



Transparent to Transcendence
by James Baquet
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"Jasmine" co-ordinates the JCF (Joseph Campbell Foundation) Roundtable in Orange County, CA. She sent this out to members; I've added part of my response, plus two more that other members wrote.

Jasmine's letter

My Friday night experience with the Orange County JCF RoundTable still has my mind spinning... (I'll send you a formal memo sharing my experience at a later time)... during which I stopped my train of thought to ask: "What does 'transparent to the transcendent'" really mean? I've heard it so many times and just went past Professor Campbell's term thinking I was just supposed to know.

On this beautiful Sunday morning, instead of doing my housework, I Googled...and wish to share this with anyone who might have/will wonder what Campbell means, and what is the reference. PLEASE ... if anyone can enlighten me further, with other references or a clearer understanding, PLEASE take a moment and educate me... If this subject bores you, don't read on...

From *An Open Life - Joseph Campbell in Conversation With Michael Toms*

<http://www.whidbey.com/parrott/toms.htm>

Heinrich Zimmer once said, "The best things can't be told; the second best are misunderstood; the third best have to do with history." Now, the vocabulary through which the best things are told as second best is the vocabulary of history, but it doesn't refer to history; it refers through this to the transcendent. Deities have to become, as one great German scholar said, "transparent to the transcendent." The transcendent must show and shine through those deities. But it must shine through us, too, and through the spiritual things we are talking about. And as long as you keep pinning it down to concrete fact, and declare something isn't true because it didn't happen, you're wrong. We don't say that about fairy tales, and so we get the truth of them. We should read our religions that way.

(source undocumented)

Sacred space is a space that is transparent to transcendence, and everything within such a space furnishes a base for meditation, even for the youngest child. When you enter through the door, everything within such a space is symbolic, the whole world is mythologized, and spiritual life is possible. This is a place where you can go and feel safe and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first you might find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, you will eventually find yourself again and again." -Joseph Campbell

The Modern Alchemist: A Guide to Personal Transformation

©1994 by Richard and Iona Miller

http://www.nwbotanicals.org/oak/magick/tma/tma_intro2.htm

Your values widen into the ethical, aesthetic, heroic, humanitarian, altruistic, and creative. You learn to live your mythology consciously. You are becoming transparent to transcendence, and experience what it means to suspend time, space, and your personal identity.

From: *Transformations of Myth Through Time*

One serpent is biting the youth between the eyes, opening the eye of inner vision, which sees past the display of the field of time and space. A second serpent is biting under the ear, opening the ear to the song of the music of the spheres, the music, the voice of the universe. The third serpent is biting the heel, the bite of the Achilles tendon, the bite of death. One dies to one's little ego and becomes a vehicle of the knowledge of the transcendent -- becoming

transparent to transcendence. That was the sense of the initiations that we have been reading about... -Joseph Campbell

Mythology for Transhumans

by Amara Graps

<http://www.extropy.com>

or a slightly different version http://www.amara.com/fio/fio_femcosmo.html

My definition of religion is the service of the supernatural or transcendence. Here, the deit(y)ies worshiped are often those described in a myth. Sometimes those "deities" are inside of you, hence, by this path, we arrive at the non-deist spiritual practices embracing individuality, compassion, and personal growth that are compatible with other aspects of the transhumanist perspective. "You are it," as the Upanishads say, and gods are the personifications of the energies that inform life, the same information that builds the trees and moves the animals and whips up the ocean waves. Transcendence and being transparent-to-transcendence refers to those information packets that are informing the body, which come from somewhere, it doesn't matter the origin. At the far end of transcendence is where some people, if they purposely or accidentally or unconsciously open all of their pores, discover that a rapture of life fills them from they-don't-know-where.

OK now, talk amongst yourselves...

Responses from:

Martin in Germany:

Dear Jasmine,

It's good to hear, that your recent RoundTable meeting keeps inspiring you. You know, the most important time and space is not that of a ritual or a sacred space, but the time and space between those rituals and sacred spaces.

Campbell has borrowed the term "to become transparent to transcendence" from Karlfried Graf Dürckheim. (His complete name, just for your amusement, was Karl Friedrich Alfred Heinrich Ferdinand Maria Graf Eckbrecht von Dürckheim - Montmartin). I have a couple of (I think about a dozen) tapes with lectures and one radio interview with Graf Dürckheim, and I used to listen to them, always before going to sleep.

He considered "to become transparent to transcendence" as the essence of his teachings. I'm not sure if the term is originally from Graf Dürckheim. I think I remember, that the painters of the Blauer Reiter - Paul Klee, Franz Marc & Kandinsky

- had a similar expression: They wanted to make visible "transcendence through transparency".

I'm not sure what Campbell meant with that term, but I guess I know what Graf Dürckheim meant. In one of my tapes he explains, that you can transcend your ego, for instance, by devoting your life to an idea, as to say to something that embraces more than your ego.

