

# Joseph Campbell's stages of the monomyth, and the life of pi

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This paper is to compare the stages of the monomyth and how they tie to *The Life of Pi*. *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell goes through the stages of a hero's journey. The hero's journey is a pattern of narrative identified by Joseph Campbell, that is found in most storytelling, drama, myth, religious rituals and psychological development. A hero's journey has three stages: departure, initiation and return, but has 17 total stages. *The Life of Pi* is a great example of a monomyth, Pi's journey consists of three main parts, and each part contains examples of The Hero's Journey. Through the hero's journey, the hero transforms their former self and grows and achieves things they didn't know they could.

The call to adventure is Joseph Campbell's first stage. When a call to adventure is answered, the hero departs from his familiar world and goes into an unknown place, never before seen things occur there and eventually a victory is won. He then returns from this mysterious land, bringing back what he has experienced to his familiar world." This first stage of the mythological journey — which we have designated the 'call to adventure' — signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown." (pg. 48) Answering the call to adventure, Pi leaves his familiar land of India to move to Canada with all their animals, his ship then becomes shipwrecked and he must survive on a lifeboat, which becomes his own personal journey. The tiger, Richard Parker, and Pi must learn how to survive together on the lifeboat. Pi's mythological adventure fits Joseph Campbell's hero archetype. As Pi battles the mysteries of the Pacific Ocean he is protected by his faith in Hinduism, Catholicism, and Islam. "Faith is a house with many rooms, oh

plenty on every floor. Doubt is useful, it keeps faith a living thing. After all, You can not know the strength of your faith until it is tested." Says adult Pi.

We then move to the refusal of the call. A hero initially will reject the call to adventure because of the changes it would cause in their life. Moving to Canada would cause many changes in Pi's life. It is very apparent that Pi fears moving because that would mean he must leave his girlfriend and move to an unknown place. "Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negatives" (pg. 49) Pi does later accept the call by not giving up and continues his journey. The third stage is a supernatural aid, supernatural simply means 'above the laws of nature.' This supernatural character often gives them the means to complete the quest. Some of the time the gift is simply wisdom. Pi's aid could be the tiger because he keeps him going. When Pi feels like giving up he remembers that he is the one giving the tiger drinking water and food, keeping Richard Parker alive, which helps Pi want to continue. "Without Richard Parker, I wouldn't be alive today to tell you my story." Says Pi.

Next, in the journey is crossing the threshold, the threshold is the barrier between two worlds." With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to "threshold guardian" at the entrance to the zone of magnified power." (pg. 64) Once the hero crosses the threshold they are entering a new world and cannot return to their "normal" world without completing the journey. Pi's crosses the threshold when the Tsimtsum sinks and he gets stranded on a lifeboat with a Hyena, Tiger, Orangutan and Zebra. Being in the middle of the Pacific

Ocean, with limited resources and many dangers, the animals pose the most danger they are just following their natural instincts. Pi says " I was alone and orphaned, in the middle of the Pacific, hanging on to an oar, an adult tiger in front of me, sharks beneath me, a storm raging about me."

The final phase of departure, is the belly of the whale, the belly of the whale is when the hero willingly crosses the point of no return. Pi faces the choice of survival, his morals start to get tested for the first time. It's the hero's choice to give up or survive and Pi has a strong will to survive. Belly of the whale occurs for Pi when Pi lets Richard Parker back on to the boat Pi accepts that this is his reality until he gets rescued, he must show his dominance to Richard Parker and provide for himself and the tiger, in order for survival.

In addition, the next phase is initiation, to begin this phase we start in the next stage of the monomyth, the road of trials. The road of trials is a series of tests, tasks, or ordeals that a person must undergo to begin the transformation. " Once having transversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trial." (pg. 81) Pi's main trial was taming his co-piloting tiger, aiming to keep himself from being eaten and learn to survive with a tiger. More trials Pi faces are being stranded at sea, finding food and water, all while experiencing grief, hunger and fear. Pi says " Nature was sinking fast. I could feel a fatal weakness creeping up on me. I would be dead by the afternoon." Meeting with the goddess, this stage is where the hero finds their true love or companion. Pi must form a relationship with Richard Parker, therefore he become is companion or Pi would be lonely.

The next stage of the journey is temptation, the hero is tempted to stray from their quest for personal gain. Pi is tempted by the mysterious island that he found, but then he discovered the dark secret and knew he must return to sea. Pi was also tempted to kill the tiger, when he couldn't get back on the boat, this would mean that Pi would only have to take care of himself." All living things contain a measure of madness that moves them in strange, sometimes inexplicable ways. This madness can be saving; it is part and parcel of the ability to adapt. Without it, no species would survive."

The succeeding stage is Apotheosis, this stage is marked by death (physical or spiritual) or transition to a different plane. Pi experiences this when he thinks about his family and past, putting him in a depression. Next, the ultimate boon, in this stage the hero reaches the final goal, gaining the final reward. Pi undergoes this stage when he finally crashes onto the Mexican beach and becomes rescued by some villagers who take him to a hospital. At this point in the journey Richard Parker leaves Pi, without hesitation, never to be seen again. "I've never forgotten him. Dare I say I miss him? I do. I miss him. I still see him in my dreams. They are nightmares mostly, but nightmares tinged with love. Such is the strangeness of the human heart. I still cannot understand how he could abandon me so unceremoniously, without any sort of goodbye, without looking back even once. The pain is like an axe that chops my heart." He doesn't want to believe that Richard Parker would leave him after everything they experienced together.

Refusal of return is the next stage of Pi's journey, Pi wants to believe that he survived in the middle of the ocean with only a tiger and limited supplies, but

that's not a believable story. The crossing the return threshold is the next stage, the journey has changed the hero and they must learn to integrate this new knowledge with their life. This happens to Pi when he tells his story in the hospital and they didn't believe him. He decides that he must tell a believable story, so he changes it into something realistic, ultimately moving himself back into reality. He keeps the story mostly the same, he changes the animals into actual people, hyena symbolizes the cook, Orangutan symbolizes Pi's mother, Zebra symbolizes the sailor and the tiger symbolizes Pi.

The last stage of the hero's journey is freedom to live, once the journey is complete and the hero is integrated back into the world, they are free to live their life. Pi now lives in a realistic world, but thinks back to his experience sometimes. When Pi shares his story with others he lets them choose which to believe, but knowing for himself which he believes. " Adult Pi Patel: So which story do you prefer? Writer: The one with the tiger. That's the better story. Adult Pi Patel: Thank you. And so it goes with God. Writer: [smiles] It's an amazing story."

In conclusion, Pi transformed himself from his former self to grow and achieve things he didn't know he could. The hero's journey demonstrated in The Life of Pi goes along with the stages of the Monomyth explained by Joseph Campbell's A hero with a thousand faces. Every hero's journey follows a predictable pattern consisting of : Departure, Initiation and Return. Pi lived a hero's life, started as a " normal" person and by the end of the journey was changed, more knowledgeable and essentially a master of two worlds."

A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself." says Joseph Campbell. Would you be considered a hero if you followed the Monomyth stages by Joseph Campbell?