trilogy, *The Return of the Jedi*. Just as there was a refusal of the call, there is also a (12) “refusal of the return.” Even though the hero agreed to the quest, the understanding of the journey changed so much that the quest is no longer viewed to be important. When in fact, the hero has a “responsibility” to bring the boon to the community but chooses to keep “residence forever in the blessed isle of the unaging Goddess of Immortal Being.”²⁴ Having attained this god-like status, or finding bliss and enlightenment in the other world, the hero does not wish to leave this experience.

Once again, our myth deviates from this paradigm. Rather than refusing, we see our hero not only returning to humanity, but also, to his own place of origin. In so doing he confronts and embraces all the reasons he left. Granted, he went to rescue his friend, Han Solo. Yet he could have told himself there was nothing he could do and not continue forward. Nevertheless, he perseveres.

Even though the hero has the duty to return, the hero may still face opposition. It may be that the boon was jealously guarded; therefore the god(s) do not want to part with it. Often these struggles result in (13) “the Magic Flight” whereby a chase or pursuit may ensue before the hero can return. “This flight may be complicated by marvels of magical obstruction and evasion.”²⁵ Sometimes the hero will leave objects as a distraction to delay the pursuit. The hero may even change form or wear a disguise to escape the god's watchful eye. The hero will do everything possible to make the pursuer realize it is too much work or not in the god's best interest to capture the hero.

Returning to our myth for Luke to retrieve Han, he must face Jabba the Hutt. Jabba could be viewed as a lesser deity as he is a crime lord with considerable influence. Luke, as well as several of his friends, wears a disguise to sneak into Jabba's Palace and free Han from his encasement in carbonite. Even after being uncovered there are still plans to outwit and escape Jabba. We learn that the droid R2D2 was used to smuggle in Luke's lightsaber. With everyone in position, they were able to kill Jabba, destroy his sail barge, rescue Han and flee.²⁶ For this development to mesh with the monomyth, the boon is no longer the Force, but rather, one's friends. We will cover their role more in the next lesson. Nevertheless, Luke did successfully make their pursuit undesirable.

²⁴ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 193.

²⁵ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 197.

²⁶ “The Sarlacc Pit.” *Episode VI: Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1983; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

For your assignment: What meaning does “home” have for you? If it is your place of origin, is it one you still frequent? If you have created a new home, what makes it different?

Lesson 8 – Friends and Allies

While the hero is the main character of the myth, we have found several others come to her or his aide, such as the herald or the mentor. However, none play a more essential role than that of the ally, typically a friend or companion. In the next step (14) “Rescue from Without” it is the ally who comes to rescue the hero. It may be that the hero has refused to return or that the hero is blocked from returning. In either case “the *world* may have to come and get him. For the bliss of the deep abode is not lightly abandoned in favor of the self-scattering of the wakened state.”²⁷ The hero would rather stay in this paradisiacal state than reenter the world. While obtaining the boon, the hero can be overwhelmed or even forget the reason for the quest initially.

It is the ally who snaps the hero back into reality, much like one’s friend who keeps one “grounded.” The friend or companion wants to see nothing more than the hero succeed. Additionally, the ally can offer another perspective that may have been missed. Sometimes, the hero thinks having a companion or friend is a liability – just one more person to protect. However, the ally is a benefit for then the hero does not have to do everything alone. In fact, the ally is one more person who can protect the hero and ensure that the hero finishes the quest.

In our myth, we find all of Luke’s friends helping to rescue another of their friends. As stated in the previous lesson, the droids had smuggled in Luke’s lightsaber. Leia, though uncovered from her bounty hunter disguise, was still present to strangle Jabba at a later time. Lando also went undercover as one of Jabba’s henchmen, poised perfectly at the platform. With everyone playing their part, not only did they rescue Han but Luke as well.²⁸

We find more allies with the Ewoks. Though diminutive and unassuming in form, they had extensive knowledge of the area which proved useful. In addition, their numbers and ability to work cohesively permitted the Rebels to defeat the Empire on the forest moon of Endor.²⁹ Perhaps the greatest ability of allies is the pooling of resources.

