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Number of Speakers

Joseph Campbell: We want to think about God. [0:00:30] God is a thought. God is an idea. But its reference is to something that transcends all thinking. I mean, he is beyond being, beyond the category of being a non-being. Is he or is he not? Neither is nor is not? [0:01:00] Every God, every mythology, every religion is true in this sense. It is true as metaphorical of the human and cosmic mystery.

He who thinks he knows doesn't know. He, who knows that he doesn't know, knows. [0:01:30] There is an old story that is still good, the story of the quest, the spiritual quest. That is to say to find the inward thing, what you basically are.

All of these symbols in mythology refer to you. Have you been reborn? [0:02:00] Have you died to your animal nature and come to life as a human incarnation? You are God in your deepest identity. [0:02:30] You are one with the transcendent. [0:03:00]

Bill Moyers: Joseph Campbell believed all our names and images for God are masks, masks of eternity, signifying a reality and human experience that transcends language and art. A myth is a mask of God too, a metaphor for what lies behind the visible world. As teacher, scholar, and writer, Joseph Campbell wanted to know what it means that God [0:03:30] assumes such different masks in different cultures.

We go East of Suez as he said and see people dancing before a bewildering array of fantastic Gods. But when those people come here, well, Campbell told the story of the young Hindu who called on him in New York and said, "When I visit a foreign country, I like to acquaint myself with this religion," so I bought myself a Bible and for some months now have been reading it from the very beginning. But you know, I can't find any religion in it. [0:04:00]

Campbell, who became President of the American Society for the Study of Religion, roamed at the sacred scriptures of all the worlds' great faiths. He found comparable stories in them, stories of creation, of virgin births, incarnations, death and resurrection, second comings, judgment days. Quoting one that is favorite Hindu scriptures, which he translated from the Sanskrit, he concluded that truth is one. The sages speak of it by many names. [0:04:30]

Joseph Campbell began his journey into this literature of the spirit after his imagination was excited by a visit to the museum of natural history in New York when he was just a boy. We met there a few months before his death in 1987 at the age of 83 and we talked through the evening about the Masks of Eternity.

Moyers: Is there something in common every culture that creates this need for God?

Joseph Campbell: Well, I think [0:05:00] anyone who has an experience of mystery at all knows that there is a dimension, let's say, of the universe that is not that, which is available to his senses. There is a wonderful saying in one of the Upanishads, when for a sunset or a mountain [0:05:30] and the beauty of this or of that, you pause and say, "Ah", that is participation in divinity."

And I think that's what it is. It's the realization of wonder and also the experience of tremendous power, which people, of course, living in the world of nature are experiencing all the time. You know, there is something there that is much bigger than the human dimension.

And our way of thinking in the West largely is [0:06:00] that God is the source of the energy. The way in most oriental thinking, and I think in most what we call primitive thinking also is the God is a manifestation of the energy, not the source, the God is the vehicle of the energy and the level of energy that is involved are represented, determines [0:06:30] the character of the God.

There are Gods of violence, there are Gods of compassion, there are Gods that unite the two there are Gods that are the protectors of kings in their war campaigns. These are personifications of the energy that's in play and what the source of the energy is. What's the source of the energy of these lights around us? I mean, this is a total mystery.

Moyers: Doesn't this make of faith an anarchy, [0:07:00] a sort of continuing war among principalities?

Joseph Campbell: As life is, yes. I mean, even in your mind you wonder when it comes to do anything. There will be a war, a decision as to priorities. What should you do now? Or in relationship to other people, there will four or five possibilities in my way of action and the notion of divinity or divine life in my mind would be what would determine my decision. And if we're rather **crude** [Phonetic] [0:07:30], it would be a rather crude decision.

Moyers: Is divinity just what we think?

Joseph Campbell: Yes.

Moyers: What does that do to faith?

Joseph Campbell: Well, it's the tough one about faith.

Moyers: You are a man of faith. You're a man of wonder.

Joseph Campbell: Yes. I don't have to have faith. I have experience.

Moyers: What kind of experience?

Joseph Campbell: Well, I have experience of the wonder of the life. I have experience of love. I have experience of [0:08:00] hatred, malice, I'd like to punch a guy's jaw and I admit this. But those are different divinities, I mean, from the point of view of a symbolic imaging. Those were different images operating in me.

For instance, when I was a little boy and I was being brought up a Roman Catholic, I was told I had a guardian angel on my right side and a tempting devil on my left. And when it came to making a decision of what I would do, [0:08:30] the decision would depend on which one had most influence on me. And I must say that in my boyhood and I think also in the people who were teaching me, they actually concretize those thoughts.

