

JOSEPH CAMPBELL  
*and*  
THE POWER  
OF MYTH  
*with Bill Moyers*



**“Fascinating...Captured vividly are the historian's  
legendary talents as a storyteller.”**

–John J. O’Connor, *The New York Times*

**“Dazzling and still potently relevant.”**

–Mark Morford, *San Francisco Chronicle*

**“Witty, stirring and elevating...Campbell and Moyers discuss heroes of  
myths ranging from ancient tales to George Lucas’ *Star Wars* trilogy.”**

–Howard Rosenberg, *Los Angeles Times*

An exhilarating exploration into our shared experience across the ages, *The Power of Myth* is a landmark six-part series of interviews recorded at Skywalker Ranch and New York’s American Museum of Natural History between acclaimed journalist Bill Moyers and renowned scholar Joseph Campbell. In conversations that span millennia and cover the far reaches of the globe, the two discuss how myths are clues to the spiritual core of human nature, while touching on such diverse topics as religion, folklore and pop culture.

Originally broadcast in 1988, shortly after Campbell’s death, *The Power of Myth* went on to become one of the most popular series in the history of public television and continues to inspire new audiences decades later.

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### **EPISODE 1: THE HERO'S ADVENTURE**

Moyers and Campbell begin their groundbreaking conversation with an examination of the classic hero cycle, including the consistent and enduring hero patterns in both literature and real life.

### **EPISODE 2: THE MESSAGE OF THE MYTH**

Campbell and Moyers compare creation stories from around the world, and talk about how religions and mythologies need to change with time in order to maintain their relevance.

### **EPISODE 3: THE FIRST STORYTELLERS**

Campbell explores how ancient myths put us in accord with the natural rhythms and cycles of life, including the acceptance of death as rebirth in the myth of the buffalo and the story of Christ.

### **EPISODE 4: SACRIFICE AND BLISS**

Campbell explains the role of sacrifice in myth, which symbolizes the necessity for rebirth, while revealing the need for us to find our sacred place in the midst of today's fast-paced, technological world.

### **EPISODE 5: LOVE AND THE GODDESS**

From kāma to agape to courtly romance, Campbell and Moyers discuss the mythology of love and the role of the female as the giver of life and form – as goddess, virgin, Mother Earth.

### **EPISODE 6: MASKS OF ETERNITY**

Campbell provides insights into the common experience of God across cultures, as revealed in Christian teachings and the beliefs of Buddhists, Navajo Indians, Schopenhauer, Jung and others.

## **BONUS FEATURES**

### **BILL MOYERS' JOURNAL:**

#### **JOSEPH CAMPBELL: MYTHS TO LIVE BY – PARTS 1 & 2**

Bill Moyers' original series of interviews with Joseph Campbell, recorded in 1981, examines the universal myths that influence our lives daily and the myth-making process from past to present.

#### **THE MYTHOLOGY OF STAR WARS WITH BILL MOYERS AND GEORGE LUCAS**

In this 1999 interview with Bill Moyers, George Lucas discusses his efforts to tell myths with Star Wars, the role of faith in his own life, and the influence of his mentor, Joseph Campbell.

# THE HERO'S JOURNEY & JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Stephen Gerring

*A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men.*

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 23*

Joseph Campbell's first full-length solo book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Bollingen Series XVII: 1949), earned the National Institute of Arts and Letters Award for Contributions to Creative Literature. In this study of the myth of the archetypal hero, Campbell posits the existence of a "monomyth" (a word he borrows from James Joyce), a universal pattern that is the essence of, and common to, heroic tales in every culture.

While outlining the basic stages of this mythic cycle, Campbell explores common variations in the hero's journey, which he observes is an operative metaphor not only for an individual, but for a culture as well. This widely recognized classic has exerted a major influence on generations of creative artists, from the Abstract Expressionists in the 1950s to contemporary filmmakers today.

