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1.5.

The Adventure Starts Here

All our dreams can come true – if we have the courage to pursue them.

– Walt Disney

As I was discussing in the previous section, finding your own path through life requires a great deal of courage. You have to dare to step out onto the road alone and to step into the fight against your own personal dragons. You have to dare to meet one challenge after the other. That is why you can look upon your life as an exciting adventure. Famous mythologist Joseph Campbell believed that all sagas and myths from around the world relate variations of the same story. In essence, it's the story of life that is told in a thousand different ways.

It is the story of the hero who is called into adventure. The hero's intention is to slay the dragon, or to fulfill the requirements of his particular quest. If the hero slays the dragon, then upon his return home he is rewarded with the princess and half the kingdom. These heroes are usually men, but what is told, naturally, goes for all of us. You can actually see the male hero as the symbol of the masculine energy that dwells in all of us – in both men and women – the force that makes us all eager to jump into the adventure when the time comes.



Most of today's myths are not found in the form of sagas but in the form of Hollywood movies. Nevertheless, these share the same recurrent theme as found in the old myths. It is that of one person – the hero – who must accomplish a crucial feat for himself or for the world, or bet-

ter yet, for both. This feat must be of heroic proportions, and the tale must have a happy ending, with the hero and his beloved falling into each other's arms.

According to Campbell, these stories are really about life in general, and the reason they are told repeatedly may be to offer us valuable insights into life. For life is a matter of taking challenges and braving the adventure. If we fail to do this, then we die before our time. As I was saying in another section, we need to rediscover our passion for life and to heed the call of our own personal dreams. This is the true adventure, and if we lose it in the rush of things, then we lose ourselves.

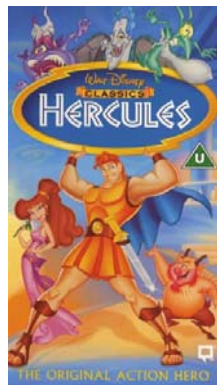
Ninety-five percent of all Hollywood movies have happy endings. The heroes of these stories, however, from their own perspectives within the stories, are never guaranteed that things will end happily. Such a guarantee would nullify the whole point of the adventure. The hero might just as well leave his dragons in peace. It's the same with real life. The whole point of the adventure is that we don't know how it will end. We have to learn to live with a certain amount of uncertainty throughout our lives.

One thing we can be sure of, however, is that unless we set off on the adventure, we will never see the riches at the end of it. Instead, the call to adventure will just continue to nag at us.

The adventure is always unique. It forces you to do things that require the use of your own particular talents. The adventure is also multifaceted. It is made up of many smaller adventures and obstacles that must be negotiated, much like a modern computer game. Computer games have further developed the retelling of the myth by allowing the player to participate in deciding which direction the game will go. In

this way, the dividing line between myth and reality is fading. But something is amiss if we search for adventure only on a computer screen and not in our own lives. A monitor is capable of generating only 20 Watts.

This mythical perspective transforms life's many difficulties into smaller or greater adventures. You are the hero. You are the one with a contribution to make to the world by accepting your particular challenges. It is you who can prove both to yourself and to your fellow man that the limits to what you can do are not set in stone. If you do not rise to meet these challenges, your soul will wither long before your body dies.



I have a favorite myth. It is about Zeus's son Hephaestus, who was deformed at birth and so was cast out from Olympus, the abode of the gods. None of the gods wanted anything to do with this child. He received further injury on the way down from Olympus, but someone took him in. In spite of his deformities, he grew up and was trained as a blacksmith. It was soon discovered that his metalworking contained magical powers, and it was surmised that the blood of the gods must run in his veins.

Eventually, the gods took notice of his astounding handiwork and called him to Olympus. His true identity was soon discovered and he was welcomed into the fellowship of the gods. As compensation for the sufferings they had caused him, he was offered the hand of Aphrodite. She was, however, regularly unfaithful to Hephaestus, which was a dominant theme in the personal lives of the gods anyway.

Do you see your life as an adventure?
Have you encountered any monsters along the way?
Were you brave enough to kiss the frog?
Were you brave enough to attack the dragon?

In general, I have a great love for Greek mythology. Greek mythology offers us a variety of gods who individually illustrate different aspects of human fate and different human

strengths and weaknesses. Because there is a great number of these gods and because they have such distinctive human qualities, I experience these myths as telling us a great deal about life. They teach us, for example, that we don't have to see everything in terms of black and white, that everything doesn't have to be considered completely good or bad. These myths demonstrate that there are many shades of gray.

Our tendency for oversimplification in such matters can have treacherous consequences. In this complicated world of ours, it is of utmost importance that we are able to see issues from several perspectives at once. This is especially true when working in teams. Thinking that there is only one correct answer to every question can be devastating. It is better to hammer out a more balanced view of things.

Most conflict stems from the belief that I am right and you are wrong and that the issue in question can be viewed only in terms of right and wrong. This is true both for greater conflicts and for one's own personal inner conflicts. How liberating it is to realize that there is a third perspective and even a fourth!

This is illustrated in the picture on the next page, where the man and the woman can't agree upon whether the figure they are looking at is a six or a nine. In such situations, it could be a relief to tell the other person, "Yes, you may have a point there." Such a comment could break the ice and lead to a discussion that clarifies the different standpoints.

One of the most important roles of all myths and religions is probably to give us guidance through life. Consider the myth of King Midas. When granted one wish for anything he wanted, he wishes that everything he touches will turn to gold. His wish is granted and soon he is the richest man in the world. But his new gift quickly turns into a curse. He can't touch his loved ones without them turning into gold. He can't even eat or drink, because as soon as he touches his food, it turns to gold. He finally prays for release from this curse and is told by an oracle that if he bathes in the Pactolos River, he will be free. He does and is finally able to hug his wife and children again.

This story illustrates how greed and miserliness can ruin your life. This is what I mean by mythology's ability to teach us about the inherent nature of life. I believe, for example, that it is greatly worthwhile to look upon your own life as an adventure. This implies that you've got an important part to play. All of us are part of the weave of the great human adventure.

We all share in the responsibility of doing a little every day to make the world a better place.

There is room here for each of us to play an important part. Thinking of our lives this way makes it easier for us to put our lives into perspective.

On a global level it is of course easy to see that mankind has many life-and-death adventures to get through. We have to face poverty, starvation, sickness, environmental destruction and the threat of war. Each of us bears a share of the responsibility for these challenges. And so each of must take part in diminishing these problems.

Let's return to Hephaestus for a moment. What I find especially appealing about the story of Hephaestus is that it tells about a man who is able to cheat fate. He refines his special talents instead of getting stuck within his shortcomings. He develops his abilities and uses these to give the world something it has never seen before. And as a result of this, he wins his Aphrodite.

In short, that's how the world turns!



Yes, you may have a point there ...