Moyers: They did what?

Joseph Campbell: It was an angel. That angel is a fact and the devil is a fact. Do you see? But why one thinks of them as metaphors for the energies that are afflicting and guiding you.

Moyers: And those [0:09:00] energies come from?

Joseph Campbell: From your own life, the energy of your own body, the different organs in your body including your head are the conflict systems.

Moyers: And your life comes from where?

Joseph Campbell: Yes, there you are. From the ultimate energy, that's the life of the universe. And then you say, well, somebody has to generate that. Why do you have to say that? Why can't it be impersonal? That would be Brahman. That would be the transcendent mystery that you can also [0:09:30] personify.

Moyers: Can men and women live with an impersonality?

Joseph Campbell: Yes. They do all over the place. Just go east of Suez. In the East, the Gods are much more elemental.

Moyers: Elemental?

Joseph Campbell: Elemental. Less human and more like the powers of [0:10:00] nature. I see a deity as representing an energy system and part of the energy system is the human energy systems of love, and malice, hate, benevolence, compassion and in oriental thinking, the God is the vehicle of the energy, not the source. [0:10:30]

Moyers: Well, of course, the heart of the Christian faith is that these elemental forces you are talking about embodied themselves in a human being and reconciling mankind to God.

Joseph Campbell: Yes and the basic Buddhist idea is that that is true of you as well. And what Jesus was, was a person who realized that in himself and lived out of the Christhood of his nature.

Moyers: [0:11:00] What do you think about Jesus?

Joseph Campbell: We just don't know Jesus. All we know are four contradictory texts that tell us what he did.

Moyers: Written many years after he lived.

Joseph Campbell: But, I think we know what Jesus said. I think the sayings of Jesus are probably pretty close. But when you read the Thomas gospel, the gospel according to Thomas, which was dug up there with those other agnostic texts, it has all the flavor [0:11:30] of one of the synaptics – Matthew, Mark, or Luke – except that it doesn't say quite the same thing.

There's one wonderful passage, it's the last one in the gospel actually. When will the kingdom come? Now in Mark 13, I think it is, we hear that the end of the world is going to come. That is to say a mythological image, that's the end of the world, is taken as a reference to an actual physical historical fact to be. [0:12:00]

When you read the Thomas gospel, Jesus says, "The kingdom of the father will not come by expectation. The kingdom of the father is spread upon the earth and men do not see it." So I look at you now in that sense, and the radiance of the presence of the divine is known to me through you.

Moyers: Through me?

Joseph Campbell: You. Sure.

Moyers: A journalist? [0:12:30]

Joseph Campbell: Jesus also says in this text, "He who drinks from my mouth will become as I am and I shall be he. He's talking from the point of view of that being of beings, which we call the Christ who is the being of all of us. And anyone who lives in relation to that is as Christ. And anyone who incarnates [0:13:00] or rather brings into his life the message of the word is equivalent to Jesus. That's the sense there.

Moyers: So that's what you mean when you say I am radiating God to you.

Joseph Campbell: You are, yes.

Moyers: And you to me.

Joseph Campbell: And I'm speaking this seriously.

Moyers: No, no, I take it seriously. I happen to believe the same as you without being able to articulate it as you do. I do sense that there is divinity. That divinity is in the other.

Joseph Campbell: So you are the vehicle. You are as if were [0:13:30] a radiant of the spirit. And that's – why not recognize it?

Moyers: I'll tell you what the most gripping scripture in the Christian New Testament is for me. It says, "I believe, help thou my unbelief."

Joseph Campbell: I believe in what?

Moyers: I believe in this ultimate reality [0:14:00] and that I can experience it, that I do experience it. But I don't have answers to my questions. I believe in the question. Is there a God?

Joseph Campbell: I have a very amusing experience, which it might be well worth telling. I was in the New York Athletic Club swimming pool. And you know, you don't wear your collar this way or that way, you just wear that way when you're in swimming pool. And I was introduced to a priest. This is father so and so, [0:14:30] this is Joseph Campbell. I'm a professor. He's a professor at one of our Catholic universities.

