## What Will/Should Be the New Myths? Global Myths?

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Mythologists observe that contemporary humans, especially in the West, need new myths, because the old ones no longer resonate and are stale. They often add that the new myths should be global in nature, in light of the globalization of human society, modern physics and cosmology, our exploration of outer space, and our capability to destroy ourselves. Below I tentatively explore the issues that will need to be addressed in navigating this course.

Our starting point must be to revisit the premise that myths are still necessary in our modern society. I believe they are needed, even critical. This is because the need for myth has been hardwired into our brains over eons of evolution, a quality that is not going to disappear anytime soon, nor should it. Myths serve us by evoking feelings of the sacred, awe, reverence, oneness, and inspiration. At their best, they bring us to a spiritual experience. Our ability to feel a sense of the sacred and have spiritual experiences is an evolved trait that increases our psychic health and the ability of human communities to function and thrive. This ability is universal, though it plays out differently depending on one's culture and spiritual practices. Neurological studies show that the mystical-spiritual experiences of people from different religious paradigms (e.g., Buddhist monks in meditation, Christian mystical experiences of "God") are essentially the same. Having a spiritual impulse is part of what makes all of us human. In light of this, having new myths that better resonate with our spiritual needs and goals will be important for our psychological well-being and a healthy society. Further, the fact that human spiritual needs and experiences are universal and of like kind serves to confirm that at least some myths can and should be global, by which I mean encompassing and serving to unify all of humankind.

The next step is to remember where myths come from. Depth psychology teaches us that they come ultimately from our unconscious psyche, principally the collective unconscious. On the one hand, this fact too shows that myths can be global. On the other hand, it means that the new myths can't and won't be so "new." They will have to be based on archetypes that formed during our long psychic evolution and which generated the old myths. To a large extent, the "new myths" will be old wine in new bottles. Straying too far from what has resonated with our psyches in the past will generate a hollow story that won't resonate at all, like a piece of music that may be technically flawless in form but lacks that spark of soul and does not touch us. The difference now, as in the past, is that in order to resonate and have life the new myths must wear the dress of contemporary environments and cultures.

The above considerations, however, make it hard to be more specific about the content of new myths. The fact that myths emerge from our unconscious also means that we can't simply think them into existence using our ego consciousness. This means that mythologists can neither predict nor mandate what the new myths will be, except in the broadest terms as discussed here. We must not overthink the problem. Mythologists can,

however, help midwife the new myths by conceptualizing the framework within which they will have to emerge and by working to create the right kind of environment and assets/tools for mythmakers to utilize, which may include educational programs (including in spiritual practices, art, music, filmmaking, etc.), popularizing art, reading, and mythology, and helping to generate funding for all of this.

The above analysis confirms that we need to look to the same sources of creativity that have generated myths, spirituality, and art in the past: artists, writers, composers, musicians, and (more modernly) filmmakers. This is only natural because creativity springs largely from unconscious processes, which artists succeed in tapping for inspiration and then bring to concrete life for themselves and the rest of us. The Surrealists, for example, famously tapped their dreams in producing their art.

Despite the limitations on our conceiving the particular content of the new myths, with the benefits of depth psychology it is possible to identify a few areas where new myths are needed and should be able to resonate. This is possible precisely because these are areas in which we can see that modern society to our detriment has unduly repressed and suppressed parts of our unconscious, parts which want to break free. These include:

- Myths that celebrate and bring out the feminine in all of us and in society, because it has been unduly repressed for centuries (including in many of the old myths).
- Myths that serve to put us back in touch with nature, put us in awe of it, and rekindle our sensitivity to it, because modern urban humans have lost touch with nature. Here modern science (physics, astronomy, cosmology) can play a role.
- Myths dealing with sexuality, since our society has repressed sex and sexual dialogue for so long.
- Any myths that serve to help individuals and communities to recognize and address their shadows.
- Any myths springing from the old archetypes but appearing in contemporary cultural dress to better resonate with us. The hero's journey motif, for example, will continue to flourish, and in fact has become a template for novelists and filmmakers.

The above considerations apply in the case of global myths, but in this case there are further challenges. Inspired by photos of "Earthrise" from the Apollo moon missions which put humankind's place in the cosmos in better perspective, Joseph Campbell proclaimed that the time had come for new global myths. I agree that we should have them, but getting there is not so simple.

A threshold hurdle is that the human psyche evolved in such a way that we tend to be groupish, seeking identity with one or more groups which disassociate themselves from others and give separate groups definition. Historically, such group identity (and rivalry with outsiders) has helped foster myths as well as things that group members consider sacred (e.g., biblical Israel, ancient Hellenic identity, the Catholic Church). Developing global myths based on our common humanity in the absence of any "rival" group would take us into largely uncharted territory. Even our favorite mythological

films (e.g., *Star Wars, Lord of the Rings*) entail humans (sometimes with non-humans) uniting against common enemies. At the same time, modern astronomy and cosmology show the tiny role of our earth and humankind in the large scheme of things. In fact, it is the old myths (and old religious thinking) which portrayed our earth and humanity as special in the cosmos and thereby united human thinking to some extent.

A second challenge is that global myths would tend to parallel globalization in general, which itself is a sensitive issue. Many regret the leveling of world culture and the concomitant marginalization of smaller cultures and their languages and art. People resist the corporatization of agriculture and the rest of the national and world economies. There is a countermovement supporting local products and virtually anything local. Sensitive and enlightened people celebrate diversity. I would venture to say that the folks on the anti-globalization, pro-local and pro-diversity side of the fence also tend to be the very people who most appreciate myths. We can, for example, write stories (and essays and books) about the virtues of diversity, which I would of course favor, but in light of our psychic inheritance it is not clear whether these would qualify as myths. In terms of both mythmakers and their audience, developing successful global myths that are aligned with the human psyche, progressive while embracing human diversity, and avoid "McMyth" is going to be a tricky needle to thread.

Do these challenges mean that global myths are flawed in concept or that they are not worth pursuing? Surely not. There is an ugly side to many groupish myths that leads to self-delusion, jingoism, and collective shadow behaviors, which result in needless strife and sometimes wars. Global myths can target and combat such problems and help lead us into a more progressive and elevated society. In the end, a key to having resonant, living global myths will require a corresponding effort to elevate (evolve) the human psyche itself so that we will be more receptive to global myths and better able to create them. Obviously, these two goals should be pursued in parallel, because in psychological terms they go hand in hand. One will not succeed without the other. This should mean that depth psychology has a great future with great things to do!