

Pathways to Bliss

Mythology and Personal Transformation

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Edited & With a Foreword by DAVID KUDLER

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For students of mythology, psychology, theology, and spirituality, Joseph Campbell needs no introduction. It could be argued that he is the world's best-known and best-loved author and translator of mythology of the 20th century, one whose stories and ideas have become a part of our collective wisdom. Campbell spent 25 years studying, writing about, and teaching world mythology before he began to turn his knowledge into a comprehensive guide for personal transformation through understanding the symbolism inherent in the myths. His informed yet relaxed and witty writing style makes his insights easily available to the lay reader. As I read his books, I think of Campbell as someone who takes a detached look at humanity as it has existed throughout history, documenting the changing mythologies as they emerge in different cultures. He charts the differences, and he charts the changes over time, but mostly he looks for the common threads, the themes that reveal the steady, universal longings of the human heart. Like an alien being sent to study human nature, he is able to see human myth and story as ways to illuminate the collective evolution of the human creature.

Pathways to Bliss was published posthumously (Campbell died in 1987) as a continuation of the direction his work had been taking in his later years, which was to act as a soul-guide for seekers of transformation. Campbell takes a broad overview of mythology in the early chapters, which he then draws down into the subject of personal mythology. How do we live our lives? What collective cultural myths inform each person's underlying, guiding mythology? How do we uncover these myths, which in modern life seem to have completely lost their potency for many people?

Those readers familiar with Campbell will recognize the connection his work has to that of Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist whose concepts inform much of modern psychology. Campbell once said that mythology is other people's religion. In *Pathways*, Campbell draws heavily on Jung's work and ideas to show how mythology is as much the psychology of the ancients as it is the religion. Jung, of course, was a student of mythology, and used mythological symbols to help define the images of the unconscious mind. Campbell here outlines, in brief, some of Jung's basic ideas on the structure of the mind and how the mind uses mythological symbols to understand and give meaning to human experience.

Campbell recognizes that the role of psychology in modern society is to act as a myth-builder. He sees psychological crises as a loss of myth, a lack of meaningful symbolism to guide us. We have suffered a loss of the knowledge of transcendence, of connection to something bigger than ourselves, that myth and religion provided to our ancestors. Jung thought a new mythology would spring up naturally and that humanity would find its way, collectively, to a new story, one that included the knowl-

edge that scientific discovery has brought us.

Campbell, however, sees the situation differently. He says the way out of humanity's spiritual quagmire lies in individual mythology. Campbell's *bliss* is a similar concept to Jung's *individuation*. Jung's idea is that through the individuation process one finds oneself back at the beginning: union with the divine. This is to say that within us all is the spark of the divine that is our birthright. Through finding our own individual path in life as separate from culturally imposed expectations, we find our souls. Campbell calls this "finding your bliss." To him the true challenge for each individual in life is not whether or not to take the expected job or career course, but whether or not one can take a course in life that leads one to truly be who he or she is on a soul level. Who are you, really? Does your life reflect that essence, or not? If not, you are not following your bliss.

Pathways concludes with a section of questions and answers taken from lectures Campbell gave over the years. These dialogues offer wonderful insight into the essential Joseph Campbell and complement the written chapters very nicely. Readers not familiar with Campbell will find *Pathways to Bliss* a fine introduction to his work and ideas. This book does not have the in-depth analysis of worldwide mythology that his many other books carry. Rather, this is a guidebook for finding one's own inner hero or heroine, and for finding the guts to listen to one's own story. Readers familiar with Campbell will enjoy this book because of its easy access to his thinking. He synthesizes very broad ideas into a guide for living a courageous life. ■

REVIEWER: **Faye Maguire** received her master's degree in psychology from Regis College in Denver, CO.