So after I'd had my swim, I came and sat down beside in what we call, you know, the horizontal athlete situation, and the priest is beside me. And he said, "Mr. Campbell, are you a priest?" I said, "No, father." He said, "Are you a Catholic?" I said, "I was, father." [0:15:00] He said, and now he had the sense to ask it this way. "Do you believe in a personal God?" I said, "No, father." And he said, "Well, I suppose there is no way to prove by logic the existence of a personal God." And I said, "If there were, father, what would be the value of faith?" "Well, Mr. Campbell, it's nice to have met you." And he was off. I really felt I'd done a jujitsu[0:15:30] trick.

But that was a very illuminating conversation to me. The fact that he asked, "Do you believe in a personal God?" I meant that he also recognized the possibility of the Brahman, of the transcendent energy.

Moyers: Well, then, what is religion?

Joseph Campbell: Well, the word religion means, religio, linking back. Linking back the phenomenal person [0:16:00] to a source. If we say it is the one life in both of us, then my separate life has been linked to the one life, religio, linked back.

Moyers: And this ...

Joseph Campbell: And this becomes symbolized in the images of religion, which represent that connecting link.

Moyers: Your friend **Jung** [0:16:24], the great psychologist says that the most powerful [0:16:30] religious symbol is the circle. He says, "The circle is one of the great primordial images of mankind that in considering the symbol of the circle, we are analyzing the self." And I find you in your own work throughout the course of your life

coming across the circle whether it's in the magical designs the world over, whether it's in the architecture, both ancient and modern, whether it's in the dome-shaped temples of India or the calendar stones of the Aztecs, [0:17:00] or the ancient Chinese bronze shields or the vision of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, when you talk about the wheel and the sky. You keep coming across these images.

Joseph Campbell: Yes. It's an every present thing. It's the center from which you've come back to which you go. I remember reading in a book about the American-Indians called *The Indians' Book* by Natalie Curtis, which was published around 1904 [0:17:30]. Her conversation with a chief, I think it was a chief of the Pawnee tribe.

And among the things he said was, "When we pitch camp, we pitch a camp in a circle. When we look at the horizon, the horizon is in a circle. When the eagle builds a nest, the nest is in a circle." [0:18:00] And then you read in Plato somewhere, the soul is a circle. I suppose the circle represents a totality. Within the circle is one thing. It is in circle that's enframed. That would be the spatial aspect. But the temporal aspect of the circle is, you leave, go somewhere and come back, the Alpha and Omega. God is the Alpha and Omega, [0:18:30] the source and the end. Somehow, the circle suggest immediately a completed totality whether in time or in space.

Moyers: No beginning, no end.

Joseph Campbell: Well, round and round and round. The year, well, this is November again, you know, and we're about to have Thanksgiving again. We're about to have Christmas again. And then, not only the year [0:19:00] but the month, the moon cycle, and the day cycle. And this is – we're reminded of this when we look on our watch and see the cycle of time is the same hour, the same hour, but another day and all that sort of thing.

Moyers: Why do you suppose the circle became so universally symbolic?

Joseph Campbell: Well, it's because it's experienced all the time, the experience in the day and the year just as we've said. [0:19:30] And you experience it in leaving home, going on your adventure, hunting, or whatever may be and coming back to home. And then there's a deeper one also, the mystery of the womb and the tomb when people are buried, it's for rebirth. I mean, that's the origin of the burial idea. You put back into the womb of mother earth for rebirth.

Moyers: And Jung kept returning to that theme of the circle as being the sort of [0:20:00] universal symbol.

Joseph Campbell: Well, Jung used it as a pedagogical device, actually, what he called the Mandala. This was actually a Hindu term for a sacred circle.

Moyers: Here is one of the pictures.

Joseph Campbell: That's a very elaborate Mandala. You have the deity at the center with the power source, the illumination source, and these are the manifestations or aspects [0:20:30] of its radiance. But in working out a Mandala for oneself, what one does is draw a circle and then think of the different impulse systems in your life, the different value systems in your life and try then to compose them and find where the center is. It's a kind of discipline for pulling all those scattered aspects of your life together, finding a [0:21:00] center and ordering yourself to it. So, you're trying to coordinate your circle with the universal circle.

Moyers: To be at the center.

Joseph Campbell: At the center. The Navajo have that wonderful image of what they call the pollen path. And when you realize what pollen is, it's the life source and it's a single path at the center. And then they were saying, oh, beauty before me, beauty behind me, beauty to the right [0:21:30] of me, beauty to the left of me, beauty above me, beauty below me. I'm on the pollen path.

It's in the little cosmos of one's own life and the macrocosm of the world's life are in some way to be coordinated. Well first, it's among the Navajo Indians' healing ceremonies [0:22:00] were conducted by way of sand paintings, which are mostly Mandalas on the ground and then the person who is to be treated moves into the Mandala. There will be a mythological context that you will be identifying with and he identifies himself with that power.

