

The Eight Mirrors

Exploring the Life of Yeshe Tsogyal & Our Own Spiritual Path

The Invitation

The mystery that is out there is the same mystery that is within you.
Joseph Campbell

Each one of us has an intuition about the mystery of ourselves and a deep desire to experience it fully. For Buddhists, the possibility of penetrating this mystery is set into motion with the arising of a personal intention or aspiration to awaken (Sanskrit - bodhicitta).

Once bodhicitta is present, a Buddhist lives, not for temporal and mundane goals, but for the experience of eternal spiritual knowledge. All experience is regarded as a portal into awakening. From sunrise to sunset and in-between, the spiritual journey unfolds and the individual advances on the path to ultimate truth.

Fortunately, there are maps for this journey. In vajrayana, these are maps of consciousness presented in the guise of extensive metaphors, archetypes, symbols, and mythical and historical role models. Their sole purpose is to connect the individual with the deeper self and to make the deeper self real.

The seeker engages in deep inner work, integrating the eternal, the silent, and the unmoving, with the diverse, fluctuating manifestations of their personal experience.

About Myth

Myths give inspiration for aspiration.

Joseph Campbell

Their purpose:

According to Joseph Campbell myths introduce us to the ground of higher truth. They provide guidance for the journey of life, both mundane and sacred. He taught that myths are secret openings that carry us forward across the difficult thresholds of transformation.

Their functions:

Traditionally and cross-culturally, Campbell expounded in Pathways to Bliss, myth fulfills four important functions. First, it offers an inspiring world view which initiates the individual into the mystery of existence. Second, it offers a total and sacred view of the universe and what lies beyond time and space. Third, it teaches how to make the journey of connecting or reconciling relative existence with ultimate mystery of being.

Myth as re-construction:

In examining the recurrent themes in myths, Campbell concluded that typically myths are concerned with destruction and then re-construction in greater more spacious light.

Personal mythical journey:

Campbell also remarked on how important it is for the individual to discover their own mythic life, especially in today's world which is changing so rapidly that many contemporary myths are no longer effective.

The Heroic Journey

We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love. But always meeting ourselves.

J. Joyce

Campbell portrayed myths as stories of heroic persons that have gone before us.

The hero's life:

The first task is called the down-going. This is the call to adventure in which the hero moves away from the conventional outer world and seeks the inner world – where the real difficulties lie. Having entered the inner realms, the hero receives transformative instructions and initiations and eventually succeeds in severing the old dysfunctional patterns. At the same time, there is a breakthrough, a direct experience of something previously unknown. The hero and is thus re-born into more light and wisdom. Eventually the hero transcends all limitations and enters the stage of the up-going when is given the task of returning to the world to teach others and bestow blessings.

The Buddhist hero:

In the Buddhist model, because of unawareness, the hero realizes that he has become separated from his true nature and sets out to reunite with himself - recognizing who he really is. With this realization, which is the realization of all buddhas, the hero then re-manifests himself eternally for the benefit of beings..

The Heroine's Journey

The wonderful and transcendental beauty of Campbell's description of the hero as "the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally, human forms" is its ability to be transposed upon either man or woman.

In as far as the hero's journey is inward, psychological and metaphorical, there is no difference between genders. On the other hand, psychologically, there may be different needs and motifs. For example, the male hero will often go off to war, but the female hero will often make a quest in search of her own experience, giving birth to herself in a different manner than her male counterpart.

In vajrayana, this difference is said not to be a difference, but rather it is explained that the hero dwells in the play of phenomena and the heroine dwells as the space of phenomena. Since the vajrayana practitioner is most directly seeking the experience of the space of emptiness, it is often taught that meditation on the female archetype will be more effective in reaching this goal.

Joseph Campbell perhaps had a similar inclination. When asked about the heroine's journey, he said that there is no heroine's journey, that the woman was where the men/hero's were trying to get too... much like Odysseus trying to get home to Penelope.

Role Models & Archetypes

We have only to follow the thread of the hero-path . . . And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.

Joseph Campbell

It is impossible to tread the heroic path without a role model or archetype. Role models are archetypes that inspire us to see ourselves, not larger than life but deeper than life. When triggered, an archetype can act as a mirror for change. You see yourself as more worthy or more powerful.

An archetype is like a boat that carries you over to the other side and then you discard it.

