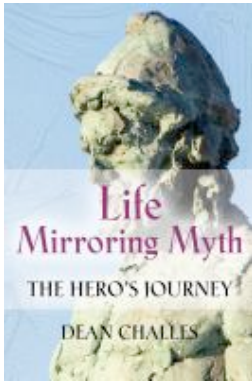




**Life
Mirroring Myth**

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

DEAN CHALLES



Mr. Challes places in perspective his adventurous life within the mythological framework described and modeled by the renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell, called the Hero's Journey. Campbell extolled that age-old mythological tales together with the life paths of numerous famous historical figures follow a similar life trajectory that he modeled as the Hero's Journey. That mythological pattern provided Dean with meaningful pieces of the puzzle to his own full but fragmented and varied life experiences.

Life Mirroring Myth – The Hero's Journey

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Dean Challes

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ISBN: 978-1-63491-486-4

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2016

First Edition

PREFACE

“A well-written Life is almost as rare as a well-spent one.”

– Thomas Carlyle

My life has resembled a wandering chip on a checkerboard zigzagging haphazardly up square-by-square to eventually be crowned if successfully reaching the end of the board. I’ve entertained thoughts about chronicling it in the past for the simple sake that it’s been quite interesting if nothing else. But I’ve always hesitated. In the first place, it was difficult to conceive how a compelling sense could be made of such a rambling and disconnected, albeit captivating one and, secondly, I wasn’t interested in undertaking it merely as a “see what I’ve done.”

If I considered spinning its tale my real interest was not simply to chronicle very stimulating, varied, full, and episodic outer world life experiences along with all the inflection points, intriguing as they were, but to pay homage to the mystical forces I’ve felt strongly influenced it along the way – the mystical world of spirit. To put it another way, it was to honor the amazing Presence that accompanied me across the times holding it all together and my eventual recognition and gratitude for it.

I was uncomfortable narrating my story without the consideration of an authentic underlying theme to frame it. I felt that there was a larger story to my journey outside of the outer world experiences; one that I innately felt was part of a deeper sacred connectedness with my essential self.

In recent years all this has turned much clearer as I’ve become aware of having carried out a life quite seemingly in alignment with a legendary mythological coding of the human psyche - a destiny code within our cells, if you will. Coming to understand my own personal journey inside of mankind’s larger collective human story made sense of my own lived experience. It provided the missing parts to the puzzle of my own life - a “coming home” moment.

This was when I came across the Hero’s Journey mythological model extolled by the renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell that I instantly and clearly realized the golden thread tying it all together, thus, this bouillabaisse of a book. The wholistic context of my life as propounded by the Hero’s

Journey was the seed I needed to begin seriously chronicling the story within the context of a much larger and richer inner spiritual reality; how the mystical relationship I've had with the spiritual world since early youth but never realizing it related to a codified mystical and coherent wholistic life story cloth weaving together a disparate patchwork of numerous outer world experiences.

Campbell draws upon the vast archive of world's stories that tell the journey of the hero and his/her transformation based upon the similarity of theme among sacred stories spanning many eons and cultures. I had become acquainted with much of Campbell's work at an earlier time, but wasn't sufficiently aware nor had the life experiences then to fully appreciate much less consider my own life's journey mythologically. The revelation has awakened me to the deeper meaning of my life due in no small measure to added decades of life experiences and inner growth. Perhaps my story can prompt others to look at their life in a more clearer, enhanced, and rich way as well.

To sum it up, the Hero's Journey mythological story clearly reveals that the pieces of my life represents patches in a majestic quilt created by a Grand Master artisan, the fabric of which expresses a rich meaning and purpose. How this is so unfolds throughout my story. I begin with the inspirational spark that sat me down to actually undertake its writing. There are numerous instances of serendipity and synchronicity described throughout the book that played a critical role in my affairs, including the one that inspired me to actually sit down and pen the story.

