

Joseph cambell four functions of a mtyh



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Sayed Maghloubi (Historical Mythology) Joseph Campbell explains the following four functions of a myth. Its metaphysical function is to awaken us to the mystery and wonder of creation, to open our minds and our senses to an awareness of the mystical "ground of being," the source of all phenomena. Its cosmological function is to describe the "shape" of the cosmos, the universe, our total world, so that the cosmos and all contained within it become vivid and alive for us, infused with meaning and significance; every corner, every rock, hill, stone, and flower has its place and its meaning in the cosmological scheme which the myth provides.

Its sociological function is to pass down "the law," the moral and ethical codes for people of that culture to follow, and which help define that culture and its prevailing social structure. Its pedagogical function is to lead us through particular rites of passage that define the various significant stages of our lives—from dependency to maturity to old age, and finally, to our deaths, the final passage. The rites of passage bring us into harmony with the "ground of being" and allow us to make the journey from one stage to another with a sense of comfort and purpose.

The mystical experience, the core spiritual journey that envisions God, has always been a tough experience to communicate. Some would say it's impossible to communicate. Others would say that this is the primary function of myth—to find a way to communicate whatever mystical insight has been gained on the journey: an understanding of the mysteries that underlie the universe; an appreciation of its wonders; the sense of awe or rapture experienced. Since these things can't be communicated by direct means,

myth speaks in a language of metaphors, of symbols, and symbolic narratives that aren't bound by objective reality.

Some believe that the mystical experience is what gives birth to metaphoric language, metaphoric thinking. In our post-Enlightenment western world, we have decidedly turned to science to tell us what the "shape of the world is." Originally, however, myth performed this function, explaining the cultural history, religion, class structure, origin, even the origin of the geographical features in the surrounding landscape. A myth describes the shape of the world, and infuses each part of that world with meaning and significance.

And though a mythic tale may seem literally false in our world today, it was once considered true, and it still expresses a metaphorical truth. Campbell explains that the sociological function of myth is to support and validate a particular social order. The myth will make it clear who is in charge, what ethical code is appropriate, what the institutional rituals will be. The problem is that these codes are fixed, like the natural order, for all time; they are not subject to change. Our myths, according to Campbell, are seriously outdated.

Changing times require new myths, and since our times are changing so very rapidly, the myth-making function can't keep up. As a result, we are practically myth-less. Campbell felt we needed to expand into much more than we presently have. This is the aspect of myth that teaches us how to pass into and live all the differing stages of our lives. Our myths (as religion) give us rituals to live by, rites of passage to accomplish. We learn how to look at the world, at ourselves, from birth till death. Because he felt they

were all true, Campbell believed myth could teach us important lessons about how to live.