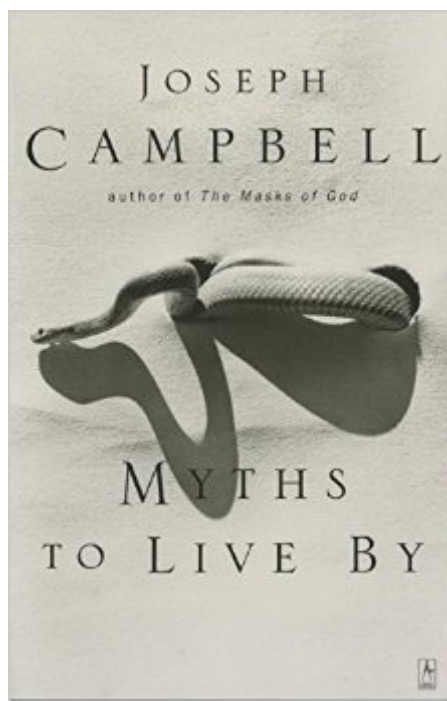


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Myths To Live By



Synopsis

What is a properly functioning mythology and what are its functions? Can we use myths to help relieve our modern anxiety, or do they help foster it? In *Myths to Live by*, Joseph Campbell explores the enduring power of the universal myths that influence our lives daily and examines the myth-making process from the primitive past to the immediate present, retuning always to the source from which all mythology springs: the creative imagination. Campbell stresses that the borders dividing the Earth have been shattered; that myths and religions have always followed the certain basic archetypes and are no longer exclusive to a single people, region, or religion. He shows how we must recognize their common denominators and allow this knowledge to be of use in fulfilling human potential everywhere.

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Customer Reviews

MYTHS TO LIVE BY consists of a dozen essays/talks Joseph Campbell prepared between 1961 and 1971. He described the period as a "new age" where "...we are...participating in one of the very greatest leaps of the human spirit to a knowledge not only of outside nature but also of our own deep inward mystery." At the time he wrote these essays, Campbell was a professor on a campus, surrounded by young people whom he found hard to understand at times. For example, in his essay "The Moon Walk--the Outward Journey" he relates his own feelings of awe on viewing the Apollo moon landing and contrasts them with the reaction of a student who wrote "So What" on a photo of the moon landing posted on a campus bulletin board. In another essay "Schizophrenia--the Inward

Journey" he contrasts the use of mind-altering drugs by shamans and psychotics (including the LSD induced version) as the difference between divers and non-swimmers in "the waters of the universal archetypes of mythology." I find Campbell's essays are very relevant, 30 years later. The most obvious example is "Mythologies of War and Peace" which addresses the underlying belief systems of participants in the Mideast crises. Campbell says the cruel fact is that "killing is the precondition of all living whatsoever: life lives on life, eats life, and would not otherwise exist...it is the nations, tribes, and peoples bred to mythologies of war that have survived to communicate their life-supporting mythic lore to descendents." He suggests that "we" in the West "have been bred to one of the most brutal war mythologies of all time." He then goes on to cite Deuteronomy and Isaiah and follows with excerpts from the Koran such as Sura 2, verse 216.. "Fighting is prescribed for you." Campbell does not condemn myths nor does he say myths are not literally true. He suggests creation myths and myths about love and war and peace contain the essence of the truth. Myths are to humans what kangaroo pouches are to baby kangaroos, they provide a "womb with a view." Being born simply isn't enough. We need myths to help us organize and guide our lives. However, our current myths arose in another era and were shaped by tribal mentalities that sustain the notion of GROUP differences. We need new myths for the journey of life.

I read this book while on a cruise, and found myself spending a lot of time reading. Of all his works, this is the most down to earth. The others are too 'professorial' as if intended to impress, while this one simply lays it on the line. Psychology and mythology relate to each other very nicely, as Mr. Campbell realized when asked to share his concepts with those of a Psychologist. Jung was a favorite because of his concept of Universal Mind. Contrary to what might be thought, the book is not anti-religious, but it does explode particular Christian beliefs. Rather, it reveals the Universal meaning of 'life' which each community resolves in its own way, frequently as not, in similar ways. Boil away the variety of customs, etc., and you have the essence of Joseph Campbell's work, and a better appreciation of man's universal mind.

I am glad that I finally got around to reading this collection of Campbell's lectures delivered between 1958 and 1971. Since they deal with eternal subject matter there is little chance of them being "dated." The common theme running through them all is the deep power of myth on the inner, spiritual lives of human beings throughout the ages. This includes our own age, whether we personally want to admit or recognize it. The Lectures include: 1) The Impact of Science on Myth (1961), 2) The Emergence of Mankind (1966), 3) The Importance of Rites (1964), 4) The Separation

of East and West (1961),⁵) The Confrontation of East and West in Religion (1970)⁶) The Inspiration of Oriental Art (1958),⁷) Zen (1969),⁸) The Mythology of Love (1967),⁹) Mythologies of War and Peace (1967),¹⁰) Schizophrenia- the Inward Journey (1970),¹¹) The Moon Walk- The Outer Journey (1970),¹²) Envoy: No More Horizons (1971), The reader will recognize much of the subject matter from the later talks with Bill Moyers in the "Power of Myth" series. All in all there is enough material covered to make this an excellent introduction to myth, true spirituality, and depth psychology. One of the topics that stuck with me was the fundamental difference in the nature of religion in the East, the Near East, and the West. Traditional Eastern societies were seen as governed by one great cosmic law through which all members were seen to draw their purpose, their worth, their meaning. God was in all things and the divine spark was in all individuals. Union with the divine was possible to those that transcended their ego. In the Near-East human beings (including the King) were seen as the groveling "tenant-farmers" of God. Men were the slaves of the Gods and could only beg and sacrifice to obtain boons. Man was in no way a part of God- matter and spirit were artificially split (mythic dissociation.) Finally, there was the Greek model- mankind as the rivals and competitors of the Gods. The Greek had turned ego into God, laying the foundation for the total denial of the very existence of spirit. That is, except for the initiates of the Mysteries.... There is a section of reference notes citing sources in the back of the book, as well as, a full index for quick reference.

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