

Preface

We live in an era of massive change on a global scale. In the last one hundred years, there have been more significant changes than in the preceding two thousand years. My father remembers running down the lane of the family farm just to watch a car go by. Now we can see thousands of cars on the freeway going nowhere during rush hour. Our cities are now powered by electricity. Soon we will be able to book a personal holiday into space to witness our cities light up at night. Above all, the invention of the computer chip has been revolutionary. Refrigerators can tell us when our milk supply is running low. Cars can drive themselves while we sleep. Cell phones connect people from all corners of the world, and they have become computers in our pockets.

In the last hundred years, the capitalist economy has created enormous wealth. The changes are endless and amazing, but change is disruptive and not totally good or equally beneficial to all. Unrestricted capitalism has allowed CEOs to move their manufacturing to countries with low wages to return with phenomenally inexpensive goods and phenomenally high returns for their investors. Meanwhile, once thriving cities are now inhabited by vacant, deteriorating factories and the lives of thousands of families have been disrupted. Many factories remain and are still booming. Instead of thousands of workers, there are only a few staff greasing the wheels and tending the robots.

Automation is marvelous. Robots can work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and don't take breaks, get sick, or want holidays in the summer. Meanwhile, the lives of thousands who lost their jobs are disrupted. And on top of that, the inequitable distribution of wealth continues to rise. Currently, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the richest 5% of Americans own two-thirds of the wealth. The most expensive cars fill the roads of our cities while a huge number of people work two jobs just to feed their families. Most governments, so far, have failed to make the cultural or economic changes necessary to rectify these inequities.

There is one area of significant change that is affecting most of us but without any major downside. This is the area of increasing knowledge about the human animal. Science and scholarly research are laying bare more of the realities of how humans function.

We have decoded the human genome, "a complete set of nucleic acid sequences, encoded as DNA within 23 chromosome pairs in the cell nuclei and in a small DNA molecule found within individual mitochondria". I don't even know what that all means, but it is a complete layout of nature's plan for the creation of a human being. This knowledge promises great strides for the future of medicine. More relevant to the topic of this book is our ever-growing insight into child development, the processes by which a child grows from infancy through adolescence to adulthood.

We are all born into an established culture. As children, we learn enormously complicated concepts in record time. Like sponges, we absorb ideas from our

environment to adapt and survive. But this is not reasoned learning. These are ideas and concepts imprinted emotionally in our minds that become the unconscious knowledge that guides us in life. These emotionally ingrained ideas are the perceptual patterns that give meaning to the raw data of our senses. What we see is what we know. Any sensory data that doesn't fit is ignored as noise. We don't even see it. The meaning derived from these perceptual patterns creates the normal, natural, cultural world that we adapted to and inhabit. It is here that we feel most comfortable.

As long as the world confirms our unconscious knowledge, we feel comfortable and at home. If the world changes or our unconscious understanding is challenged, we feel uncomfortable and threatened. Our discomfort prompts our emotions to tell the computer in our head to find out what's going on. The brain races off and analyses the situation in light of all our knowledge and experience. When the brain returns with an answer, the emotions evaluate it. If the answer does not feel right, the brain runs off to try again. But, if it does feel right, an understanding is gained, and the discomfort is dispelled. Truth need not be an attribute of this understanding. Elimination of our discomfort is the objective.

The degree of discomfort depends upon the impact the changes impose on our lives. If minor discomfort arises, we merely seek an understanding so that we can stop thinking about the problem. By contrast, if angst and worry are tearing us apart, the question to the brain is like a scream for help. In response, the brain moves quickly to find an answer to the angst and anguish.

Unfortunately, any answer will do in a storm: "It's those Jews hoarding all the money. It's those blacks and queers destroying our culture. It's those immigrants stealing our jobs." For some men, "it's women that are the cause of all our problems." Finally, we understand, and the angst and torment become anger instead. Righteous anger feels so much better than helpless angst. In this way, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, and racism provide convenient scapegoats for our problem, so angry hatred can mitigate our pain.