And this idea of sand painting with Mandalas and used for meditation purposes appears [0:20:30] also in Tibet. In the great tantric monasteries outside of Lhasa, for instance, Gyuto, they practiced sand painting, cosmic images and so forth indicating the forces of the spiritual powers that operate in our lives.

Moyers: Now what do you make of that that in two very different cultures, the same imagery emerges.

Joseph Campbell: Yes. Well, [0:23:00] there are only two ways to explain it and one is by diffusion that an influence came from that here and the other is by separate development and when you have the idea of separate development, this speaks for certain powers in the psyche, which are common to all mankind. Otherwise, you couldn't have – and to the detail, the correspondences can be identified. [0:23:30] It's astonishing when one studies these things in depth. The degree to which the agreements go between totally separated cultures.

Moyers: Which says something about the commonality of the species, doesn't it?

Joseph Campbell: Well, yes. That was Carl Jung's idea, which he calls the archetypes – archetypes of the collective unconscious.

Moyers: What do you mean by archetypes?



Joseph Campbell: An archetype is a constant form, [0:24:00] a basic fundamental form, which appears in the works of that person over there and this person over here without connection. And they are expressions of the structure of the human psyche.

Moyers: So if you find in a variety of cultures, each one telling the story of creation or the story of a virgin birth or the story of a savior who comes and dies [0:24:30] and is resurrected, you're saying something about what is inside us and the need to understand.

Joseph Campbell: That's right. One can say that the images of myth are reflections of spiritual and depth potentialities of every one of us. And that from contemplating those, we evoke those powers in our own lives to operate through ourselves. [0:25:00] There was a very important anthropologist. He's the one with whom my works begin, you might say, my studies. Bastian [0:25:07] in Germany and in the last century and first part of this. He was a world traveler and recognized very soon that there were certain motifs that appeared in all of the religions and all the mythologies in the world.

Such an idea for example as a spiritual power, that's an archetypal image [0:25:30] that appears everywhere. And he calls these elementary ideas. But they appear in very different forms in different provinces and different times. And those different forms or costumes, he called ethnic or folk ideas. But within the ethnic idea is the elementary idea. And it is those elementary ideas that Carl Jung then began studying and called archetypes of the [0:26:00] unconscious.

When you say elementary idea, they seem to come from up here. When you say archetypes of the unconscious, they come from up here and they appear in our dreams as well as in the myths.

Moyers: So when one scripture talked about being made in His image/God's image, it's being created with certain qualities that every human being possesses no matter what that person's religion or culture or geography or heritage.

Joseph Campbell: God would be the ultimate [0:26:30] elementary idea of man.

Moyers: The primal being [0:26:33].

Joseph Campbell: And we are all made in the image of God, okay? So that is the ultimate elementary idea or archetype of man.

Moyers: I feel stronger in my own faith knowing that others had the same yearnings and we're seeking for the same images to try to express and experience that couldn't be costumed in ordinary human language.

Joseph Campbell: That's right.

Moyers: I feel much more [0:27:00] kinship with all those who follow other ways because it's [0:27:05].

Joseph Campbell: This is why clowns are good.

Moyers: Clown.

Joseph Campbell: In religions because they show that the image is not a fact but it's a reflex of some kind.

Moyers: So does this help explain the trickster Gods that show up [0:27:20].

Joseph Campbell: Very much that, yes. Some of the best trickster stories are associated with our American-Indian tales. Now, these figures are [0:27:30] clown-like figures and yet they are the creator God at the same time very often. And this makes the point I am not the ultimate image. I am transparent to something. Through me, through my funny form and mocking it and turning it into a grotesque action, you really get the sense, which if I have been a big sober presence you get stuck with the image. [0:28:00]

Moyers: There's a wonderful story in some African tradition of the God is walking down the road and the God has on a hat that is colored red on one side and blue on the other side. So when the people – the farmers in the field go into the village in the evening. They said, "Did you see that fellow, that God with the blue hat?" And the other said, "No, no, he had a red hat on." And they get into a fight.

Joseph Campbell: He even makes it worse by first walking along this direction, [0:28:30] then turning around, turning his hat around, so that again it will be red and black or whatever. And then when these two chaps fight and brought before the king or chief or judgment, this fellow appears and he says, "It's my fault. I did it. Spreading strife is my greatest joy."

Moyers: And there's a truth in that?

