

SANCTIFICATION
"Fateful Cleavage"
Lecture 1

Joseph Campbell suggests that today every Twentieth Century man is on a quest for images and stories that somehow give significance to his life. Campbell is one of a large group of social scientists that are dealing with the whole arena of mythology. I want to elaborate on Campbell's thesis just a bit and say that the lucidity of every man in the Twentieth Century has been intensified to such an extent that we are on a desperate sort of quest for patterns, or stories, or images, or significating ways of talking about the lucidity that all of us already have. This course is an attempt to deal with that sort of concern. It's not that we're out to tell you anything that you don't already know, but, as you might guess, to try to bring some order and clarity to the chaos.

We'll be working during this time in four sessions, the first one of which has to do with what I want to call "becoming conscious of your care", recognizing a sort of root concern that is the basis of humanness. The second session's focus will be on the next step in that process: beginning to act out that same universal, unlimited care at the root of humanness. What does it mean to act that out and embody it in every dimension of your life. Our third session will have to do with the issue of what happens when somebody begins to act out of what he has just become aware of in the deeps of his humanness. And finally, we want to look at the sociological consequences.

This recognition of the root, basic concern in the midst of humanness is a happening. It amounts to a "fateful cleavage". Life is not the same on the other side of that happening. It's as though a wedge has been driven into your history and literally split it apart, and there's no turning back. Another way to talk about this would be "compelling engagement" and maybe what happens would be a very "strange transformation". The sociological consequence of the very strange transformation that occurs in the midst of the compelling engagement after having been cleaved fatefully is a "global reordering".

To come back to it again, we are going to deal first with the inescapable consciousness, that which happens to every man and when it happens there is no escape, not any turning back from that consciousness. We'll be talking in the second session about a depth authenticity in beginning to embody that kind of consciousness. In the third session we'll be talking about human fulfillment, filled-fulness, human happiness, but it's the happiness that, as one of our colleagues has said, is no laughing matter. And finally, we'll be talking about the corporate dimension of that, and the Awe-Full League. I spell that Awe-Filled people, or the Awe-Full League.

To put some more theological categories on this, we'll be talking about "Universal Benevolence" as one of the dynamics in the process, and about "Profound Integrity" and about "Endless Fulfillment". Finally, the upshot of all three, when it's selfconsciously appropriated is, the "Religious Life" or, as some of our fathers would say, the "Holy Life."

All this is a picture of the Great Resurgence. When I talk about the resurgence that is happening in our time, in the first instance I am not talking about things getting better, or the good things beginning to outweigh the bad things, or that society is finally being more creative than destructive, or that somehow there is a silver lining on the dark cloud that we've been in the midst of. That's not what I'm talking about. What I would hope to point to when I say that we live in an Age of Resurgence is that this journey is being taken by every man--whether consciously or unconsciously or self-consciously, whether appropriated or rejected--this journey of humanness in the deeps is going on today. That passionate vitality, that discovery, that engagement, that creativity is happening. Now when we talk about the resurgence dynamic that becomes self-conscious and appropriated then we're really talking about loving God. This is going to be a course about loving God. This has to do with selfconsciously appropriating that of which you have become conscious.

Now if that delineates the broad arenas, I want to say a little more about the practics of our time together. We'll be doing a construct with which you are familiar. We'll be having our meals together with conversations. We'll be having lectures or discourses to generate a common stew, and then seminars where we'll be using St. John of the Cross as our resource. What we have in St. John of the Cross's Dark Night of the Soul is a story of this journey of loving God told by one man. We'll be looking through the eyes of this man who went there and wrote about it; and we will reflect upon his experience as it is helpful for our own. We'll have our lectures and meals here, all together, in the Paraguild. Then we'll split and have our seminars in the Protoguild.

Now let us get into a bit more content on this process of Universal Benevolence which is at the root of humanness. Oh, yes, one other thing...lest we be naive, and I don't think that's a danger, what we're talking about here is a process. It's a journey..

(Reading: Antigone
"Grab the wheel--shoot into the mob"
Scripture)

I want to begin to talk a bit about this human struggle in Universal Benevolence under four categories: External Occurance, the Internal Happening, the Attempted Escape, and finally the Existential Question. Those of you who are familiar with Kierkegaard will recognize this as the dynamics of what happens when you're overagainst God.

An external occurrence of fate creates an internal happening which you try with all your might to escape and the futility of that escape raises the life and death question for you. This is a road map of Universal Benevolence.

