

Psychological Mentoring: A Dialogue about The Hero's Journey and the Mentor

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The Hero's Journey

Woman: It's a metaphor for the psychological experiences of life.

Man: Myths and dreams come from the same place. They come from a realization of some kind that has then to find expression in symbol form

Man: Joseph Campbell was very influenced by Carl Jung and Jung's theories of psychology explained that we process experience visually. That psychological processing is akin to a visual field, very much like a movie.

Woman: George Lucas studied the work of Joseph Campbell and of course he was also a film maker. And in the Star Wars films George Lucas has made a very compelling adaptation of one of the most famous forms which is the hero's journey. This is by far the most commonly found form in the history of mythology.

Man: Star Wars is what is sometimes called the hero's journey. It reflects the initiatory pattern that is a journey story that represents a transition. Moving from one identity, say young adulthood, into another identity, say full adulthood, and elicits the various stages of that process.

Narrator: Over the course of the Star Wars saga, two characters set off on the hero's journey – Anakin Skywalker and his son Luke.

Man: Each of them is called to an adventure. Each of them does not expect to become a hero. Each of them becomes drawn into the struggle between good and evil where they have to choose what side they will align themselves with.

Narrator: For Anakin, the journey will be a tragic one as his arrogance, fear, and desire for power ultimately lead him from the hero's path and lead him to the dark side where he becomes the evil Darth Vader. And Luke's journey ultimately becomes the quest to redeem his father.

Woman: Luke starts out being a nobody and what he needs is a call to adventure to get things started.

Man: A call is an event that pulls us away from familiar comforts. It pulls away from everything that is familiar to us, including what we know what to do. We are out in a situation that is enormously challenging. A common present day example is the young persons transition from high school to college.

Man: They fulfill the role of a mythic hero because they usually start out being very simple, slightly insecure characters. For example, characters like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz, like

Harry Potter, like King Arthur. They are what we call the Everyman. To us they have the same insecurities and fears we do. As a result, these stories can help us understand our own struggles. And that is their primary value; that is they can help us navigate the psychological experience that is going on within the larger framework of our lives.

Man: There is a possibility of rejecting the call. That is, you see what is out before you, you see what you could rise to and say, "I don't want to go." But more often there is a kind of struggle and there is a preparatory time. There is a kind of dress rehearsal while the person says, "I'm not doing this." Presently, rejecting the call is often times not reached as a stage because you need someone who is guiding you to the place where the young person recognizes that they are in fact called to something. This lack of mentoring is the by product of the breakdown of the nuclear family with it's extensions to elders, as well as our accepted model of living far apart from family members who would naturally fill the role of the mentor, such as a grandparent, a godparent, an uncle or aunt.

Man: The journey of Luke is an archetypal journey like Odysseus for instances or even biblical figures like Moses. They don't even necessarily want to do what they are called to do but life propels them on a journey.

Man: At the heart of the story is some kid who is being called to service to deal with something that is so much bigger than him.

Man: Suddenly there is a crisis and all of sudden his whole life changes.

Man: The Cantina scene is what Joseph Campbell referred to as the threshold crossing. It is a moment that you are profoundly aware that you are not in Kansas anymore. You are going into a bizarre place, very dangerous, and the characters you will be dealing with are not like the folks back home.

Man: The hero's journey is the simple, classic hero thing of I am an adolescent who is about to break from a smaller view of the world to a much larger one. And I'm going to go through a really painful journey in order to do that. Just as Hercules and other heroes of classic mythology had to under go certain tasks to prove their worth, so Luke develops as a character through the path he undertakes. He rescues Princess Leah. He helps attack the Death Star where he is a key player. He is swept up in the battle of Hoth and is able to deal with that. He rescues his friends from Jabba the Hutt. All of these things are part of his proving himself, although his biggest struggle is with his father.

Man: The struggle between father and son is very present in Greek myth. For example, Zeus came to power by struggling with his father. And his father before him struggled with his father. His weapon is a thunderbolt, lightning. So when I saw Darth Vader fighting with Luke with these light beams, I thought of the thunderbolt of Zeus.

Man: The Luke-Vader relationship is actually a biblical theme in the sense that the bible talks about the sins of the fathers will be passed on to the sons and daughters through the fifth and six generation.

Man: The notion is that basically evil is inescapable in all of us and that guilt is inescapable in all of us and we have to acknowledge that. Luke's father is scarred and that passes on the scar to his son. The Passing on of the Mark of Cain. Finally, all this comes to rest on Luke Skywalker.