## THE ORIGINS OF HERO

The genesis of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* served as Campbell's own call to adventure. After the success of *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (with co-author Henry Morton Robinson), an editor from Simon & Schuster approached Campbell with a proposal to write a book on mythology – "a modern Bulfinch," he called it, referring to the 19th century popularization of Greek myths.

Campbell instead offered to write a book on "how to read a myth." Though Simon & Schuster agreed, they ultimately declined the finished manuscript, which is how Bollingen ended up publishing it.

Campbell traces the inspiration for his recognition of the hero's journey to German ethnologist and archaeologist Leo Frobenius, whose 1904 *Das Zeitalter des Sonnengottes* (*The Age of the Sun God*) pointed to a motif of descent into the

underworld (“going into the belly of the whale and coming out again”) that appears in myths of many cultures.

Campbell, following up with his own study of hero myths, quickly recognized that movements key to the hero cycle corresponded exactly with those described by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep as central to all initiation rites.

*That was when I started teaching my course at Sarah Lawrence College in Comparative Mythology, using this as my core structuring theme, and studying and always looking for some refutation of this, some way to blow it up. I found I couldn't blow it up.*

Bruckner, D.J.R.: “Joseph Campbell: 70 Years of Making Connections,”  
*New York Times Book Review*, 12/18/83

Interestingly, the phrase “the hero’s journey” appears nowhere in the original text, though the book often refers to the “hero-quest” and the “hero-deed,” and describes how “the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces.” Over time, Campbell adopted the phrasing we’re familiar with today.

## WHAT IS THE HERO’S JOURNEY?

*The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation – initiation – return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.*

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 23



Discussing the trajectory of the journey as depicted in the diagram, Campbell summarizes the many possible variations within each stage as follows:

*The mythological hero, setting forth from his common-day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again – if the powers have remained unfriendly to him – his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).*

*The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 211*

We recognize this pattern in tales of Raven's theft of fire from the House of the Sun, Isis' search for Osiris, Ulysses' long voyage home from the Trojan War, the sojourn of the children of Israel in the land of Egypt, and even the adventures of Luke Skywalker "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away."

## UNPACKING THE JOURNEY

Campbell emphasizes three stages which he deems essential to the hero's journey: separation (sometimes called departure), initiation, and return. Each of these stages must be present to make a hero's journey, but the same doesn't apply to all the possible variations within each stage. Much critical analysis gets bogged down in mistaking Campbell's discussion of the most common elements of these stages as setting forth

rigid, sequential steps found in all hero myths, which is not what Campbell was suggesting in his work.

Campbell highlights four possible climaxes to the adventure: the Sacred Marriage, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, or the Elixir Theft, but which one arises depends on the story:

*One finds different orders of story. For example, in fairy tales it's usually the finding of the bride – or sometimes stealing the bride – and the sacred marriage motif. In the Roman Catholic tradition, it's the atonement with the father motif – and there the woman becomes either the guide to the father in the form of Mary, or seductress in the form of Eve and her children. In the Christian tradition one is not to experience the apotheosis. You are not to think of yourself as the Christ, whereas in the Buddhist tradition that's the way.*

Archive audio L1184, Big Sur, CA, 11/8/83

A tale containing every possible alternative can become clumsy and bloated; rather than “steps,” it helps to think of these as variations that are either included, or omitted, depending on the choices the hero makes.

## **THE HERO'S JOURNEY TODAY**

The hero's journey is a simple yet powerfully creative concept, found not just in myths and fairy tales but also novels, films, interactive video games, or anywhere stories are told.

