



On 'Following'

It is well known that towards the end of his life Joseph Campbell *Find where it is, and don't be afraid to follow it*" and *"if you do follow all the while, waiting for you... doors will open where you didn't know*

INITIALLY THIS SOUNDS attractive, but although Campbell did not intend it this way, it can become a destructive demand, and we might wonder what happens with a life where it is not clear what your bliss is, or that you can find it, or that once found you could pursue it? Perhaps other things are also demanded; perhaps there are other imperatives which are just as real, or obstacles which cannot be crossed? Is, for example, a life irredeemably lost if you care for a child or a spouse who is incapacitated and do not follow bliss alone? Might you develop just as much from pain or restriction?

The implied message that if you do not follow your one path, your one enjoyment, your one bliss, then your life will be wasted, is reinforced by the Christian parable of the monetary talents, from whence we get the idea of personal '*talents*'. It is not surprising that religion and myth lurk beneath an

imperative. In this story the servant who fails to increase or use his talents, but merely keeps them safe, displeases the master and is thrown outside into the darkness where there is "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matthew 25: 14-30 and a similar tale at Luke 19:12-27). Those who do not use their talents correctly are clearly damned. The message of using talents can thus become a dictum to oppress and flog ourselves with. The story also seems to make a perfectly confused emblem for life in modern society; if we don't make money or increase our selves, by ourselves, then we have failed.

Campbell also *seems* to be saying that if you follow your bliss then problems will be cleared away. Jung suggests that we should beware of philosophies that imply that we can make our life simple, certain and smooth. Problems, in his view, rather than success, force us to greater consciousness and to separation

your Bliss

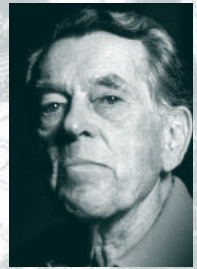
by Jonathan Marshall

said: “My general formula for my students is ‘Follow your bliss’.
 w your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there
 w they were going to be” (*The Power of Myth*, pp. 120, 149).

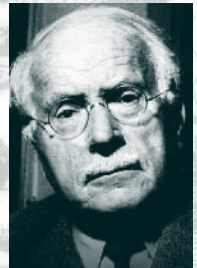
from childhood. “Every problem... brings the possibility of a widening of consciousness”. “The serious problems of life are never fully solved. If ever they should appear to be so it is a sure sign that something has been lost” (Jung “The Stages of Life”, CW 8). Neither is it that clear that there is really only one potential path through our lives; the Self is capable of many expressions, and if one is taken then others may have to be surrendered. There is at the end of our lives, only the one path we have taken. If we have a fantasy of bliss which we did not fulfil, does that mean our life was misspent? Or can we use our problems to get somewhere?

There may be two solutions to this issue. Firstly, the mystical; our bliss is within us already, and can be brought to whatever we do and, as a result, we do not *have* to follow some path in order to be satisfied or become whole. Secondly, our ambition is a symbol of something,

but not necessarily that *something* itself. In which case, the ambition can be explored like a dream, or an active imagination. What does, say, “being a professional writer” symbolise to you? What does it feel like in your body? We can make associations, we can see where the unconscious wants to go, and perhaps face our misconceptions. We can do the same with our reactions to our supposedly prosaic realities. In both cases the depth is already present in our being, rather than in something we might have done or might achieve. Perhaps following either track will help us act in a new way, perhaps different from what we thought we wanted. Perhaps it can help us *be*. In either case, through work and facing problems, we can move beyond a fantasy and social based imperative towards something valid for the soul.



Joseph Campbell



Carl Gustav Jung