As a result, in times of disruptive change, we see a significant increase in acts of violence and hatred against innocent people. If we reject all scapegoats, our brain continues looking for the source of the problem and, if no answers feel right, we find no rescue. Desperate to end the dilemma, the brain suggests a final answer: "End it all". Sadly, in times of disruptive change, there is a significant increase in the number of suicides. Such toxic solutions are failures of adaptation. In our current world of rapid and disruptive change, the chaos we experience around us is a product of this failure.

An alternative appears if we reject both scapegoats and suicide as ways to dissipate our angst. It occurs to us that we could try just learning to live with the problem. But shallow tolerance is so stressful that it too has major downsides. Not only does prolonged angst destroy our physical health, but it also makes the achievement of happiness impossible. Since happiness is the primary goal of life, there is only one solution: find an answer within our mind that mitigates the discomfort. We must make an exploratory journey into our mind, a realm of all possibilities, for the answer.

Just such a brave venture into one's inner self is the topic of this book. In mythology, this inner trip is called the "Monomythic Journey". In some areas of study, it's called the "Adaptative Response" and in others the "Creative Act". At its core, the adventure involves the rewiring of our existing mental patterns to incorporate new perspectives. This intense rebuilding process makes the inner journey a personal quest for peace of mind. It is necessarily a highly emotional experience.

Many years ago, I experienced such a transformation through a revelatory variety of the adaptive response. It began with a dramatic emotional event instigated by a crisis in my life. While the crisis, rejection in love, may appear trivial in hindsight, at the time it was not. I was young and in love and believed everything was perfect. Then my world fell apart. She left me. Life became empty and meaningless. There was no hope because she was not coming back. Then, out of a long and painful struggle to extract myself from my depression, I experienced a magical moment. Suddenly I broke out of my dark perceptual cage and my whole life flashed before my eyes. I imaginatively relived, in the reality of human emotional response, pivotal events in my life that had shaped me into the person I'd become, and I saw how my actions precipitated my girlfriend's departure. Suddenly I understood what had happened and liberated from despair, found a whole new world open before me. Everything became wonderful.

This type of experience is often called mystical or religious, but when all the hyperbole is set aside, it is a natural human response to a challenge of adaptation. It occurs when our existing knowledge fails to provide the answer we need. Our agonizing frustration mounts, bursting us out of our locked perspective and casting new light upon the problem. With this new perspective, we are able to understand and devise a solution. The rapid transition from despair to elation imbues the entire experience with a sense of wonder. The answer appears beautiful in its simplicity. We acquire a new perspective that leads to a new understanding that, in my case, helped me adapt to my new reality. An inspirational moment is usually just that, a moment, but in my case, the emotional high lasted for months.

When I tried to tell my friends what was happening to me, it was impossible. At first, the communications gap didn't bother me most of the time because I was having so much fun. But it got to be frustrating since no one could understand what I was going through, and I was not able to explain it properly since I didn't understand it myself. Here was a beautiful and exhilarating experience. I longed to share it, but I didn't know how, and I didn't know anyone who had ever experienced anything similar. I was sure that an experience as wonderful as this could not be unique to me. Coincidentally, as soon as I became convinced that it could not possibly be unique to me, I discovered that it wasn't. I discovered the world of mythology.

Mythologist Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* collected mythic tales from around the world to illustrate that beneath the diversity, each hero's adventure follows a common pattern. He named this standard path the Monomyth. Its pattern is basic to all adventure myths, and to most human experiences of change.

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 man. (Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 30)

Latent, if not explicit, in Campbell's thesis is that this mythic region of supernatural wonder is equivalent, in psychological terms, to the realm of the human mind. These early storytellers did not have a psychological vocabulary to discuss their experiences, so they used fantasy to convey common psychological truths.

The realm of the mind is a realm of dreams and nightmares. It is also the realm of the imagination where the laws of nature do not apply. Like Campbell's mythic realm, the realm of the human mind is a "region of supernatural wonder where fabulous forces can be encountered".