These days you have to go out of your way to be naive. It takes effort to be a person of illusion. History has conspired to make us lucid people today. I was reflecting on how you might imaginably say that and it struck me that the best way was to put up some numbers: 63, 68, 72. Maybe that will get it. If you put 19 in front of each of them, does that generate anything? 1963 was assassination, in effect the assassination of liberalism in the West via its symbolic head in the death of Kennedy. 1968, how do we begin to talk about what happened in '68? Kennedy, King, the Chicago riots, the Democratic convention. Event after event that brought a crashing end to an era in the U.S.A. In 1969 something else began to blossom: the earth rise. All of a sudden there was that picture of one world, and because of that picture the global village came into being. "Space ship earth" was no longer a poetic image, it was real across the globe. In 1969 a new thing happened. 1972 showed global relatedness in a way that it had not been there before. I don't know how you hold that. Vietnam would be one bit of data. Watergate would be another.

It doesn't surprise people anymore, you know. People just know. Everybody knows that life is filled with brokenness, that what you're over against in the midst of life is raw tragedy, and that nets of lethargy ensnare anyone trying to do anything about it. Naivete in terms of reforming has gone out the window. You know you're over against a mysterious other in the midst of life and yet, in spite of that, life is a gift. You know that decisions have to be made in the midst of raw ambiguity. You know that the meaning of life is to lay down your life. All of that is common knowledge. It's almost as if the Lord of History got that all done.

Sometimes, sometimes in the midst of your lucidity and your struggle with that awareness of the way life is you find yourself getting images that work. Sometimes you get an image. I saw a play called "Pantacles". The character (he was an innocuous character) sleeping on a park bench one night, woke up, yawned, and said, "Gee it's a beautiful day"; and it turned out that that was the code word to start the revolution. And everybody to whom he said it started shooting. It was like he had found the whistlepoint. All of a sudden he was right in the middle of significant engagement. He was a breaking loose of new possibility in himself. Though how he got there, no one knew.

Sometimes you come upon yourself like that. You have days when you don't know how you got there, but you know that the images are right you got it working. you look back on it and say, "My lord, did I do that?" People's lives were addressed. I don't know what happened but something happened. You come upon yourself at the end of the day and the only way you can talk about your day is "I was A Midas of meaning."

Everything I toughed turned transparent. Possibility broke loose in everybody I dealt with." Sometimes it comes together like that, you've gotten your mental images in line with the way life really is and begin to act that out. And I want to say it's at that moment of enthusiasm, of great possibility where vulnerability occurs.

The external happening here is on the other side of having said yes to the way life is and having struggled with appropriating life the way it is. In theological terms, this is an issue of the life of faith. It's on the other side of the decision about the Christ Word. When you ~~are~~ struggling to live out of that Word, and you begin to work, something happens: very fragile, very mundane...but then it all goes away. That very particular something suddenly doesn't amount to a row of beans in itself. All its power all its meaning and value go away.

Let me give you an example: Our team was assigned to the kitchen one weekend last quarter. After we struggled through what it means to be assigned to the kitchen for a weekend, we decided that "every meal, was going to be a miracle." That was our motto. And I mean it was. We brought that place off like nobody's business. We did painting, and extra cleaning, and the meals were miraculous, and it was phenomenal, and you know towards the end of the weekend I just happened to walk down the hall and pass one of those time clocks that are on the wall and this sign reared up out of it and said, "forty years". And all that glory went away. It happens just in the midst of a trivial encounter. As you're living your life, it all goes away.

In that particular situation it was counting years like you have this to do forever. But you come at it another way: if you could do that here, any place has the possibility of being a miracle. You can bring off a miracle anywhere and furthermore there are places you go where miracles don't get brought off. That's a tragedy. An indicative flag is waving these three things: It's all possibility, it's forever, and it's your life.

What happened there was something like having a 100-ton crane off that apartment building across the street descend and land on your head. To draw the picture of the way that comes: all of a sudden there is a rock in the middle of my back and it's the whole world. "The sky fell in" is another way to talk about it. A minor thing explodes all that significance, all that gleaming and glory of transforming life, that was coming in the midst of life. It's like suddenly hearing the cry, "IT'S NOT ENOUGH,".... What you're doing is NOT ENOUGH. A Colleague was talking the other day about having expended his life significantly in a metro and having some amazingly great work. He then looked at the census figures and found out there were 12 million people in the metro. "NOT ENOUGH", it just all goes away. In the midst of that, how would you talk about success? What would it mean to succeed in caring radically for the lives of 12 million people?

