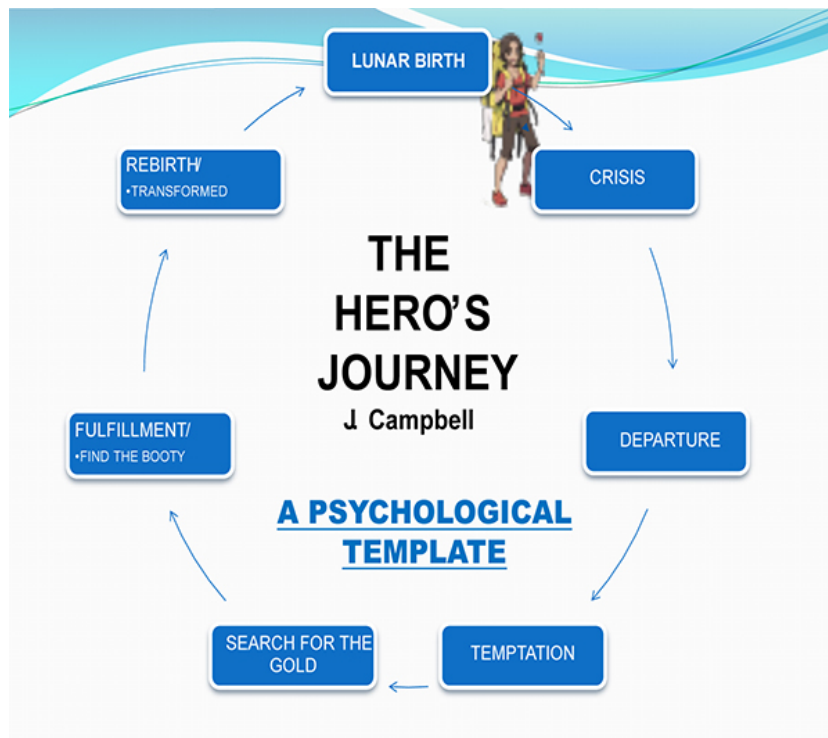


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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



Becoming a Hero in Your Own Life: Journey Out of Stuck by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.



Do I believe I have to stay stuck or just muddle through life? Do I believe I have the courage to push past obstacles and say Yes to the adventure of life or remain frozen in place?

Joseph Campbell's classic work, **The Hero's Journey**, takes us on a metaphorical journey out of stuck—from muddling through life with fear and anxiety towards a stronger sense of self and purpose. This cycle of change and transformation toward more psychological maturity challenges our myths, our inner dragons, and our lifelong belief that, "I can't do that!" Such journeys are embedded in the structure of stories, films, myths, and even fairy tales which depict the struggle to overcome the inevitable resistance and unease that arises when one departs from the known into the unknown. In our life's journey we experience many emotional ups and downs. No two people share the same response to life events. Our responses are learned. And we are the physical result of all our learned interpretations.



One example is seen in the film *Star Wars*, created by George Lucas, who was much influenced by Campbell's work. A multi-character, mythical space story that takes place "a long time ago in a fictional galaxy far, far away," *Star Wars* is an exploration of outer space, the unknown, and, as such, plumbs the depths of a perpetual conflict of the splits:

good vs evil, the dark side (the Sith), vs the light side (the Jedi), and *a good cause*. In the initial saga, the cause is to save the galaxy from the Empire's world-destroying battle-station, while also attempting to rescue Princess Leia from the evil Darth Vader. Our hero, Luke Skywalker, listens to his *inner spirit*, says Yes to the adventure, and moves beyond the boundaries of the known, thus evoking his higher nature. And, as in most mythological themes, the hero relates to a mentor, a guide, a wise old man who acts as his advisor. The hero joins forces with a Jedi Knight, a haughty pilot, a Wookiee, and two droids.

In the story of *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice squeezes in and out of many harrowing circumstances, obstacles, and challenges—of the sort we all experience in our lives, including the temptation to turn back, get distracted, listen to the advice (both good and bad) of others, or lose sight of our purpose. It takes courage for a person to look squarely into the mirror and face the unknown, alien, and neglected aspects of themselves. This is an especially frightening experience for one who has lived life in the comfort zone of external success and achievement. Initially, such a journey of change can cause great fear, but with a guide or mentor along the way, the result is a move into a far more mature, confident, and resilient sense of self.

Consider viewing the stories and events in *Star Wars* and many other films in terms of metaphors, not simply to inspire us but as a way to help us through the puzzle of our own personal conflicts. As metaphors, tales are psychological mirrors that reflect challenges we face on our own path. With this frame in mind, *Star Wars* exemplifies departure, crisis, temptation, and fulfillment. We also learn about the unknown, or alien aspects of the self. On the psychological stage, *Star Wars* takes us on a hero's journey (Campbell): Home (lunar birth), leaving home (going beyond the known), searching for the gold (what's missing), finding the treasure (the booty), and then coming home. Returning home is not about coming back to a location, it indicates a transformation of consciousness. The force that awakens in this hero's journey is an "inner force," the omnipresent energy inherent in all of us.

How We Can Stop Being a Boulder in Our Own Stream

False "myths" about ourselves can keep us stuck in believing we have no choice but to muddle through life. However, when we can learn how to push past obstacles by using our courage and resilience, it can transform everything.

Make the assumption that your beliefs, expectations, and self-image play a role in what's been happening to your body and soul. Death rates from cancer and heart disease are higher among people in psychological distress and lower among these who have a sense of purpose and well-being. Once you become aware of how you may have been limiting yourself by becoming a "boulder" in your own stream, your initial reaction may be anger at "missing out on life." But, as you begin to clarify your unmet needs, identify what you want for yourself, and convert that resistant energy into a self-determined goal, the anger dissipates, and the depressed "pain tape" is replaced by an internal self-dialogue that shouts about the joy of life. Your body-mind is constantly in the process of becoming what you believe.

In the end, we can experience a sense of fulfillment and a new sense of self. But all is not over! Just like our cells are constantly being renewed, so, too, can new challenges take us on to yet greater adventures and deepening experiences. As Campbell's work teaches, returning home from a journey is not just about coming back to a *location*, it's about a transformation of consciousness. We become more than we thought we were. We begin to see the world around us and inside us with new eyes, a new perspective, reborn. Now, with recognition, motivation, and support, our life becomes a new set of possibilities, and we become a mixed bag of potential just waiting to happen.

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