Joseph Campbell: Sure is. Yes.

Moyers: Which is?

Joseph Campbell: No matter what system of thought you have, it can possibly include [0:29:00] boundless life. And when you think everything sets that way, trickster comes in. It all blows and you get the becoming thing again. Now, Jung has a wonderful saying somewhere. Religion is a defense against a religious experience.

Moyers: You have to explain that.

Joseph Campbell: Well, that means it has reduced the whole thing to concepts and ideas. And having the concept and ideas short circuits the transcendent experience, the

experience of [0:29:30] deep mystery is what one has to regard as the ultimate religious experience.

Moyers: Well, there are many Christians who believe that to find out who Jesus is you have to go past the Christian faith, past the Christian doctrine, past the Christian church. And I know that's heresy to a lot of people.

Joseph Campbell: When you have to past the image of Jesus, the image of God becomes the final obstruction. Your God is your [0:30:00] ultimate barrier. This is basic Hinduism, basic Buddhism. You know the idea of the ascent of the spirit through the centers, the Chakras as they called, the lotuses, the different centers of experience, the animal experiences of hunger and greed, or just the zeal of reproduction, or physical mastery [0:30:30] of one kind or another. These are all stages of power.

But then when the center of the heart is reached and the sense of compassion on another person, mercy and participation and I and you are in some sense of the same being, this is what marriage is based on, there is a whole new stage of life experience opens up with the opening of the heart and [0:31:00] this is what's called the virgin birth actually, the birth actually, the birth of a spiritual life in one form, when he was simply a human animal living for the animal aims of health, progeny, wealth, and a little fun.

But now you come to something else to participate in the sense of accord with another or accord with some principle that has lodged in your mind as a good to be [0:31:30] identified with. Then a whole new life comes and this is in oriental thinking, the awakening of the religious experience. And then this can go on even to the quest for the experience of the ultimate mystery as ultimate mystery can be experienced in two senses, one, without form and other with form.

And in this oriental thinking, you experience God with form here. [0:32:00] This is heaven. That's the identification with your own being because that with God refers to is the ultimate mystery of being, which is the mystery of your being as well as of the world. So, this is it.

Moyers: How do you explain what the psychologist Maslow calls peak experiences and what your friend James Joyce [0:32:24] called epiphanies. I love that world, epiphanies.

Joseph Campbell: Oh, well, they're not quite the same.

Moyers: I know.

Joseph Campbell: [0:32:30] the peak experience refers to actual moments of your life when you feel that this has told you something. Something has come through in your experience of your relationship through the harmony of being. It can come. My peak experiences, the ones that I knew were peak experiences after I had them all came [0:33:00] in athletics.

Moyers: Which was the Everest of your experience.

Joseph Campbell: Yes, well.

Moyers: Which one was it? Was it when you were running at Columbia?

Joseph Campbell: Yes, of course. And I've ran a couple of races. It was just beautiful. And the whole race, I knew I was going to win and there was no reason for me to know I was going to win because I was touched off anchor in the relayed with the first man 30 yards ahead of me. And I just knew, do, it was peak experience nobody can beat me today. [0:33:30] That's a kind of being in full form and really doing it. I don't think I've ever done anything in my life as competently as I ran those two races. And those consequently, were the experience of really being at my full and doing perfect job, I don't think I've ever had anything like that quite that I really came up to anything quite that way.

Moyers: [0:34:00] Do you think you, Joseph Campbell, have to – it has to be physical?

Joseph Campbell: No. But it can be a peak experience. There were other times of peak experiences, which I know were superior to those. But those are the ones that when I read Maslow and read the peak experience, I just know that those were peak experiences.

Moyers: What about James Joyce's epiphanies?

Joseph Campbell: Now, that's another thing. This has to do with the aesthetic experience. Joyce's formula [0:34:30] for the aesthetic experience that it does not move you to want to possess the object. That he calls pornography. Nor does it move you to criticize and reject the object. That he calls didactics, social criticism and all, that kind of thing. It is beholding an object.

And he says, you put a frame around it and see it as one thing and then seeing it as one thing, [0:35:00] you become aware of the relationship of part to part, part to the whole, and the whole to the parts. This is the essential aesthetic factor, rhythm – the rhythm – the rhythmic relationships. And when a fortunate rhythm has been struck by the artist, that is the radiance, that's the epiphany. And that is what would be the Christ coming through. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Moyers: The face of the saint beholding [0:35:30] God.