The weight of the world on your back is the experience I'm referring to as the objective sociological occurrence that's happened in our time to produce our interior crises. Every man lives out of a universe of images that bring significant pattern and order into his relationships. When that weight of the world descends, when that happening happens to you, it's as though someone had taken an ax and had cleaved your universe right down the middle. It's all gone; your whole universe goes away. All your meaning, all your escapes, all your values don't mean anything anymore. It is a hollowness, an emptiness that falls on you. You are collapsed. I don't mean an act of unfaith it is as though that which is outside of you comes with an axe and cleaves our head. Your life is forever different. Every one of those patterns that you have known before is split asunder, and you find your self over against raw nothing. The tragedy, the futility, the emptiness of life just gets laid out before you in clean and dizzy detail. You can talk about that as though you were assaulted by an alien image. It is as though your interior computer is at work and along comes this image and not only does it not compute, but it throws sand in the computer and everything else goes out of kilter. It's that kind of experience I want to talk about.

It is a blinding kind of thing. One of our colleagues used to play football, and he played in the line. The opposing fullback ran at his position eight straight times and he tackled him every one of those times. The ninth time he just stepped aside and let him go. He was just all gone inside. It had taken away all the resources that would get him up and get him going.

It's pervasive. I think the thing that gets you most of all is when you can't turn anywhere without encountering it, that image, that mysterious impingement shows up everywhere. You are trapped by the mystery. It reminds me of St. Francis. You remember in his early days he could not endure the sight of lepers. It came to him that he was commanded to kiss the first leper he saw. He saw one coming down the road with a horribly disfigured face. Kazantzakis described the interior collapse that Francis was having. He tried to turn away and ignore that demand on his life; but everywhere he turned, all he could see was lepers. Everywhere you turn, there is the mystery. You are looking for your life, and that relationship shows the utter Mystery, the fragileness of that relationship. Your telephone rings and you are afraid to pick it up and you are afraid not to pick it up. That same pervasiveness has happened to people in our time.

The thing that really makes it inescapable is what you discover in the midst of the weight: that you CARE. If you and I did not care for the whole world, its weight wouldn't make any difference. We would just ignore it. But what gets exposed is not only that am I responsible for the whole world, but that I "give a damn." For me that has been an amazing insight into humanness that's come clear recently. It is false to say that people are apathetic. Man has a "give-a-damnedness" at the heart of his humanity itself that when exposed to the awesome reality of the 20th century, you just collapse under the burden of care.

Of course the first thing you want to do is escape. "Get me out of here. Take the rock off my back." You are convinced that man cannot live in that sort of situation with the world on his back it is like being required to create the whole universe while you are standing in the middle of its swirl. All this is on your head and maybe, maybe, you're telling yourself, "Well, I can stand it for a couple of days but then somebody else has to come and help me I can keep these hours for a month but after our week, 8 hours, is enough." You set time limits on your radical expenditure. I tell myself, "You can stay up all night for maybe two nights and after that you have had it." The load that is placed on you says, "All your life." We run to get out from under that.

It is intriguing to speculate on the way things run. It is not possible to ignore the demand any more, so illusions simply do not work anymore. When you have to be self-conscious to create the illusion, it is not an illusion. It is an outright rejection. When this lucidity breaks in on you, that is what makes it such an utter separation, no more illusion. You must deal with that radical demand. The first way we run from it is something like a porcupine. Do you ever wake up feeling like the porcupine? You are out to stick everything that gets in the way: malicious, just utterly malicious in every encounter. "Malicious zombi" is a way to talk about that. You realize that you are mad for some reason. There is no particular person or thing with which you are angry. The fact is that you are furious with whatever it is that is on your back, and you are trying to get out from under it. "If I can just find a flaw in this rock, it's not really on my back," I tell myself. You begin to talk with someone and he says, "Well, you know so-and so is ALWAYS..." and we malicious zombies can be so stubborn. We can be the nicest kind of malicious zombie you ever saw. We come up to somebody and say, "You know, on behalf of what you are doing maybe I ought to let you in on how this is coming off and WHAM..." We discover that not every time you're nasty to somebody are you pronouncing the Christ Word on his life.

There is another possibility: the passive zombism, the comparable opposite of the zombi with the porcupine image is playing possum. That is where you draw into yourself. Before, you were out to kill the rock; now you are out to kill the care. "I really don't care, I'll do whatever you tell me to, I'm naive, I don't want to offend anybody." That is deadly. Some of my best friends are like that. What you are out to do is to kill your own interior passion, to deny that, and so get out from the rock. You know you do not have to be utterly quiet as you play possum. It is quite possible to be a whale of a bitch because what I mean by "bitchiness" is the kind of yak, yak, yaking that has no intention whatsoever to taking serious responsibility for the weight. It is an in-turned-ness, a self-conscious attempt to escape the weight of the world that shows up on your back. The demonic thing about it is that it does not work. The weight does not just go away.