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

It would take an especially inspirational moment for me to undertake the laborious effort to pen a book, the professional author I am not. In this instance that spark flashed in an unexpected and powerful way while on an Aegean Sea Greek isle one December morning in 2014. I was visiting the island for a few days before continuing on to Athens and then to Morocco, North Africa to meet up with a student team from Columbia University that I was mentoring on a humanitarian engineering project.

I was lodged in the former grand villa of an early prosperous islander that had been converted into a lovely inn. While breakfasting in the inn's sunroom at a small table draped with exquisitely embroidered table cloth the surrounding serene and rich ambiance was interrupted by a faint drumming

sound coming up from the narrow roadway that ran up from the inn. Rena, the inn's manager and gracious hostess, informed me that the day was a revered religious holiday on the island, one honoring the island's patron saint, Ayios Dionysios. I descended the outdoor stairway leading into the inner courtyard and stood in the opening of the entrance to glance in the direction of the increasing sound of the drum roll. I stretched my head out the entrance and observed a crowd of expectant villagers lining both sides of the narrow path. A small Greek church was opposite the inn, adding a bit more sacrilegious air to the occasion.

A drum corps led the precession as it rounded a curve into view. The drummers were all young adolescent school boys dressed in black pants and white shirts. They were trailed by classes of primary school students from each of the island's schools all decked out in their white shirts. Each group was led by a young girl hoisting a long staff crowned by the blue and white striped Greek flag. I was touched by the youngsters' fresh, smiling, innocent, and excited faces.

A regal four-posted, red velvety canopy trailed the long precession of students held up by a marching team of village male bearers. As it approached I noticed a magnificent gold and silver icon of the honored Saint Dionysios nested in the canopy. Trailing the exalted canopy was a group of about ten richly colored robed Greek Orthodox priests and monks thrusting incensed burning metal casters into the air blessing the standing crowd of onlookers along the path.

The head priest of the surrounding group of islands slowly trailed immediately behind royally clothed in magnificent white and gold linen liturgical vestment. To my astonishment the priest stopped in the middle of the path directly opposite the door opening I was straddling and turned in my direction. He began waving an incense burning crucible directly at me, not more than a few feet away.

The priest stood in place and continued casting his blessing ritual at me for a few minutes while I remained frozen and transfixed. Rightly or wrongly I was wont to believe I was being personally blessed as our eyes locked, being the only person in the direction he was concentrating his action towards. I felt a strong personal blessing from the priest that waved through my being. He eventually turned and the precession continued its windy trek through the village's narrow pathways followed by villagers falling in behind.

I stepped in at the tail end and followed along down to the harbor. When all had descended to the harbor and congregated in front of the waterside main church its bells started to bellow echoing across the harbor tolling in a

symphony of deep tones. If there was an inner climatic and serendipitous moment for me this was it. I instinctively internalized the moment, recalling Earnest Hemmingway's immortalized words: "*For whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.*"

I had the unassailable feeling the bells were tolling for me. Coupled with the vibrant felt-blessings bestowed my way minutes before still coursing through my veins I felt a powerful inspiration to commence writing. It was all an unmistakable signal to get busy and end my procrastinating intent to write this book.

I immediately headed back to the inn's sun room and to the same small embroidered cloth table I was drawn out of. I then began the long and arduous task with notebook and pen in hand. There was no thought of the effort that would be involved, but that I would stay at it until completion.

My previous literary undertaking "*Here, There & Beyond*" was inspired in a somewhat similar vein. Then, I was in Alexandria, Egypt and had entered the new Great Library, the replacement of the famed historic earlier one. I felt lightning strike when standing in the center of the cathedral-like reading room and immediately seated myself to begin the manuscript in longhand. The feeling resembled a revelation or epiphany, similar to what I experienced with the inspiration to sit down with this story.

As with this book, I had then been stewing about writing about a life changing and adventurous two year period in my earlier life, but knew I would need a high voltage spark to actually sit down and begin the laborious task. That bolt of lightning occurred when I stood in the center of the massive atrium reading room with its terraced floor levels and transparent overhead chrome latticed glass roof. I instantly knew that the inspirational vibes I was getting meant the moment had arrived and I wasted no time to find the nearest table to begin with pen and notebook.