The influence of the hero's journey in popular culture is especially apparent in film, as in George Lucas' acknowledgment that *Star Wars* might never have become the phenomenon it has if it weren't for Joseph Campbell:

*I wrote many drafts of this work and then I stumbled across *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. It was the first time that I really began to focus... I went around in circles for a long time trying to come up with stories, and the script rambled all over and I ended up with hundreds of pages. It was *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* that just took what was about 500 pages and said, here is the story. Here's the end; here's the focus; here's the way it's all laid out. It was all there and had been there for thousands and thousands of years, as Mr. Campbell pointed out. And I said, "This is it." After reading more of Joe's books I began to understand how I could do this.*

George Lucas at the National Arts Club in 1985, cited in *The Hero's Journey*, 215

## A ROADMAP FOR LIFE

But this mythological motif is more than just a plot device. There's an argument to be made that the hero's journey is germane to the human experience. Though the giants in the field who preceded Joseph Campbell studied myth to understand other cultures and add to human knowledge, he was one of the first to grasp that mythology has relevance in the real world.

Campbell acknowledges the influence of his predecessors, but goes beyond them in asserting the motif of the hero's journey can be understood metaphorically as a model for the living of life, which itself is a series of initiations. Campbell's understanding of this aspect of the hero quest thus reflects what he terms the psychological (or pedagogical) function of mythology: "to carry the individual through the stages of one's life."

*This is what Joyce called the monomyth: an archetypal story that springs from the collective unconscious. Its motifs can appear not only in myth and literature, but, if you are sensitive to it, in the working out of the plot of your own life. The basic story of the hero journey involves giving up where you are, going into the realm of adventure, coming to some kind of symbolically rendered realization, and then returning to the field of normal life.*

*Pathways to Bliss, 112*

## THE FEMALE HERO

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Joseph Campbell looks at multiple myths, including what may be the earliest hero journey on record: the goddess Inanna's Descent into the Underworld (the Sumerian version dates to c. 2112 BCE). Nevertheless, most examples in the book are of male heroes. As to why, Campbell observes that most of the world's myths were recorded by men.

*All of the great mythologies and much of the mythic story-telling of the world are from the male point of view. When I was writing *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and wanted to bring female heroes in, I had to go to the fairy tales. These were told by women to children, you know, and you get a different perspective.*

*Pathways to Bliss, 145*





# FOLLOW YOUR BLISS

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Stephen Gerringer

**BILL MOYERS:** *Do you ever have the sense of... being helped by hidden hands?*

**JOSEPH CAMPBELL:** *All the time. It is miraculous. I even have a superstition that has grown on me as a result of invisible hands coming all the time – namely, that 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. When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in your field of bliss, and they open doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be.*

*Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*

When Joseph Campbell died just months after recording the interviews with Bill Moyers that would become *The Power of Myth*, he had no idea how these interviews, in particular the idea of following one's bliss, would resonate with the public. Within months of airing, "Follow your bliss" became a popular catchphrase.

It's an aphorism Campbell shared in multiple interviews the last fifteen years of his life: wisdom grounded in personal experience and a lifetime spent studying myth, distilled into a single phrase.

Yet, oddly enough, this expression does not occur in any of the books Campbell completed during his lifetime. Its first appearance in print is in an interview for *Psychology Today* the year Campbell retired from teaching.

Prior to that, this bit of advice was reserved primarily for his students.

*My general formula for my students is "Follow your bliss." Find where it is, and don't be afraid to follow it.*

*Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*

## BLISS CRITICS

Though this maxim clearly strikes a chord in the popular imagination, many new to Campbell's work find the phrase elusive. A few critics have said that "following one's bliss" is a reckless and hedonistic prescription, code for doing whatever the heck you want. Countless others who never heard of Joseph Campbell embrace the phrase as a sort of magic mantra.