According to Carl Jung archetypes are inherited memories represented in the mind as universal symbols and can be observed in dreams and myths. They are states of awareness. They are concentrations of psychic energy. They exist as potential and lay as potential in our consciousness until it is triggered in our life. Once triggered, the archetype begins to manifest in you. You can speak to your archetype and ask it to work through you.

Working with a role model or archetype is also a way of working with personal content –our individual feelings, experiences, and observations. It's about embodying the archetype, not emulating it. Although the archetype is universal, the embodiment of it is personally fulfilling.

Yeshe Tsogyal as an Archetype

The Yeshe Tsogyal archetype doesn't reside only in women. Gandhi and Lincoln were markedly feminine in their image and vision; so were Jesus and Buddha.

Yeshe Tsogyal lived in the eighth century Tibet at the time when the Indian master Padmasambhava was introducing the Buddhist doctrine. Through the centuries she has become a mythic spiritual figure whose life story puts us in touch with the path of enlightenment. Beyond this, she is also manifest at a quantum and nonlocal levels as deity and Great Mother.

Yeshe Tsogyal recorded her life story on several occasions for the benefit of future generations. And even though her memoirs are rooted in a culture that no longer exists, they are continuously being translated and re-translated into European languages as accounts of astounding human development.

In the short version of her life story, after first meeting her transcendent identity and then her re-birth into this world, we are quickly swept into her personal recollections as a misunderstood child, a coveted woman, a struggling seeker, a steadfast meditator, a spiritual consort, and finally a master of great power and wisdom in her own right.

What emerges from her life inspires us all -- men and women, working people and detached hermits -- journeyers of all inclinations. It is this. Enlightenment is not about changing ourselves or pursuing noble ideals, or even arriving at a final destination. It is to see our true nature surfacing moment to moment in the mirrors of our life experiences.

The Eight Mirrors

The Mirror:

When we hold a mirror up to ourselves, things we had not previously seen may become visible. We may be shocked or pleased with these discoveries, but either way, we become aware of a bigger picture and gain more profound information than just listening to the story and thinking about it. Looking in the mirror we see ourselves as the hero

The personalization of myth:

Inspired by Rumi's advice to, Unfold your own myth, the Eight Mirrors is an experiential translation of Yeshe Tsogyal's life story into our own languaging. Not satisfied with mere intellectual comprehension or a superficial emulation of her life story, we must work a little to bring it into our life and times.

The motif of re-birth:

The entire Yeshe Tsogyal is like a second womb. Mythically, we are to be reborn from this womb and gain freedom and liberation.

The Eight Mirrors:

The Eight Mirrors are drawn from the eight chapters of the Yeshe Tsogyal autobiography. Each chapter functions as a mirror of awareness which contributes to our awakening. Each chapter lays out the spiritual challenges and how they are navigated so that the energy of enlightenment passes through and the hero evolves.

These Mirrors are called:

source and intention, birth and manifestation, the outer world, the inner journey, secret space, integration, and fulfillment.

They highlight the spiritual rhythm of our being. Beginning with unmanifest wholeness, we are moved into embodiment where the challenges of the world are encountered. This "meeting" culminates in our dedication to the spiritual journey, which in turn concludes with the discovery of the highest forms of wisdom, compassion, and completion.

How the Mirrors are presented:

Since the work is experiential, the model offers several channels of experience.

For each Mirror, there are quotations that interpret the life story; quotations from the sadhana scriptures; overviews that suggest the melodic essence of the Mirror; a few contemplative reflections; experiential maxims. Lastly, there are color and chakra correspondences drawn from the Aura-Soma system of healing through color, plant, and crystal energy.

Looking in the Mirror

In the context of an Eight Mirrors workshop or retreat, the work is directed mainly through experiential exercises and rituals called, Looking in the Mirror.

Without seeking or providing any specific information or conclusions, Looking in the Mirror is an open-ended, curious, non-judgmental way of working with a wider than normal set of options for understanding ourselves, the world, and our actions.

The Looking in the Mirror exercises are not presented in this resource book for the simple reason that prior knowledge of them will decrease their usefulness. However, the individual can expect to participate in gentle self-awareness, using mindfulness, silence, and reporting internal experience. In addition, some exercises involve creative writing, drawing/painting, or role-playing. Regarding the rituals, some are traditional Buddhist rituals and some are contemporary creations aimed at experiencing the Mirrors directly, without the sheath of mental thought.

When we look into the mirrors of Yeshe Tsogyal's life story, we see things that are not usually seen in our personal and cultural mirror.