After the assistance from the allies, the hero is now free to take the next step – (15) “The Crossing of the Return Threshold.” The hero could have chosen to stay in paradise believing the world is beyond help, hope, or redemption. No one would blame the hero. Yet, if the hero did not return, then there would be no transformation and the journey would have been meaningless. Therefore, the hero has realized that she or he must return to the world of the common day and

²⁷ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 207. Italics mine

²⁸ “The Sarlacc Pit.” *Episode VI: Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1983; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

²⁹ “The Ewoks Turn the Tide.” *Episode VI: Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1983; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

accept it as real. “Nevertheless – and here is a great key to the understanding of myth and symbol – the two kingdoms are actually one.”³⁰ The divine world coexists with that of the material world. One only needs to shift one’s point of view, as was first mentioned in the apotheosis. Even if the hero has traveled to a different realm, the more important journey is that taken through the mind.

Our hero, Luke, had already returned to his place of origin. Yet, there were additional returns he had to face. Upon escape from the sarlacc pit, Luke goes to see Yoda on Dagobah hoping to complete his training. In speaking with his teacher, Luke came to accept that Darth Vader was his father, Anakin Skywalker. Moreover, he had to go back and “confront Vader” in order to become a full-fledged Jedi. Additionally, he was given the charge to “pass on what you have learned.”³¹ With all of these reasons our hero had no other choice but to return.

For your assignment: Examine your own friendships. What abilities do your friends possess that make up for your lacks? How have they helped you to see things from a different perspective?

³⁰ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 217.

³¹ “Yoda’s Twilight.” *Episode VI: Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1983; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

Lesson 9 – Mastering Life

We have seen the hero face many trials and tribulations, travel across many landscapes (internal and external), and gained a few tools and allies along the way. Given these experiences, the hero can now perceive both the human and divine realms. In fact, one is free to move between them having reached the next step in the journey – (16) “Master of the Two Worlds.” The hero maintains no attachment to either realm. “His personal ambitions being totally dissolved, he no longer tries to live but willingly relaxes to whatever may come to pass in him.”³² In becoming a master, the hero accepts the mantle of service, going to wherever she or he is needed and doing what is required.

After Luke had confronted Vader, and accepted that Vader was his father Anakin, he gained a fuller understanding of not just the galaxy, but of humanity. Darth Vader was not a machine to be feared, an extension of the Emperor. Vader was also a human being with his own failings. Just as one can choose to follow a road leading to destruction, one can also choose to walk the path to creation. Luke saw this conflict occurring within Vader. As Luke was being electrocuted by the Emperor, he cried “Father, Please”³³ hoping his plea would call upon the good Luke still felt in him. This belief was correct as we saw Vader choose to help his son and throw the Emperor down the shaft into the abyss of space.

At last we have reached the final step in the journey, (17) “Freedom to Live.” It would almost seem a contradiction that a hero accepting the mantle of service has gained freedom. However, one previously was a slave to one’s fears, anxieties, idiosyncrasies, etc. The hero “loses his centering in the principle of eternity if he is anxious for the outcome of his deeds.”³⁴ One is always wondering if she or he did the “right thing” or what another would think of those actions. The hero views the world from a more cosmic scale. Just because something IS does not mean that is the way it should BE. The hero knows what changes ought to occur to bring this vision to fulfillment.

Returning one last time to our hero, we discover in the death of Emperor Palpatine, the lives of many in the galaxy have been relieved. We see cities tear down his statue and having huge celebrations.³⁵ It should be noted that with life, there is also death. Something must be destroyed so that something else can be created. Just as the Emperor dies so that the galaxy may live, we

³² Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 237.

³³ “Vader’s Redemption.” *Episode VI: Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1983; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

³⁴ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 239.

³⁵ “Celebration.” *Episode VI: Star Wars: Episode VI – The Return of the Jedi*. DVD. Directed by George Lucas. (1983; United States: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2004).

will find the remains of Darth Vader on the funeral pyre give rise to the spirit of Anakin Skywalker. Luke accomplished one more goal with the redemption of his own father.

Myths themselves go through this cycle of death of rebirth. “Whenever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history, or science, it is killed.” Our rational age has all but done away with these stories. Yet, for life to return, “one has to seek, not interesting applications to modern affairs, but illuminating hints from the inspired past.”³⁶ These stories still give us insight into ourselves, and perhaps the biggest learning that we are not alone. Others have gone through the same thing.

While we have seen our hero Luke Skywalker takes this journey, we too have walked those same steps – with each other. “The goal of the myth is to dispel the need for such life ignorance by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will.”³⁷ These stories connect us, give us a shared experience, a common language.

For your assignment: What did you previously understand a “hero” to be? How have you been a hero? What, did you learn (about yourself) in this journey?

³⁶ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 249.

³⁷ Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), 238.