A closer read suggests something deeper:

*If your bliss is just your fun and your excitement, you're on the wrong track. I mean, you need instruction. Know where your bliss is. And that involves coming down to a deep place in yourself.*

*The Hero's Journey, 253*

## WHAT DID JOSEPH CAMPBELL MEAN BY "FOLLOW YOUR BLISS"?

*What makes you enthusiastic? Follow it.*

*That's been my advice to young people who ask me, "What shall I do?" I taught once in a boys' prep school. That's the moment for young boys (or it used to be; I don't know what's going on now) when they had to decide their life courses. You know, where are they going? And they're caught with excitement. This one wants to study art, this one poetry, this one anthropology. But Dad says study law; that's where the money is. Okay, that's the decision. And you know what my answer would be – where your enthusiasm is. So I have a little word: "Follow your bliss." The bliss is the message of God to yourself. That's where your life is.*

*Thinking Allowed with Jeffrey Mishlove: "Understanding Mythology": Thinking Allowed Productions, 1988*

Determining what one's bliss might be isn't simply a matter of choosing whatever one wants and then waiting for the universe to hand it over. We don't "will" our bliss; we discover our bliss.

## HOW DO YOU DISCOVER YOUR OWN BLISS?

Socrates' dictum is relevant here: "Know thyself."

*To find your own way is to follow your own bliss. This involves analysis, watching yourself and seeing where the real deep bliss is – not the quick little excitement, but the real, deep, life-filling bliss.*

"Man and Myth: A Conversation with Joseph Campbell," *Psychology Today*, July 1971

*We are having experiences all the time which may on occasion render some sense of this, a little intuition of where your bliss is. Grab it. No one can tell you what it is going to be. You have to learn to recognize your own depth.*

*Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*

It's not just what you want ("I'd like to be the next Hemingway"), but a matter of your passion. What do you keep coming back to? What catches your soul and will not let you go? There is a world of difference between wanting to play the guitar like a rock star, and always having a guitar in your hand, practicing six or eight hours a day, because you love making music. Because this is what you would rather be doing more than anything else in the world, even if there's no money in it, no fame – because THIS is your bliss.

### BLISS AND RAPTURE

Campbell sometimes describes bliss as "rapture," which is likely to be very different from one's will. You might consciously will to become a lawyer or computer programmer or news anchor, but if your bliss, your passion, your calling, is music or preaching or teaching or building or writing, then by all means follow the Call. This is the path out of the Wasteland.

Our bliss is the what, where, and when we feel most authentic, most ourselves. It is what we are doing when time drops away and we reside in an eternal now. *Eternal* means more than "forever." From the Latin *e* or outside, and *ternum* or time, that which is eternal exists outside time. It transcends time.

When you are in your bliss, ego concerns dissolve: you aren't thinking about that misunderstanding with your sister, or what you should do for dinner, how you're

going to pay the light bill next Tuesday, or what's on television tonight. When you are in your bliss, whether that bliss is sculpting clay or crunching numbers, time ceases to exist.

### **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FOLLOW YOUR BLISS?**

Following your bliss is metaphor for a process that begins with a journey, a quest, to uncover what you find most fulfilling in your life: the quest for the Holy Grail, that which gives life meaning and purpose. My bliss is not your bliss; I have to discover my bliss on my own, by listening to myself, following clues dropped by the greater part of my being.

*You enter the forest at the darkest point, where there is no path. Where there's a way or path, it is someone else's path; each human being is a unique phenomenon. The idea is to find your own pathway to bliss.*

*Pathways to Bliss, xxvi*

Campbell points out that myths won't tell you what your bliss is, but they will "tell you what happens when you begin to follow your happiness, what the obstacles are you're going to run into."

Following one's bliss takes commitment and perseverance. It's not the easiest of paths, a point that Joseph Campbell stressed:

*A boy would come to me and ask, "Do you think I can do this? Do you think I can do that? Do you think I can be a writer?"*

*"Oh," I would say, "I don't know. Can you endure ten years of disappointment with nobody responding to you, or are you thinking that you are going to write a best seller the first crack? If you have the guts to stay with the thing you really want, no matter what happens, well, go ahead."*

*Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*

## HOW JOSEPH CAMPBELL FOLLOWED HIS BLISS

Joseph Campbell isn't just speaking in the abstract; he lived his philosophy. Long before arriving at this particular phrasing, young Joe Campbell was following his bliss. Whenever he was pulled off that bliss, he eventually took steps to return to his path. This included dropping his Ph.D. studies rather than embark on a career confined to a very narrow field of academic specialization, and giving up a position that did not feed his soul during the Depression even though there were no other jobs to be had.