Remember that this is the way Campbell defines the hero in Power of Myth: someone who devotes his life to something bigger than himself.

Then Graf Dürckheim explains, that there is another step: To leave ideas and ideals behind. Remember, that Campbell said, it does not matter if we consider the ideal the hero is fighting for, to be right or wrong. Campbell used the pyramid as a symbol to explain the difference between transcendence and the field of time and space: At the base of the pyramid we have to choose one side; at its top there are no sides at all.

So "becoming transparent to transcendence" might mean, that in life, though you have to choose sides and make decisions all the time, you should be aware (become transparent), that on the pyramid's top (transcendence) all sides are united in one single point. Maybe this is an explanation that is in accord both with Campbell's and Graf Dürckheim's understanding. Graf Dürckheim also explains, in the tradition of Meister Eckhart (and I guess all serious mystics), that there is no way to search for god - you have to be found by transcendence.

Graf Dürckheim teaches that transcendence is searching for you all the time; It finds you as soon as you have become open, or transparent to the transcendent. He uses the example of the door, that someone tries to open his whole life long, full of desperation - until he discovers, that the door opens inwardly.

Maybe you like to start a thread about it in the JCF forums? It's certainly a topic that should be of interest also for associates who do not lead a RoundTable group.

Yours, Martin

Debbie in California

What a splendid e-mail.

You are addressing a subject I have been fascinated with since I was 3-years old and used to shut myself in the closet to "talk to God." My mother was slightly bewildered and a little alarmed (as she should have been, given what it took to deal with me through the years), when she asked me what I was doing, and I told her that I was talking to God, and He had said,
"When they tell you you're awake, you're really asleep.
You're only awake when you're with me."

Transparent to the transcendent? Obviously, Christianity had an influence on me, even that young, but I was being told to listen someplace else....

Since then, I have been studying a very interesting aspect of the transparency of transcendence -- the very nearly "blinding light" of fame, where people get to live myths. It's a very scary world where you are "hanging over the edge" at all times. I have attempted to do extensive studies (personally and through astrology), as I think it tightly ties to the source of our myths. When the actions and images of real people become idealized in the common psyche, we have a living myth.

I remember the ruined lawn in front of Kensington Palace where the mounds of flowers had been laid 6 months' before in honor of the death of our Moon Goddess, Princess Diana, the "Mother of the Solstice King." If you are an astrologer, you know the thread runs through astrology, as well as the human psyche. Young Prince William was actually born on the Summer Solstice on a Solar Eclipse. Why are these symbols so powerful and universal? How does someone like Princess Diana live this myth for us? Better yet, where do you and I fit in, living our own mythic lives? You have asked some marvelous questions.

Have fun with this, too, and feel free to share it if you wish.

My Response

Hi, Jasmine!

I doubt that you remember me. ... I've never made it to a meeting. (I have been living in China since February, so I'm not likely to make it to any meetings soon!)

Passing through the Hong Kong airport a few weeks ago, I saw a book called *Secrets of the Code*, which has background articles on the ideas in *The Da Vinci Code*. The most fascinating are a series of excerpts from Freke and Gandy's *The Jesus Mysteries*. (I guess I'll have to go over to Hong Kong and find a copy.) While I don't necessarily "buy" everything they say, I am pleased with their designation of much of the Church as "Literalist." Freke and Gandy think that the Gnostics were the "original" Church, basically a Jewish spin on the pan-Mediterranean Godman that they call "Osiris-Dionysus." In other words, they think Jesus was completely made up, with no historical personage connected. (That is where I'm not sure I whole-heartedly agree.) Then, they say, the "Orthodox" Church came along and literalized all the mythic aspects of the story, saying the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection were biologically and historically *real*.

I think what Campbell was getting at was that in historicizing these events, the Church overshot the mark and stripped them of their mythic significance completely. As Campbell said in *The Power of Myth*:

It was Hegel who spoke of our anthropomorphic God as the gaseous vertebrate--such an idea of God as many Christians hold. Or he is thought of as a bearded old man with a not very pleasant temperament. But "transcendent" properly means that which is beyond all concepts. (p. 75 in my edition)

But Campbell didn't originate the phrase "transparent to transcendence." Karlfried Graf Durckheim did. And he wasn't talking about myths; he was a psychologist who was a student of Gurdjieff. As a therapist, Durckheim was not talking about making our *myths* transparent to transcendence; that's Campbell's reading. Durckheim was talking about making our *selves* transparent to transcendence. And Campbell acknowledges this, too:

I think what we are looking for is a way of experiencing the world that will open to us the transcendent that informs it, and at the same time forms ourselves within it. That is what people want. That is what the soul asks for. (*Power* p. 61)

You are God, not in your ego, but in your deepest being, where you are at one with the nondual transcendent. (*Power* p. 264)

Hence Campbell's love of repeating the Vedantan idea "You are That."