

The Value of Mythology Today

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When one speaks of Mythology, what comes to mind is: Wonderful stories of fantastic gods and heroes; or mysterious giants and monsters of a past long gone or imagined. We think of people's old rituals and religions in which we do not believe, but we read their stories with interest and fascination. In spite of the fact that Mythology has become the subject of serious academic study and many scholars have borrowed mythical material to explain the truth of various incidents in their own fields the fact remains that most people, still, perceive Mythology as something non pertinent to their own lives and their world.

So the word MYTH today is generally used to indicate something which is false, or at least not true in a real sense. However, this word comes from the Greek word MYTHOS, the original meaning of which is: STORY. In other words, MYTHOS is a story, and a story is neither true nor false by itself. It becomes true if people believe in it, and conversely, it becomes false if people do not believe in it. This, of course, raises the question of what TRUTH is, and this goes beyond the issue of whether something is a fact or not.

A fact is a fact, but TRUTH is defined by people based on their own interpretation of the fact. So we may have several people experiencing the same factual event, but their story on what they have witnessed might be totally different; sometimes, so different that it might be hard to believe that these stories were based on the same fact. The event has not changed, but the way people have experienced the event constitutes the basis of their STORY, their MYTH, and their TRUTH.

People's ideas and points of view are shaped by the environment in which they are born and raised, and these ideas become their own beliefs as well, which in turn color the way in which they, too, are experiencing the world. The same is also true about the STORIES and MYTHS we all hold sacred collectively as families, nations, religions, political parties or as any other group. These stories permeate our language, our songs, our art, our rituals, our products, and the totality of our every day experience. For this reason MYTHS are powerful and they should not be taken lightly. Even if they are not literally

real they shape subconsciously people's TRUTH, and they are often used to justify ideologies, political acts, authority, and can even lead to war, murder and genocide. As D.A. Leeming put it, "one culture's cleansing ritual, based on myth can become another culture's holocaust." (The World of Myth, 5)

This speaks clearly of the fact that Mythology, far from being impertinent, contains real power of which we all have to be vigilant. Its language might be symbolic or metaphorical, but it describes vividly our human condition. For it is through our MYTHS that we all learn how to interpret our world, how to approach the mystery of LIFE, and how to attach meaning to our existence. From that point of view, we can all use Mythology as the thread which unites us all as humans; but we can also employ our MYTHS as a tool of destruction. The choice, of course, is ours.



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