

prince asked his charioteer, and the reply he received was, "That's an old man. That's age."

"Are all men then to grow old?" asked the prince.

"Ah, yes," the charioteer replied.

"Then shame on life," said the traumatized young prince, and he begged, sick at heart, to be driven home.

On a second trip, he saw a sick man, thin and weak and tottering, and again, on learning the meaning of this sight, his heart failed him, and the chariot returned to the palace.

On the third trip, the prince saw a corpse followed by mourners. "That," said the charioteer, "is death."

"Turn back," said the prince, "that I may somehow find deliverance from these destroyers of life—old age, sickness, and death."

Just one trip more—and what he sees this time is a mendicant monk; "What sort of man is that?" he asks.

"That is a holy man," the driver replies, "one who has abandoned the goods of this world and lives without desire or fear."

Whereupon the young prince, on returning to his palace, resolved to leave his father's house and to seek a way of release from life's sorrows.

MOYERS: Do most myths say that suffering is an intrinsic part of life, and that there's no way around it?

CAMPBELL: I can't think of any that say that if you're going to live, you won't suffer. Myths tell us how to confront and bear and interpret suffering, but they do not say that in life there can or should be no suffering.

When the Buddha declares there is escape from sorrow, the escape is Nirvana, which is not a place, like heaven, but a psychological state of mind in which you are released from desire and fear.

MOYERS: And your life becomes—

CAMPBELL: —harmonious, centered, and affirmative.

MOYERS: Even with suffering?

CAMPBELL: Exactly. The Buddhists speak of the bodhisattva—the one who knows immortality, yet voluntarily enters into the field of the fragmentation of time and participates willingly and joyfully in the sorrows of the world. And this means not only experiencing sorrows oneself but participating with compassion in the sorrows of others. Compassion is the awakening of the heart from bestial self-interest to humanity. The word "compassion" means literally "suffering with."

MOYERS: But you don't mean compassion condones suffering, do you?

CAMPBELL: Of course compassion condones suffering in that it recognizes, yes, suffering is life.

MOYERS: That life is lived with suffering—

CAMPBELL: —with the suffering—but you're not going to get rid of it. Who, when or where, has ever been quit of the suffering of life in this world?

I had an illuminating experience from a woman who had been in severe physical pain for years, from an affliction that had stricken her in her youth. She had been raised a believing Christian and so thought this had been God's punishment of her for something she had done or not done at that time. She was in spiritual as well as physical pain. I told her that if she wanted release, she should affirm and not deny her suffering was her life, and that through it she had become the noble creature that she now was. And while I was saying all this, I was thinking, "Who am I to talk like this to a person in real pain, when I've never had anything more than a toothache?" But in this conversation, in affirming her suffering as the shaper and teacher of her life, she experienced a conversion—right there. I have kept in touch with her since—that was years and years ago—and she is indeed a transformed woman.

MOYERS: There was a moment of illumination?



CAMPBELL: Right there—I saw it happen.

MOYERS: Was it something you said mythologically?

CAMPBELL: Yes, although it's a little hard to explain. I gave her the belief that she was herself the cause of her suffering, that she had somehow brought it about. There is an important idea in Nietzsche, of *Amor fati*, the "love of your fate," which is in fact your life. As he says, if you say no to a single factor in your life, you have unraveled the whole thing. Furthermore, the more challenging or threatening the situation or context to be assimilated and affirmed, the greater the stature of the person who can achieve it. The demon that you can swallow gives you its power, and the greater life's pain, the greater life's reply.

My friend had thought, "God did this to me." I told her, "No, you did it to yourself. The God is within you. You yourself are your creator. If you find that place in yourself from which you brought this thing about, you will be able to live with it and affirm it, perhaps even enjoy it, as your life."

MOYERS: The only alternative would be not to live.

CAMPBELL: "All life is suffering," said the Buddha, and Joyce has a line—"Is life worth leaving?"

MOYERS: But what about the young person who says, "I didn't choose to be born—my mother and father made the choice for me."

CAMPBELL: Freud tells us to blame our parents for all the shortcomings of our life, and Marx tells us to blame the upper class of our society. But the only one to blame is oneself. That's the helpful thing about the Indian idea of karma. Your life is the fruit of your own doing. You have no one to blame but yourself.

MOYERS: But what about chance? A drunken driver turns the corner and hits you. That isn't your fault. You haven't done that to yourself.

