

Life's Paradox

uncommon reflections of life matters

Are You a Hero?

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Heroes. What do they mean to you? Do images of mythical heroes like Sir Lancelot of the Round Table, Mulan the Chinese Warrior, Psyche the Greek Immortal, or Luke Skywalker the Jedi Knight spring to mind? Could it be historical legends like Saint Joan of Arc, Alexander the Great, Genghiz Khan, Mary Queen of Scots? Or is it about the superheroes like Batman, Spiderman, Superman and more recently, The Incredibles? Who are your heroes?

I was amidst discussion with friends about our greatest heroes. We were considering Mahatma Gandhi to Jesus Christ, our own less known yet undoubtedly pioneering great-grandparents, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis to Tiger Woods. One of my insightful friends then piped up: "Me. I am my greatest hero."

A pregnant pause as we all reflected. We tend to look beyond ourselves for heroes – people whom we admire and aspire to. It was thought provoking to think that I can be my own greatest hero. And why ever not?

The perennial philosopher, Joseph Campbell, who has brought the mythical sense of the world back into our everyday consciousness, said: "Life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be lived.....It's not the agony of the quest, but the rapture of the revelation."

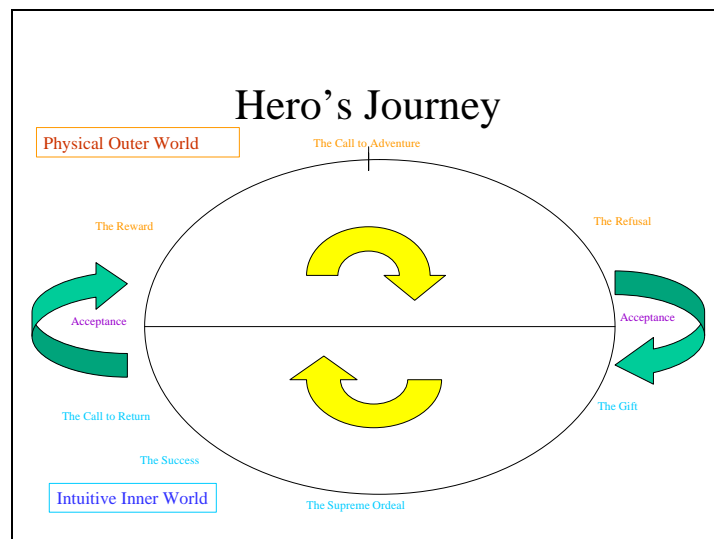
Joseph Campbell, in contrast to conventional scholar's emphasis on cultural differences, concentrated on similarities, in his comparative historical approach to mythology, religion and literature. In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell taught us the poet's way of how to read a myth: symbolically, metaphorically, soulfully.

In his cross-cultural explorations of the essence of human nature, Campbell consistently alluded to the Hero's Journey as being a common theme in myths across all cultures. In fact, the Hero's Journey is the formula by which Hollywood screenplay writers have structured evergreen bestseller movies over and over again.

Since fiction imitates life, how far removed can it be that we are all on a Hero's Journey? If that be so, am I not the mystery I am seeking to know? Too deep?

Let's break down the Hero's Journey as I understand it. As you follow me on this very simplified version of Campbell's thoughts, why not indulge yourself into how these apply in your life?

In my interpretation, I consider my life to be one big Hero's Journey that consists of fractals of countless heroic journeys within. Let me illustrate by just one such example in my life to help illuminate the concepts within the Hero's Journey. As one cycle of this mini-journey ends, a whole new adventure at a different level begins.



The Call to Adventure

It all starts with The Call. I am sure we are all familiar with people getting their so-called Calling. That's just one way of looking at it.

I began my professional life in dentistry. It was certainly rewarding both financially, intellectually and socially. As years went by, my niche developed not just into pediatric dentistry patients, but more of the Phobic/ Highly Anxious kind. One could say I was particularly good with hyperventilating kids and their parents. My practice thrived as the word got around about how I can transform the lives of these apprehensive patients and their families.

Is this then my Calling? Ah. But it is not as obvious. The Call to Adventure, I believe, really occurred after I got married, and the next step was the hounding question (not just by the Mother-In-Law): "You're great with kids – so when are you going to be a mother?" The Call to Adventure of Parenting...

The Refusal

This is the usual reaction of the hero: Refusal to take the Call because "I can't do it" or "It's too comfortable to change the status quo" or "I just do not have the skills".

In legendary tales, we hear of heroes such as Luke Skywalker (a farmer on his planet) refusing to heed Princess Leia's holographic call for help because it was harvest time! To him being a warrior was far from his mind. How can it be a Calling!

My refusal to the Call? In true form of the career woman of my generation – I was having too good a time to be silly enough to opt-out of what all my feminist foremothers had fought so hard to get. So I indulged in "Me, I and Myself". Nope – I refuse to give up the good life of a "to die for" career and the self-satisfaction of being a totally independent woman of substance. Kids – forget it. Aren't they supposed to be dependent on you? Like, what's gonna become of my freedom? Besides, I am just a kid myself. How can I look after another soul?

So, seven years passed me by, child-free. My mother-in-law gave up four years earlier to pester me regarding the baby issue. It was about that time when she asked me to go visit a doctor "if I was having problems with conceiving." Naughty me as I whispered: "I have. The doctor said I am fine. I am having trouble getting your son to see him. Would you help me ask him to do so?" With that, she never asked me about having babies again!

Acceptance – Transition to Intuitive Inner World from the Physical Outer World

Despite all my excuses and justifications, deep down I wanted to be a mother. It just did not feel right at this point in time. The time was of course, never right. So what the heck – I decided to throw caution to the wind.