Meanwhile, a mythic journey that began with a childhood fascination with Indigenous cultures continued to expand as one door opened after another. He had no idea where he would end up as he followed the clues provided by his own varied interests.

It wasn't until the age of 50, on a year-long sabbatical from Sarah Lawrence in Asia, after years of teaching, having published several books and edited more, that Joseph Campbell put the pieces together and experienced a major epiphany (one that might have seemed obvious to anyone who knew him):

*Resolution: Comparative mythology...is indeed my field.*

*Asian Journals, 595*

Following one's bliss would seem to be more about the journey than the destination.

## FOLLOWING BLISS LATER IN LIFE

Though Campbell considered this advice especially appropriate for young people just setting out in life, before taking on family responsibilities and financial commitments, he believed this maxim relevant as well for those at midlife and beyond – with an important caveat.

During *The Power of Myth* interviews, Bill Moyers asked Joe what would happen if we all just ran off to follow our love:

**MOYERS:** *Are you really saying that we should follow our bliss, follow our love, wherever it leads?*

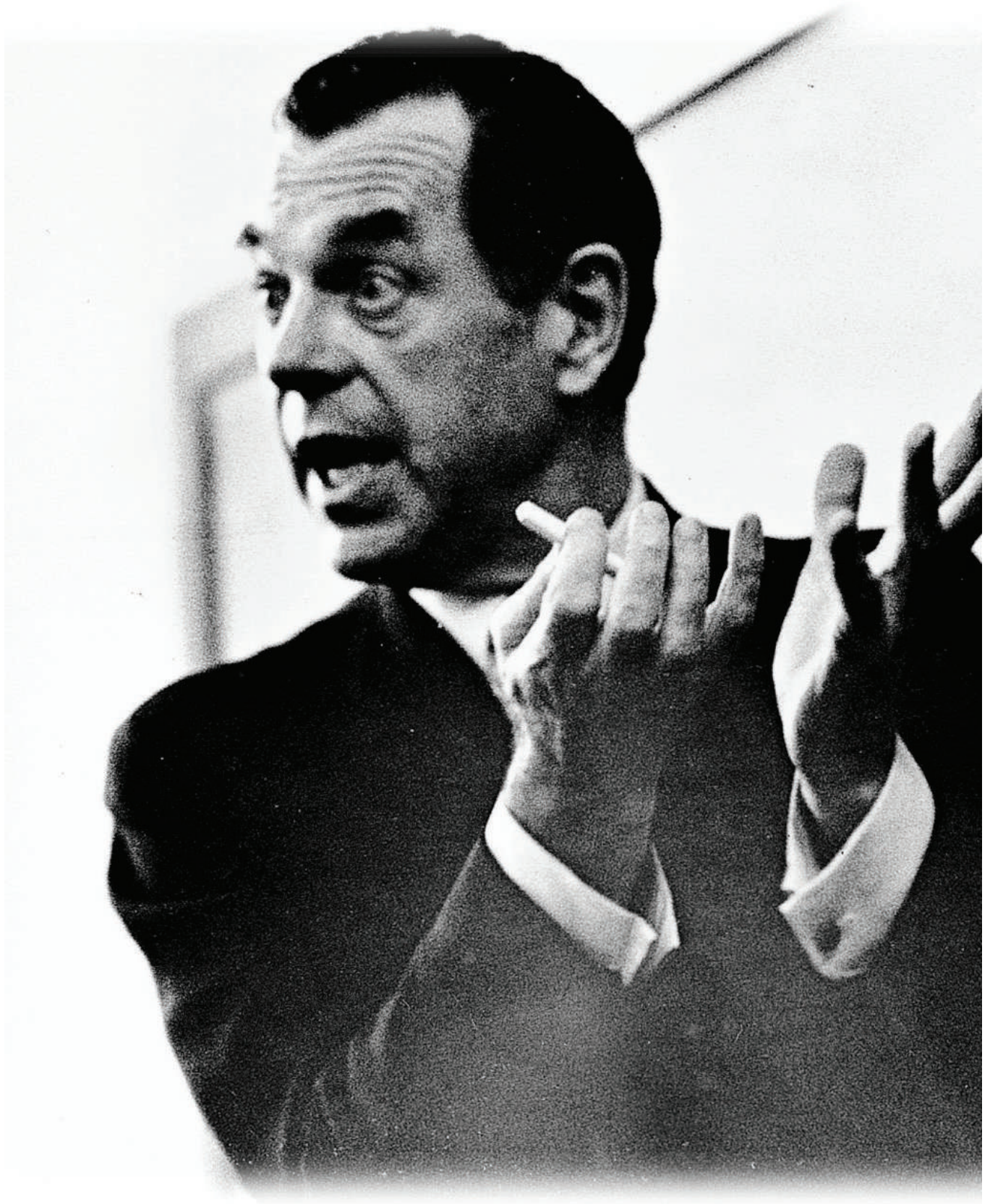
**CAMPBELL:** *Well, you've got to use your head. They say, you know, a narrow path is a very dangerous path – the razor's edge.*