During my crisis, I was amazed to see again and again mythic stories that paralleled the exact psychological events I was experiencing. The storylines followed emotional patterns, which, when I empathized with the mythic characters, would call to my mind parallel events from my own experience with similar emotional coloring. As if a neon sign were flashing in my mind, I understood what the author of the myth was describing. The result was a radically new understanding, a new way of looking at the contents of my own experience, as well as an entirely new appreciation for the value of mythology. I realized that many myths and folktales are attempts, using fantasy and fiction as metaphors, to delineate the wild psychological experience of inspiration. I learned that a very real yet mythic happening known as a Meeting with the Goddess represents that moment of inspiration. Its significance reshapes everything. It is transformative.

This innate Adaptive Response is the source of much that we value most in human culture. The Monomythic hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder where fabulous forces are encountered, and a decisive victory is won. Similarly, the human being's innate creative genius dives into the realm of their mind, an inner region where fabulous forces are encountered, and new understanding is devised. In other words, both a mythic protagonist and an everyday person faced with a crisis or unexpected challenge needs to deal with "fabulous forces" and respond with newborn understanding.

And without the more spectacular exploratory dives of the creative individual, there would be no science and no art.'
Koestler, *The Creative Act*, 181

The powerful creative act is the source of Campbell's Monomyth and the source of humankind's greatest achievements. Our mythic heritage is littered with insights into this process.

Joseph Campbell's Monomyth provides the blueprint for this book. Certain common psychological barriers must be overcome before our creativity can flourish. We'll explore the cage of Mythlock that blinds us to new possibilities. We'll see how Scapegoatism hijacks the emotional harbingers of the creative process and vents them

through anger upon any handy external entity. We'll confront the Threshold Guardians of fear that bar the threshold crossing. And we will see how if confidence is lacking, a Magic Amulet eases our passage.

Our first trial across the Garden's threshold is to face the Looking Glass. In front of the Looking Glass, we confront the unleashed emotions of guilt, regret, and anger. Our emotions must be groomed for safe navigation because, within the Garden of the Goddess, negative emotions can breed monsters of the mind. A negative response to new ideas can transform the Goddess into a Hag. A negative attitude towards our own sensuality can transform the Goddess of promise into a Seducitrice tempting us into sin and depravity. The climax of the Adventure is an encounter with the Goddess in all her splendor. Everything becomes clear and an answer is manifest in all its beauty and simplicity. But the Goddess always promises more. Beyond the Goddess lies the Stairway to the Stars. This is "Nirvana", a god-like perspective where "All is One". In religious mythology, this is called seeing the face of god.

But the greatest challenge of all is yet to come. The wonderful, exciting, and innovative ideas hatched within the realm of the mind are as nothing until they have passed through the Crucible of Reality. The real test of our gains from our Monomythic Adventure comes with the Return, when we take the Boon, those powerful insights we discovered within the Garden, and put them to actual use in our real day-to-day life. The Challenges of the Return are formidable. Enthusiasm is usually the first casualty. What takes a mere moment to transpire in the fluid realm of the mind can take forever to make happen in the real world.

The world has its successful Monomythic adventurers, its geniuses. These Masters of Two Worlds trip lightly back and forth across the threshold "not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other" (Campbell 229). These geniuses, be they renowned high achievers or quiet unsung heroes known only to their family and friends, have one great feature in common: they revel in the pleasures of new perspectives. For them the creative act is habitual. They understand the tentative nature of knowledge and avoid the trap of the Mythlock. And the Masters of Two Worlds never forget the purpose of the Adventure: to adapt successfully to life's changes and challenges and to help others to do the same. In the words of the fairy tale, they are able, come what may, "to live happily ever after." A key revelation of mythic tales is that all that we think we know and believe is a rationalized creation or fantasy of our conscious mind, a vision deemed adequate by the feelings of our heart. It is a humbling realization that our conscious mind is merely a tool in the service of our emotions. Yet it is also empowering to know that if the rationalized fantasy that we believe is not yet achieving its objective – the creation of a successful, happy life -- all we need do is book ourselves in for another Monomythic Adventure.