Woman: Luke has to realize that he is part of a family and to not carry on the sins of the father. This is an important aspect of the psychological development of all children, especially as they take on the mantle of adulthood. As such, each child must come to terms with the authority of their parents, and in the process, come to understand that being an adult means that they now carry this authority as well. When the process of claiming and owning one's own authority, as well as putting one's sense of authority into accord with the larger authority of society, when this process goes awry, we see all manner of problems making the transition to adulthood, and in fact find that many young adults will find a family in the form of a gang of some type.

Man: In the drama, there will be a serious battle and a serious wound. Throughout the rest of the drama, the effect of that wound will shape the actions of the hero. It is letting us know the dangers of adulthood. The real injuries of life add up as we go along. That is the making of character. That is what makes us human and adult and, in a way, wise.

The Mentor

Narrator: Yoda. Qui Gon. Obi Wan. In mythic tradition, these three characters share the role of mentor. Part wizard, part priest, part surrogate parent, mentors give philosophical and spiritual guidance to the hero. They often possess almost magical powers that reflect a lifetime of study, discipline, and acquired wisdom.

Man: In moments of absolute disconnect and loss and confusion and fear, these characters arrive that give purpose and confidence to our main character.

Narrator: The figure of the mentor continues a mythic tradition that spans from ancient Greeks like Homer's epic poem, the Odyssey to Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings

Man: When Odysseus goes off on his long journeys, he is concerned about the wellbeing of his son, Telamachus. So he asks a family friend, an older friend named Mentor to look in on his son and from this we get our name mentor.

Narrator: In Star Wars, as in many ancient myths, mentors do not always appear in what seems a normal shape or size.

Man: In mythology, the story of Achilles tells us that he was sent to study with Chiron the centaur who was half man, half horse being who lived in an isolated spot in Mount Pelion. And Achilles learned everything he knew from Chiron including not only warfare but music, speech. He got a complete hero's education from this composite being, far more strange than Yoda.

Narrator: Usually, the mentor performs another important duty early in the hero's journey. He must present him with a special gift.

Man: The moment is crucial and in the stories it is a sword or lightsaber, often something useful in the struggles to come.

Mentor: In our experiences, a mentor gives us a gift of an idea, a wisdom of some discernment. A lightsaber can cut, so can discernment. This is sorting out life. Being able to make those distinctions allows the hero to move forward in the story.

Man: Luke is reminiscent of King Arthur in a way. King Arthur is given the sword Excalibur as part of his role to be king and to lead. So, also, Luke receives his father's lightsaber from Obi Wan and it's really at that point Luke realizes there is something special about him.

Narrator: In Star Wars, the lessons the hero must are those of the Jedi Master. They combine morality, spiritual faith, and strict physical discipline. Today, such themes are often core characteristics of what we call psychological mentoring in that mentoring of young

Man: One could argue that they are the Jesuits of this world. These are the people who are the Truth Bearers, who are the priesthood of freedom, and who give their lives in order to stop evil.

Man: Jedi themselves are very samurai like. Jedi comes from jidai in Japanese jidaigeki, which are the samurai films. Jidaigeki literally means history film or history piece and it's contracted down to Jedi.

Narrator: In Star Wars, the mentor's most important teachings concern the spiritual phenomenon known as the Force.

Man: The idea of the Force is general enough that people of any religious background can identify with it. One can see it as a personal god of Western religion. One can associate it with a more spiritual ideal. I think the key thing to remember that it means one is believing in something higher, that events in the universe are not meaningless. There is a purpose, there is meaning to life, and something is directing and guiding that.

Man: A life force like chi, and that is another is a very important aspect about these movies. They give us a sense of confidence that there is a world outside of our consciousness.

Narrator: In the Star Wars universe, spiritual enlightenment does not come without sacrifice. Those who seek the power of the Force must study, train, and obey strict discipline. They must also overcome their own skepticism and self-doubt.

Man: When a person is brought to enlightenment, you can't tell them what to do. They really have to figure it out for themselves.

Narrator: Unfortunately, during the hero's journey the mentor cannot stay forever.

Man: Our parents die. Our teachers die. The losses in life's long journey are great. The first reaction is often I can't make it without this help. It is crucial that the help not stay there: that they either leave or die. Or we would never know that we have, in fact, taken in the teaching.

Man: After people that we know have passed on their spirits can stay with us. Star Wars steps right in and picks up on that.

Man: The mentor is now within and I'm able to survive. From the epic Obi Wan, Yoda, Qui Gon, Star Wars repeatedly shows that as valuable as the mentor relationship is, ultimately we will outgrow it.

Man: Everyone wants a mentor and we got to adopt Obi Wan as our mentor. And this is a dream for a boy. That they could find someone who they could trust and who would tell them what it is they will do with their life.

Woman: You never outgrow your need for a mentor. I don't care how old you are. They take different shapes, different forms. It is a great reminder to us. If somebody holds out a helping hand, don't look to see if it is green. Just take the hand.