That project was sufficiently satisfying in its own way and achieved a long personal goal. Writing a follow up account such as this one was an idea that I eventually thought would be nice to bookend that period, but actually doing so was not seriously contemplated for the time and effort involved. However, once a tree is born it casts its seeds onto the ground and nature does the rest. So it was with me that another seed was sown and the germination of another tree lay in waiting.

Although the earlier book had captured a most significant inflection point in my life it, nevertheless, was only a small patch in an otherwise richly

crafted tapestry. The last sentence of that book begged to be continued: “*I ended one journey on the road and ready for the next journey with the rest of my life.....it will NEVER be the same!*”

Life would never be the same in terms of the unconventional and free-spirited one it became, as others were prone to remind me. I felt the first book adequately related how my inner world reality and psychology had evolved and transformed up to and during the end of that adventurous period. It was, however, just the precursor preparing me thereafter for a much greater self-realizing and self-actualizing existence. I have endured and fully experienced my adventures accompanied by many trials and initiations, have loved and been loved, and have granted myself sufficient time on many occasions by withdrawing from “doing” in the world to “being” and internally integrating learnings and experiences.

I have not to this point had the opportunity to tell my story in full to interested listeners. Even those closest to me are not aware of the full extent of my life journey, if even a small slice of it. It is my desire that these will be my interested audience along with providing an inspiration to those who are drawn to leading or continuing on a Hero's Journey life of their own and to gain the awareness of recognizing it as such.

This story has that larger story and underlying theme I had long searched for and unfolds through the time travel of my memories as if it all recently occurred. It illuminates and confirms the direction my life has taken and how it relates to the destiny of humankind.

INTRODUCTION

“How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book?”

– Henry David Thoreau

“The challenge of our time is to forge a new story by which we might understand ourselves.”

– Joseph Campbell

“I don’t know how I get away with it, but I don’t suggest anyone go about it the way I have.”

That has been my response to those who get a wisp of the so-called free-spirited life I’ve led. Such a reaction is usually elicited as they vicariously listen to a tale I might be relating. It is not that I have been reticent to be more communicative about my life and what I do when asked by an interested party. The difficulty lay in how to succinctly respond in a way that might make any sense to anyone without losing the two minute attention span of the inquirer. I would typically quip “it all depends what year it is,” and that flippant remark although quite reflective of actuality would usually end the curiosity then and there.

A source of wonder for me has been how, in fact, I had managed to get away with having had such full and varied life experiences that pulled me in many directions, yet all leading to safe harbor after all was said and done. A way to describe my life would be as a conventional linear progression during the first half of it and as random chaotic theory the second half to put it in context of the sub atomic world. The idea of chronicling the writing of a life story struck me as an exercise in futility, like trying to herd a bunch of cats. It would lack an underlying thread or theme to weave it all together.

I knew better than to attempt it unless I discovered a way that could speak to my conviction that there were underlying unifying forces that instructed my life that had some credibility to it. What was needed was a way that I could associate my outer world experiences within the context of a

realization of higher powers and spiritual presence at work, especially at significant crossroads and inflection points.

I wanted to be able to clearly see that most of what unfolded in my life propelling it forward to eventual soft landings was not out of baseless happenstances or coincidences, but that the synchronicities and serendipities experienced were associated with a higher order of life.

Long ago I came across the writings of the late great mythologist Joseph Campbell and as interesting as they were to read at the time I, nevertheless, failed to make a personal connection with how my life experiences could align with the lives of well-known mythological figures and the real life historic personas he described. He themed the underlying pattern of their lives through the Hero's Journey paradigm. I had sufficiently evolved in consciousness and accumulated enough life experiences such that when I again stumbled upon Campbell's classic model it took on life-meaning significance.