Joseph Campbell: And it doesn't matter who it is. I mean, you could take someone who you would think of as being a monster. That is an ethical judgment on the life and this is transcended of ethics. No didactics.

Moyers: That's where I would disagree with you because it seems to me in order to experience the epiphany, that would you behold but do not want to possess must be

beautiful in some way. And a moment ago when you [0:36:00] talked about your peak experience, running, you said it was beautiful. Beautiful is an aesthetic word.

Joseph Campbell: Yes, it's right.

Moyers: And how can you behold a monster?

Joseph Campbell: I'll tell you, there's another emotion associated with art which is not of the beautiful but of the sublime and what we call monsters can be seen as sublime. And they represent powers too great for the mere forms of life [0:36:30] to survive. Prodigious expansion of space is sublime. This is the thing that the Buddhist knows how to achieve in their temples. Particularly when I was in Kyoto, I was there for seven glorious months.

Moyers: In Japan.

Joseph Campbell: Yes. Visiting some of the temple gardens, they are so designed that you're experiencing something here and then you break past the screen and the whole new horizon opens out [0:37:00]. At somehow with the diminishment of your own ego, the consciousness expands. This is experience of the sublime.

Another experience of the sublime is not of tremendous space but of tremendous energy and power. And I have known a couple of people who were in central Europe during the saturation bombings that were conducted over those cities. And there is the [0:37:30] – you just have the experience of the sublime there.

Moyers: I once interviewed a veteran of the Second World War. And I was talking to him about his experience at the Battle of the Bulge with the assault of the Germans about to succeed.

Joseph Campbell: Yes.

Moyers: And as – well, as you look back, what was it? And he said it was sublime.

Joseph Campbell: And so the monster comes through there.

Moyers: What do you mean by monster?

Joseph Campbell: Well, by a monster I mean someone who breaks all of your [0:38:00] standards for harmony and for ethical conduct.

Moyers: Is there a story in mythology that illustrates the sublime in the monster.

Joseph Campbell: Well, the God of the end of the world. Vishnu at the end of the world is a monster. I mean, he destroying the world first with fire and then with torrential flood

that drowns out the fire and everything else and then nothing's left but ash. The whole universe has been [0:38:30] wiped out. That's God.

Moyers: Well, the Christian millennialist talked of the rapture.

Joseph Campbell: Well, read chapter 13 in Mark.

Moyers: Which says?

Joseph Campbell: That's the end of the world. You see, these are experiences that go past ethical judgment. Ethics is wiped out. Our religions with the accent amount of human, as I mentioned a little while ago, also stressed the ethical.

Moyers: Yes.

Joseph Campbell: God is good, God is horrific, the end of the [0:39:00] world. There's an Arab saying that I read somewhere in the Arabian Nights that the angel of death – when the angel of death comes is terrible, when it has reached you it is bliss.

Now, in the Buddhist systems, particularly as we get them from Tibet, the Buddhas appear in two aspects. There's the peaceful aspect and there is the [0:39:30] wrathful aspect of the deity. Now, if you're clinging to your ego and its little world and hanging on and the deity wants to open you, the wrathful aspect comes. It seems to you terrible. But if you are open, and open enough, then that same deity would be experienced as bliss.

Moyers: Well, Jesus talked to bringing a sword and I don't believe he meant that in terms of using it against your fellow, but he meant it in terms of [0:40:00] opening the ego. "I came to cut you free from the binding ego of your own self."

Joseph Campbell: This is what is known in Sanskrit as Viveka, discrimination. And there is a Buddha figure called Manjusri, who will be – who's showing with the flaming sword over his head. And what is the sword for? It's to distinguish the merely temporal from the eternal. It's the sword that distinguishes that which is [0:40:30] enduring from that which is merely passing. The tick-tick-tick of time shuts out eternity. And we live in the field of time. But what is living in the field of time is an eternal principle that's inflected this way.

Moyers: What's the eternal principle?

Joseph Campbell: Brahma.

Moyers: Which is?

Joseph Campbell: Well, we call it God but that personifies it, do you see that's ...

Moyers: It is the experience of the eternity.

Joseph Campbell: Yes.

Moyers: The experience of the eternal. [0:41:00]

Joseph Campbell: That's what you are, I would say.

Moyers: That whatever eternity is, is here right now.

Joseph Campbell: Nowhere else or everywhere else. If you don't experience it now, you're never going to get it. Because where you get to heaven, that's not eternal, that's just everlasting. Heaven last a long time. It's not eternal. It's everlasting.