I saw an article the other day about the young singles describing the life style that's been portrayed all along as the "good life"; and the caption of one of the major sections of the article is "Dime-a-dance Dreariness." What happens when you try to cut yourself off from life that's depending on you is death. Fair enough. The danger here--and I do not intend to be moralizing, but simply objective--the danger of escaping from this sort of life that's given us, is death. You can box yourself

off and become a zombi. All you've got to do is begin to kid yourself a little. You kid yourself about your own capacity, or you kid yourself about the weight of the world, and you begin to believe your own lies, and it grows, and pretty soon you are gone.

I am talking about a second death because of what happens when you begin to live out of the life of the League. In Journey to the East, Hesse's book, you remember the League was on the trip to the east, mingling life with poetry. One member decides to leave and slips away in the middle of the night and the League goes on. They hear later that he is frantically searching for the League. One of the members goes up to the leader and says, "don't you think we should find him?" The Leader says, "No, he's welcome to search for us, but even if he finds us he won't recognize us." What happens when you begin to kid yourself is you lose contact with reality, an on going psychosis. What we are talking about here is consciousness in man's spirit depths for which a spiritual suicide seems to be the only escape.

You can look at people and know when that suicide happens. It is as if the light goes out of their eyes. Remember Psalm 13, "Give light to my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death." The light in the eyes is passionate engagement in life, I suppose the final, irretrievable form of that suicide is when you take a gun, hold it up to your head, & pull that trigger. You understand, that is the final rebellion against the rock on your back.

The clear indicative here is that the world has descended upon us. The Mystery has begun to load overwhelming burdens on us. The choice or the existential question that is before us is very simply the question of life or death. It has that kind of radicality about it: how you be the be that you are fated to be?

We have a resident ornithologist around here who talks about birds, most particularly the osprey. He describes the osprey as a bird that fishes, and as it fishes its talons biologically lock into the flesh of its prey. It cannot let go until it alights on something solid, which releases the nerve clutching the fish, occasionally an osprey locks into a fish bigger than it can fly away with. Picture for a minute Jonathon Livingstone Osprey sailing along up in the blue making his 8 point slow roll. "There's a little silver streak down there so I think I'll head in and get some lunch! He heads in at 47 degrees, going 180 miles per hour, talons outstretched, WHOP! You see him stop and you see his eyes get big. His mouth drops open as he sees his whole future laid out there before him. It consists of a few frantic flaps, fading ripples, and feathers. You can just see that all laid out before you. Here is Jonathon Livingstone Osprey locked into the back of a whale with a life and death decision on his hands. The decision is not whether or not to let loose the whale; that is not a possibility. The decision is not about creating an illusion; "I'm not locked into this whale." The radical life and death decision is whether or not to love that fish. I mean that bird's life as a fisher is just filled full. He got "the big one that didn't get away."

When we find ourselves locked in there, the choice that we have is whether to love the rock in the middle of the back. You and I stand in the situation with two options one of them is the self-conscious refusal to live before our life, which is the second death as our fathers talked about it.

The other option is for eternal life. Do you use that poetry? Understand that when you get to this point in the life journey you are already a dead man. The issue of rescuing yourself out of this life has already been decided. The issue is : are you going to be a zombi or the resurrected one.

I want to suggest that in the midst of facing that decision, as you look toward the "yes" options, you have the necessity of being grounded "not-in-this-world." I mean the only way you can pick up the weight of the world is by having the detachment from it that comes out of what we have talked about as "the other world in the midst of this world." This is what I finally see through to in the midst of every situation: just sheer mystery or radical freedom. Total complete and unlimited care for all that is, without being eaten up by any one particular situation, this concern that is on your back, is finally the tranquility. In the midst of all this struggle tranquility is there. And with that grounding, it is possible to opt for life, the resurrected life.

That is something of the radical decision that has come before us. It is not an individual matter. What we know about corporateness in the 20th century is that which every decision you or I make, it becomes a sign emblazoned on our foreheads for all of history to read. It says "It's all a pile" or "This is my Father's World." These are the options and the stakes are high. Civilization itself rides on it. I suggest that the name of the game in which we are significantly engaged is "loving God."