Every aspect and stage of that mythological model effectively characterized the forces at work during the formative periods and significant events of my life. The realization that my life had an ultimate purpose and meaningfulness that aligned with a recognized inner essence of humankind added to my sense that there was a Divine hand by my side many steps of the way, as Campbell strongly alluded to.

I could now easily fathom how it could be a rich self-exploratory and personally-satisfying project to pen my life story and, perhaps, how it might enable others to view their life pattern in a more holistic and sacred light. It might cause others to realize that their seemingly disparate and disjointed life experiences resplendent with its ups and downs actually subscribe to the innateness of the human psyche. It could offer an inspiration to reorient one's self-unrealized path by initiating conscious and courageous changes towards fulfilling one's life purpose in alignment with the Hero's Journey.

Like a dry seed in the desert soil forever waiting patiently for a drop of moisture to sprout it, this story has been buried in me awaiting the dew of dawn to bring it alive. The Hero's Journey is that that catalyst. I am better able to understand the larger story of my life because of it.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY

The Hero's Journey legend as gleaned from Campbell's extensive study, research, and synthetization is founded on a universal life wisdom and mystic power that lives within the human psyche, independent of whether we want to acknowledge it or not. The power is recognized by all religions but identified in differing terms. It is a wisdom that lives in us and is an energy that comes from a realm beyond our powers of knowledge. The model of the myth tells us that if you engage the world in a certain way you are under the protection of a God, or guided by a Devine Hand, and offered a way to lead a life that is in tune with one's true nature.

Myths have existed throughout the eons, appropriate to each age, and providing a sense of meaning in existence. They satisfy our mind that asks for purpose and in living meaningfully. Campbell's long study of myths spanning most cultures and crossing all times brought him to the conclusion that if we follow our true nature and inner essence then we follow a familiar path from cradle to grave.

Simply put and in my words, myths help reflect the knowledge of one's being through mythological archetypes that are hardwired in our psyche DNA coding. They express something basic about our deepest humanity. The archetypes are there from birth and evolve as part of the psyche. Carl Jung, noted for his pioneering study of the unconscious, identifies archetypes as existing in the human collective unconscious. He stated that archetypical themes are universal, albeit with different cultural and socialization influences on how we think. They go to our most basic innateness. It was actually his insights that I studied and propelled me to make a quantum leap and transformation in my life that I described in my previous memoir.

Knowing this and looking back over my life at an advanced age mythology gives my life a plot as if composed by a novelist. Events that seemed disassociated with one another now turn out to be central to my life's composition.

The Hero's Journey describes a central mythological theme running through the life stories of Christ, Buddha, Gandhi, Moses, and countless other iconic and historic figures since recorded times. One needn't be a well-known hero or heroine historical figure to have led a hero's life; it can be representative of the least known of us, like me. It's a question of the quality of one's life and not the quantitative impact on the world.

The Hero's Journey mythological process involves giving up where you are at some appropriate point in life to follow an inner calling into the world of Adventure and coming, thereafter, to some kind of self-realization, then returning to the realm of a conventional life providing a boon to better the world in some way, shape, or form.

Campbell called the first stage Separation, representing leaving where you are upon finding you are living in an outmoded condition and have outgrown your comfort zone. Whatever the circumstances or environment, answering a call to Adventure draws you out of an outmoded mundane-led life.

The domain of Adventure is one of unknown forces and powers. Unfortunately, those who choose to refuse the inner call don't realize their true destiny and are inclined to live a rather mundane life. That is not to say that such a failure to answer the call necessarily leads to a meaningless and purposeless life. Even in thinking so, it doesn't portend that one is realizing and fulfilling their innermost yearnings and destiny.

When the call isn't answered, however, a kind of drying up is experienced in one's life and a sense of life lost can occur at the end of it for not having done "this" or experienced "that" in response to a deeply held desire or ambition. Having achieved success in terms of society's yardsticks isn't relevant. I've long inwardly professed that I could not go peacefully and contentedly at the end if I had deeply held regrets about not attempting, doing, or experiencing one thing or another that had long captured my imagination and inner vision.