Moyers: Well, I don't follow that now.

Joseph Campbell: The eternal [0:41:30] is beyond time. The concept of time shuts out eternity.

Moyers: Time is our invention.

Joseph Campbell: Our experience, yes. But the ultimate unqualified mystery is beyond human experience. It becomes inflected. As they say, there is a condescension on the part of the infinite to the mind of man and that is what looks like God. [0:42:00]

Moyers: So whatever it is we experience, we have to express in language that is just not up to the occasion.

Joseph Campbell: That's it.

Moyers: It's inadequate.

Joseph Campbell: That's what poetry is for. Poetry is a language that has to be penetrated that doesn't shut you off. It opens. It's the rhythm. The precise choice of words that will have implications and suggestions that go past the word as what has to happen. And then you get [0:42:30] what Joyce calls the radiance, the epiphany. The epiphany is the showing through of the essence. What Aquinas called the quidditas, the whatness. The whatness is the Brahma.

Moyers: Why do you think it is there is in so many people this deep yearning to live forever to secure my place in heaven?

Joseph Campbell: When you realize what heaven is, I mean, in the works of such [0:43:00] person as Thomas Aquinas, it is the beholding of the beatific image of God, which is a timeless moment, you know, time explodes. So, again, eternity is not something everlasting. And you can have it right here now in your relationships. I have

lost a lot of friends and my parents and all. And a realization [0:43:30] that has come to me very, very keenly is that I haven't lost them. That moment when I was with them, I had an everlasting quality about it that is now still with me. What it gave me is still with me and there's a kind of intimation of immortality in that [0:44:00]. Do you see what I mean?

Moyers: But in the sense that you were talking about eternity beyond the body.

Joseph Campbell: Yes.

Moyers: Experienced now in the body but being beyond time. Has anybody told a story that ...

Joseph Campbell: Well, there's the story of the Buddha who encountered a woman who had just lost her son and she was in great grief. And the Buddha said, I suggest you just ask [0:44:30] around to meet somebody who has not lost a treasured child or husband or relative or friend. And this business of understanding the relationship of mortality to something in you that is transcendent of mortality is the big job.

Now, there's a wonderful work of Schopenhauer's [0:44:55]. He says when you reach a certain age – and he wrote this one, he was in his 60s [0:45:00] or so – and look back over your life, it seems to have had an order. It seems to have had been composed by someone. And those events that when they occurred seemed merely accidental and occasional, and it just something that happened, turned out to be the main elements in a consistent plot. So he says, "Who composed this plot?" And he said, "And just [0:45:30] as your dreams are composed by an aspect of yourself of which your consciousness is unaware, so your whole life has been composed by the will within you."

Then he says, "Just as those people whom you met by chance became effective agents in the structuring of your life, so you have been an agent, the structuring of other lives. And the whole thing gears together like one big symphony," he says, [0:46:00] everything influencing and structuring everything else. And he said, "It's as though our lives were the dream of a single dreamer in which all the dream characters are dreaming too and so everything links to everything else moved out of the will in nature."

That's the beautiful idea. It's an idea that occurs in India in the image of what's called the net of Indra [0:46:30] or the net of gems, or it's a net of gems where every gem reflects all the other ones. And they also have the idea of spontaneous and simultaneous arising. Everything arises in relation to everything else. And so you can't blame anybody for anything. It's all working around. It's a marvelous idea. It's as though there were an intention behind it yet and all these by chance. [0:47:00] None of us has lived the life that he intended.

Moyers: And yet we all have lived a life that had a purpose. Do you believe that?



Joseph Campbell: I don't believe life has a real purpose. I mean, when you really see what life is, it's a lot of protoplasm with an urge to reproduce and continue in being.

Moyers: Not true. That's not true.

Joseph Campbell: No, wait a minute. Just sheer life [0:47:30] can't be said to have a purpose because look at around all the different purposes that has all over the lot. But each incarnation, you might say, has a potentiality and the function of life is to live that potentiality. Well, how do you do it?

Well, again, when my students would ask, you know, should I do this, should I do that? Dad says I should do this. And my answer is, follow your bliss.

Moyers: Yes.

Joseph Campbell: There's something inside you that knows [0:48:00] your inner center that knows you're on the beam that knows you're off the beam. And if you get off the beam to earn money, you've lost your life.

Moyers: So it is not the destination that counts. It's the journey.