CAMPBELL: From that point of view, is there anything in your life that did not occur as by chance? This is a matter of being able to accept chance. The ultimate backing of life is chance—the chance that your parents met, for example! Chance, or what might seem to be chance, is the means through which life is realized. The problem is not to blame or explain but to handle the life that arises. Another war has been declared somewhere, and you are drafted into an army, and there go five or six years of your life with a whole new set of chance events. The best advice is to take it all *as if* it had been of your intention—with that, you evoke the participation of your will.

MOYERS: In all of these journeys of mythology, there's a place everyone wishes to find. The Buddhists talk of Nirvana, and Jesus talks of peace, of the mansion with many rooms. Is that typical of the hero's journey—that there's a place to find?

CAMPBELL: The place to find is within yourself. I learned a little about this in athletics. The athlete who is in top form has a quiet place within himself, and it's around this, somehow, that his action occurs. If he's all out there in the action field, he will not be performing properly. My wife is a dancer, and she tells me that this is true in dance as well. There's a center of quietness within, which has to be known and held. If you lose that center, you are in tension and begin to fall apart.

The Buddhist Nirvana is a center of peace of this kind. Buddhism is a psychological religion. It starts with the psychological problem of suffering: all life is sorrowful; there is, however, an escape from sorrow; the escape is Nirvana—which is a state of mind or consciousness, not a place somewhere, like heaven. It is right here, in the midst of the turmoil of life. It is the state you find when you are no longer driven to live by compelling desires, fears, and social commitments, when you have found your center of freedom and can act by choice out of that. Voluntary action out of this center is the action of the bodhisattvas—joyful participation in the sorrows of the world. You are not grabbed,



because you have released yourself from the grabbers of fear, lust, and duties. These are the rulers of the world.

There is an instructive Tibetan Buddhist painting in which the so-called Wheel of Becoming is represented. In monasteries, this painting would not appear inside the cloister but on the outer wall. What is shown is the mind's image of the world when still caught in the grip of the fear of the Lord Death. Six realms of being are represented as spokes of the ever revolving wheel: one is of animal life, another of human life, another of the gods in heaven, and a fourth of the souls being punished in hell. A fifth realm is of the belligerent demons, antigods, or Titans. And the sixth, finally, is of the hungry ghosts, the souls of those in whose love for others there was attachment, clinging, and expectation. The hungry ghosts have enormous, ravenous bellies and pinpoint mouths. However, in the midst of each of these realms there is a Buddha, signifying the possibility of release and illumination.

In the hub of the wheel are three symbolic beasts—a pig, a cock, and a serpent. These are the powers that keep the wheel revolving—ignorance, desire, and malice. And then, finally, the rim of the wheel represents the bounding horizon of anyone's consciousness who is moved by the triad of powers of the hub and held in the grip of the fear of death. In the center, surrounding the hub and what are known as the "three poisons," are souls descending in darkness and others ascending to illumination.

MOYERS: What is the illumination?

CAMPBELL: The illumination is the recognition of the radiance of one eternity through all things, whether in the vision of time these things are judged as good or as evil. To come to this, you must release yourself completely from desiring the goods of this world and fearing their loss. "Judge not that you be not judged," we read in the words of Jesus. "If the doors of perception were cleansed," wrote Blake, "man would see everything as it is, infinite."

MOYERS: That's a tough trip.

CAMPBELL: That's a heavenly trip.

MOYERS: But is this really just for saints and monks?

CAMPBELL: No, I think it's also for artists. The real artist is the one who has learned to recognize and to render what Joyce has called the "radiance" of all things, as an epiphany or showing forth of their truth.

MOYERS: But doesn't this leave all the rest of us ordinary mortals back on shore?

CAMPBELL: I don't think there is any such thing as an ordinary mortal. Everybody has his own possibility of rapture in the experience of life. All he has to do is recognize it and then cultivate it and get going with it. I always feel uncomfortable when people speak about ordinary mortals because I've never met an ordinary man, woman, or child.

MOYERS: But is art the only way one can achieve this illumination?

CAMPBELL: Art and religion are the two recommended ways. I don't think you get it through sheer academic philosophy, which gets all tangled up in concepts. But just living with one's heart open to others in compassion is a way wide open to all.

MOYERS: So the experience of illumination is available to anyone, not just saints or artists. But if it is potentially in every one of us, deep in that unlocked memory box, how do you unlock it?

CAMPBELL: You unlock it by getting somebody to help you unlock it. Do you have a dear friend or good teacher? It may come from an actual human being, or from an experience like an automobile accident, or from an illuminating book. In my own life, mostly it comes from books, though I have had a long series of magnificent teachers.