**MOYERS:** *So the head and the heart should not be at war?*

**CAMPBELL:** *No, they should not. They should be in cooperation. The head should be present, and the heart should listen to it now and then.*

*Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*







# BIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was an American author and teacher best known for his work in the field of comparative mythology.

## **EARLY LIFE**

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Joseph Campbell was born in New York City in 1904 and became interested in mythology in his childhood.

He loved to read books about Indigenous American cultures, and frequently visited the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where he was fascinated by the museum's collection of totem poles.

## **EDUCATION**

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Joseph Campbell majored in biology his freshman year at Dartmouth, then transferred to Columbia University, where he specialized in medieval literature. After earning a master's degree, he continued his studies at universities in Paris and Munich.

## **INFLUENCES**

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While in Europe, Campbell was influenced by the art of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, the novels of James Joyce and Thomas Mann, and the psychological studies of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

These encounters led to Campbell's theory that all myths and epics are linked in the human psyche, and that they are cultural manifestations of the need to explain social, cosmological, and spiritual realities.

## **TEACHING CAREER**

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After a period in California, where Campbell encountered John Steinbeck and the biologist Ed Ricketts, Campbell taught at the Canterbury School. In 1934, he joined the literature department at Sarah Lawrence College, where he taught until retiring in 1972.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

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During the 1940s and '50s, Joseph Campbell helped Swami Nikhilananda translate the *Upaniṣads* and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. He also edited works by the German scholar Heinrich Zimmer on Indian art, myths, and philosophy.

In 1944, with Henry Morton Robinson, Campbell published *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*.

His first original work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, came out in 1949 and was immediately well received. In time, it became acclaimed as a classic. In this study of the “myth of the hero,” Campbell describes a pattern of a heroic journey and asserts that all cultures share this pattern in their heroic myths. This book also outlines the conditions, stages, and results of the archetypal hero’s journey.

## **THE POWER OF MYTH**

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Joseph Campbell died in 1987. In 1988, a series of television interviews with Bill Moyers, *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*, introduced Campbell’s views to millions of people. The accompanying book remains in print today.

## ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT

Founded in 2002 as one of the first-ever subscription film services with its DVD-of-the-Month club, Film Movement is now a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City. It has released more than 300 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide. Film Movement's theatrical releases include American independent films, documentaries, and foreign art house titles. Its catalog includes titles by directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Maren Ade, Jessica Hausner, Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrzej Wajda, Diane Kurys, Ciro Guerra and Melanie Laurent.

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