Lo and behold! I was blessed with the conception of my first son, Jett. Even at the time of re-confirmation by my GP (after the shock of the OTC Pregnancy Test result), I was still in denial. “My life as I know it is ended!” I remember lamenting to the wide-eyed GP who is still teetering on registering me as her first antenatal depressive patient.

As one accepts the Call, you are given a Gift. In *Star Wars*, most people think it was the light saber given to Skywalker by Obiwan Kenobi. It is actually something more intangible. This Gift manifests itself only in the Supreme Ordeal – when one’s true talent is ultimately tested. Until then, it is hidden within oneself.

The Gift

As I let go of my personal crisis about not being good enough, or even ready to be a mother, I decided to embrace parenting with a strong intention of personal development for my self and my child. I thought that was a good frame of mind to come from.

Amazingly, I was given a Gift then, that will remain hidden from me, until I was challenged by further ordeals.

That is the nature of the Gift that is presented to you when you accept the Call.

The Supreme Ordeal

Following from the *Star Wars* saga, Skywalker encounters many ordeals which he succeeds through, usually with help from a multitude of guides (Obiwan, Yoda, Han Solo). Facing his Supreme Ordeal of destroying the *DeathStar* (or be annihilated himself), he trusts to come through by using the Gift of...you guessed it The Force.

The Supreme Ordeal brings us to the edge of our beliefs, values and even our identity. We are given the opportunity of a challenge to essentially Do (“Use the Force, Luke”) or Die (if we did not trust to use the hidden Gift)!

In my case, my prenatal belief was that “Parenting is damn hard and tough work”. I was very unsure whether the selflessness of motherhood is a value I had in me! I had been trying on the identity of a mother-to-be, and highly anxious about my ability to do it well. So with those frames of mind, it is no wonder I developed hypertension in my third trimester! Talk about ordeals.

Among the many guides that appeared in this gestation period, this one stood out for me. My girlfriend Lis, gave me a book by Glen Doman, a child brain developmentalist, called *How to Multiply Your Baby’s Intelligence*. Doman talked to me in his book that brought about a paradigm shift in my prenatal belief. I changed it to: “Parenting is joyful, natural and I am the best person for my child in his/her learning”.

My Supreme Ordeal occurred during the delivery of my son. My blood pressure was climbing despite the epidural working. My obstetrician, Ric, was aware that this could both be a danger to me (should a stroke develop) as well as the unborn child (who was signalling foetal distress on the monitors). Despite our agreement earlier not to go with a Caesarian, the emergency situation made his professional decision a priority. I heard Ric order the operating theatres to be prepared.

“No!” I could hear myself scream inside my head. “I can do this. We can do this, Jett. This is going to be easy. Help me, Jett.” I calmly made this known to the staff and Ric.

With the last contraction, Jett started descending through the birth canal and I seemed to hear this being communicated to me: “Mum, don’t worry. I have my destiny and you’re here just to hold the space for me. You can’t do wrong. Just be yourself and I will be fine.”

It may sound uncanny to some. But to me, it was just what I needed to shift my total identity on motherhood. It was not about doing parenthood properly. The Gift, I believe, is about being myself and respecting others to be themselves. Through the learning partnership shall we both grow. So the Gift surfaces from my unconscious.

The Success

Jett was born healthy. My blood pressure dropped to normal pretty soon after.

Was it a fluke? Whether it was using the force to bomb the *DeathStar*, or listening to the wisdom of my inner self to get past death by blood pressure – the Supreme Ordeal is a once-off event. Thankfully so.

So what is the use of the Gift, if you can only use it once?

The Call to Return

From the learnings in the inner supernatural world, the Call to Return from abstract intuition to the natural real world beckons. How can I consciously use the Gift over and over to reap the ultimate Reward on a day-to-day basis?

Acceptance – Transition back to the Physical Outer World from the Intuitive Inner World

Luke Skywalker returns with a new identity of a warrior. He is forever changed when he gets back to the real world. No longer is he a farmer. He is now a Jedi, ready to overthrow the Dark side.

I had earlier intellectualized the concepts of joyful parenthood, and how being true to myself will ultimately inspire others to achieve their highest purpose. I have come through certainly with new beliefs, values and identity on parenthood. I am now ready to be a role model of how to overcome anxiety and apprehension to live our dreams. Foster learning partnerships from one another. Walk my talk.

The Reward

What is the ultimate Reward? It is about using the Gift as a strength in your life. To do your Calling. To be true to thyself. The Hero's Journey then spirals to the next level – as a new Call to Adventure begins.

Jedi Skywalker battles the Dark Side as his next Call to Adventure. Yours truly finds it rewarding to hang up the drill and become a facilitator of transformation at an organizational as well as individual level.

Are you now perceiving yourself as your greatest hero? Or do you see it all as the agony of a lifelong quest? After all, nobody can live your life for you. How will you answer the Call to Adventure to live the Rewarding rapture of the revelation of the mystery in your life?

It is all up to you.

About the Author: **Dr Yvonne Sum** is a pioneer in Parent Leadership coaching. She is on a quest to co-create joyful learning partnerships between parents and children to simultaneously bring out each other's authentic best. She inspires parents to learn from our children mirroring to us what we most need to learn about ourselves and vice-versa. Through her series of **Transformational Leadership Challenge™ (TLC)** programs, Dr Sum is committed to transform leaders of tomorrow today by highlighting family values and celebrating parents as role models and heroes in life who proactively unleash our children's potential through self actualization, intentional living and powerful leadership centred on love and high purpose. She expresses this passion to bring out our authentic best through her roles as an international speaker, writer, transformational corporate facilitator, executive and parent Meta-Coach, Neuro Linguistic Programming trainer, business woman, wife and mother. Please visit www.dryvonesum.com for more information.