If the call is heeded, however, the individual is implored to engage in an Adventure as Campbell describes it, moving out of a familiar and secure existence. The idea in the hero's and heroine's Adventure is to pass through the door molded by conventional societal and cultural conditioning and into the world of inner calling, into the great beyond. The hero who accepts the call must face tasks and trials, either alone or with assistance - the long "Road of Trials," as Campbell identifies it.

If the hero survives, he and she can achieve a great gift or "boon." The hero must then decide whether to return to the ordinary world with this boon. If the hero does decide to return they often face challenges on the return journey - the Road of Trials - that tests one's ability to withstand strong pulls back to the secure and conventional mundane life of before. The Road of Trials stage typically culminates with a personally disastrous or traumatic fall from grace from which the hero or heroine must regain their footing to move

into the last phase of the Journey. If the return is successful, the boon or gift must be used to improve or better the world or people in some way or manner.

The Hero's Journey model consists of several stages with each individual's journey going through many of the definitive stages. Common to all individual journeys are three main phases: Separation, Initiation, and Return.

Separation deals with the hero's rather conventionally-led life prior to accepting the quest into an Adventure period. Initiation is associated with the hero's many experiences and pursuits during an extended Adventure period, and Return is related to the hero's return home with knowledge and powers acquired on the journey. With the subsequent boon the hero and heroine serves up to better the world. Anything short of fulfilling the Return phase doesn't merit consideration as a Hero's Journey.

Looking back, I can clearly see how my life can be wholistically viewed in alignment with our human psychic inheritance aptly described by the Hero's Journey. The fact that this awareness comes at this point in my life is most timely, coming at the three-quarter century mark when it is natural for one to look back upon their life to affirm how it was led or to regret not talking the path least traveled - living with the thought, "I wish I could have done or been this or that."

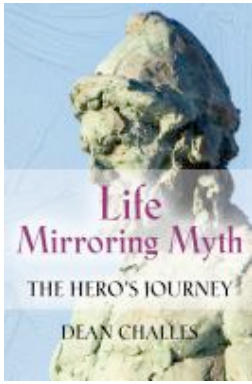
The book proceeds in three parts. Part One, "Separation," is the first phase of the Hero's Journey life and continues until I have the compelling sense that my life has become outmoded, albeit a successful one according to conventional societal measures of success. I chronicle the more significant and formative experiences of my conventional life that preceded the call to Adventure.

Part Two, "Initiation," is the critical inflection period in the Hero's Journey whereby one either breaks out of outmoded ways or continues in them. This stage can often be referred to as the mid-life crisis in psychological jargon – mid-life opportunity to my way of thinking. My big leap from a mundane and conventionally led life to one following an inner calling for adventure, exploration and self-discovery launches this stage. It commences with the experiences surrounding my two year odyssey adventure as well as spanning a many decades long Road of Trials period.

Part Three, "Return," is the final stage of the journey and manifests a life where one's inner life is integrated with one's outer life, and the hero returns to gift a boon to society and the world at large. The trials and tests that are expected to occur on one's approach leading up to the Return path are aptly

owned up to: derailments, failures, and all. Lastly, there is the final crossing into the boon phase.

I pay homage to Joseph Campbell for bringing my awareness to the Hero's Journey as the archetypical theme to living a life resonating with my inner nature. My life has largely freed me from a life dictated and conditioned by outer societal influences of culture, environment, expectations, and upbringing, and it is more than gratifying that it has been graced and blessed by unfolding in harmony with our true essence.



Mr. Challes places in perspective his adventurous life within the mythological framework described and modeled by the renowned mythologist Joseph Campbell, called the Hero's Journey. Campbell extolled that age-old mythological tales together with the life paths of numerous famous historical figures follow a similar life trajectory that he modeled as the Hero's Journey. That mythological pattern provided Dean with meaningful pieces of the puzzle to his own full but fragmented and varied life experiences.

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