Joseph Campbell: Yes. There's a wonderful old man, I think he is still alive in Germany, Karlfried Graf Dürckheim. And he says when you're on a journey [0:48:30] and the end keeps getting further and further away, then you'll realize that the real end is the journey. It's not bad. This is it. This moment now is the heavenly moment, the end.

Moyers: I like the idea that Eden was not, Eden will be.

Joseph Campbell: Eden is, the kingdom [0:49:00] where the father spread upon the earth and men do not see it. I mean, Eden is.

Moyers: There's some image of Shiva, the God Shiva, surrounded by circles of flame, grains of fire.

Joseph Campbell: That's the dance of the world. The dancer who's dances the universe and in this hand, he has a little drum that goes tick-tick-tick. That is the drum of time, the tick of time which shuts out eternity. [0:49:30] And we are enclosed in that. In this hand, there is a flame which burns away the veil of time and opens us up to eternity. And in his hair is a skull and a new moon, the death and rebirth at the same moment, that moment of becoming.

Moyers: That's a powerful image for any life, not just ...

Joseph Campbell: Well, the goal of your quest for yourself is to find that [0:50:00] burning point in yourself, that becoming thing in yourself which is fearless and desireless, but just becoming. This is the condition of a warrior going into battle with perfect

courage. That's life in movement, a plant growing. I think of grass, you know. Every two weeks a chap comes out with a lawn mower and cuts it down. Suppose the grass would just say, well, for the Pete's sake [0:50:30]. What's the use? It's the coming into [0:50:33] being that's it. And that's the life point in you. And that's what these myths are concerned to communicate to.

Moyers: Well, I've always interpreted that powerful mysterious statement, "The word was made flesh," as this eternal principle finding itself in the human journey, in the human experience.

Joseph Campbell: Yes.

Moyers: Now, I don't know what the word is and I don't [0:51:00] even know what flesh is. But I know that there is that experience of epiphany when you – when you meet what you don't know and understand it.

Joseph Campbell: Yes. And you can find it in yourself too, the word in yourself.

Moyers: Where do you find it if you don't find it in yourself?

Joseph Campbell: Well, Goethe says, "All things are metaphors." "Alles Vergangliche ist nur ein Gleichnis." Everything that's transitory is but a metaphorical reference. That's what we all are. And to see the word [0:51:30] – we're getting back to that – your radiance that we spoke up before comes out here again now.

Moyers: But how does one worship a metaphor, love a metaphor, die for a metaphor?

Joseph Campbell: Well, that's what people are doing all over the place. That's what people are doing all over the place, dying for metaphors. And when you really realize the sound Aum, the sound [0:52:00] of the mystery of the word everywhere then you don't have to go out and die for anything because it's right there all around and just sit still and see it and experience it and know it.

Moyers: Explain Aum. That's the first time you've used that.

Joseph Campbell: Well, Aum is a word that – what can I say – represents to our ears that sound of the energy of the universe of which all things are manifestations. And Aum [0:52:30] is a wonderful word. Its' written A-U-M. You start in the back of the mouth, Ahh, and then Ooo, you fill the mouth, and Mmm, closes at the mouth. And when you pronounce this properly, all vowel sounds are in that pronunciation "Aum ..." And consonants are regard it's simply as interruptions [0:53:00] of Aum. And all words are thus fragments of Aum as all images are fragments of the form of forms of which all things are just reflections.

And so Aum is a symbol, a symbolic sound that puts you in touch with that throbbing being that is the universe. [0:53:30] And when you hear some of these Tibetan monks

that are over here from the Gyuto monastery outside of Lhasa, when they sing the Aum you know what it means, all right. That's the zoom of being in the world. [0:54:00] And to be in touch with that and to get the sense of that that is the peak experience of all. "Ahh-Ooo-Mmm." The birth, the coming into being, and the dissolution that cycles that. And this is called the four-element syllable. What is the fourth element? Ahh-Ooo [0:54:30]-Mmm, and the silence out of which it comes back into which it goes and which underlies it.

Now, my life is the Ahh-Ooo-Mmm but there is a silence that underlies it, and that is probably we would call the immortal. This is the mortal and that's the immortal and it wouldn't be this if there weren't that.

Moyers: The meaning is essentially wordless.

Joseph Campbell: Yes. [0:55:00]

Moyers: Well, words are always qualifications and limitations.

Joseph Campbell: And yet, Joe, all we puny human beings are left with is this miserable language, beautiful though it is, that fall short of trying to describe.

Moyers: That's right and that's why it's a peak experience break past all that every now and then to realize it, oh, ah. I think so. [0:55:30]

[0:57:07]

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