

JOSEPH CAMPBELL
and
THE POWER
OF MYTH
WITH
BILL MOYERS

Love and the Goddess Part 5 of 6

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#5 Love and the Goddess

Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth with Bill Moyers

5. Love and the Goddess

[Tease]

JOSEPH CAMPBELL: "So through the eyes love attains the heart, for the eyes are the scous of the heart. And the eyes go reconnoitering for what it would please the heart to possess. And when they are in full accord and firm, all three in one resolve, at that time perfect love is born from what the eyes have made welcome, to the heart. For as all true loves know, love is perfect kindness, which is born, there is no doubt, from the heart and the eyes."

[Titles]

BILL MOYERS: One of Joseph Campbell's most eloquent essays was called simply, *The Mythology of Love*. "What a wonderful theme, he wrote," and what a wonderful world of myth one finds in celebration of this universal mystery." Stories of love fascinate the human race, and Campbell made their interpretation one of the great passions of his life as a scholar, teacher and philosopher. Like a weaver of fine cloth, he spun the tales and legends of love into an amazing tapestry of the human psyche.

He gathered his materials everywhere, from the erotic mysticism of India to the Old Testament Song of Songs; from the life of Christ and the teachings of the Ramakrishna, to Saint Paul and Bernard of Clairvaux, and William Blake, Thomas Mann and many others, for whom love was the controlling principle of art.

Campbell thought the greatest love stories were told in the Middle Ages, when "noble and gentle hearts," as he called them, produced the romantic love that transcended lust. This love between individual men and women, *Amor*, was celebrated by wandering minstrels, who sang of "what the eyes have made welcome to the heart." It helped create a distinctive Western consciousness that exalted the individual experience of men and women over the authority and traditions of the church and state.

[Interviewing] Let's talk about love.

CAMPBELL: Let's talk about love, fine.

MOYERS: But it's such a vast subject, that if— in mythology, that if I had come to you and said, "Let's talk about love, but where should we begin?" what would your answer have been?

CAMPBELL: I think my answer would have been the troubadours in the 12th century, let's begin there.

MOYERS: Why the troubadours?

CAMPBELL: Well, because they're the first ones in the West that really considered love in the sense that we think of it now, as a person-to-person relationship.

MOYERS: You're talking about romantic love?

CAMPBELL: Yes. It's the seizure that comes in recognizing as a— as where your soul's counterpart in the other person, and that's what the troubadours stood for, and that has become the ideal in our lives today.

MOYERS: What had it been before that?

CAMPBELL: Well, the idea of love as Eros, the god who excites you to sexual desire, this is not the person-to-person thing, of the falling in love in the way the troubadours understood it. I have a definition for Eros, the erotic biological urge, as the zeal of the organs for each other, and the personal factor doesn't matter.

MOYERS: Where did Eros come from?

CAMPBELL: Well, Eros is Cupid, and in India the god of love is Kama, and he's no Cupid, he's a big, vigorous youth with a bow and a quiver of arrows, and the names of the arrows are such things as "Death-Bringing Agony," and "open up," and really, he just drives this thing into you, so that it's a total physiological, psychological explosion that takes place. Then the other love, the Christian love of *Agape*, spiritual love, in love thy neighbor as thyself, again it doesn't matter who the person is, I mean, it's your neighbor, you must have that kind of love.

But the kind of seizure that comes from the meeting of the eyes, as they say in the troubadour tradition, and the purely personal, person-to-person thing, as far as I know it originates as an ideal to be lived for, with the troubadours.

MOYERS: You've said that what happened in the 12th and 13th centuries "was one of the most important mutations of human feeling and spiritual consciousness, that a new way of experiencing love came to expression."

CAMPBELL: Yes.

MOYERS: And it was in opposition to that ecclesiastical despotism of the heart.

CAMPBELL: Yes.

MOYERS: Which required people, particularly young girls barely out of adolescence to marry whomever the Church or their parents wanted them to marry.

CAMPBELL: That's right.

MOYERS: And what had this done to the passion of the heart?

CAMPBELL: Well, the— to say a word for the other before I do this, the usual marriage in traditional cultures is arranged for by the families. It's not a person-to-person decision at all, and this is true to this day in many parts of the world. This is not to say that in arranged marriages of this kind there is no love; there is a lot of love, there's family love and a rich love life on that level. So in the Middle Ages, of course, that was the kind of marriage that was sanctified by the Church. And so the idea of a real person-to-person marriage was very dangerous.

MOYERS: Dangerous because it was heresy.

CAMPBELL: It was not only heresy, it was adultery, and that was punishable by death. For instance, in the Tristan romance, that's the crucial romance, of—

MOYERS: Tristan and Isolde?

CAMPBELL: Yes. Isolde was engaged to marry King Mark. They had never seen each other. And Tristan was sent over to fetch Isolde to Mark. And Isolde's mother prepares a love potion, so that the two who are to be married will have real love for each other. And these two youngsters, they think the love potion is wine, and they drink it and then they're overtaken with this love. But Brangene, the nurse of Isolde, realized what had happened. She went to Tristan and said, "You have drunk your death." And Tristan said, "If by my death you mean this agony of love, that is my life. If by my death you mean the punishment that we are to suffer if discovered, which is namely execution, I accept that. But if by my death you mean eternal punishment in the fires of hell," in which these people believed, "I accept that, too."

MOYERS: That was quite—

CAMPBELL: That's big stuff.

MOYERS: For a medieval Catholic, because they believed in a literal hell and—

CAMPBELL: Well, these people did.

MOYERS: Yes. So what's the significance of what he was saying?

CAMPBELL: What he was saying is that this love is bigger even than death, than pain, than anything. This is the affirmation of the pain of life in a big way.

MOYERS: And I would choose this pain for love now, even though it might mean everlasting pain and damnation in hell.

CAMPBELL: That's right.

MOYERS: And that was a marked change in how people—

CAMPBELL: Well, that is an— any life career that you choose in following your bliss should be chosen with that sense, nobody can frighten me off from this thing.

MOYERS: This is sort of the beginning of the romantic idea of the Western individual taking matters into his or her own hands.

CAMPBELL: Well, absolutely. I mean, you can see, there are examples in Oriental stories of this kind of thing, but it did not become a social system. It has now become the ideal, at any rate, of love in the Western world.

MOYERS: Love from one's own experience.

CAMPBELL: Right. That's a very mysterious thing, that electric thing that happens. And then the agony that can follow, which is that which the troubadours celebrate, you know, the agony of the love, the sickness that the doctors cannot cure; the wounds that can be healed only by the weapon that delivered the wound.

MOYERS: Meaning?

CAMPBELL: Well, the wound is the wound of my passion and agony of love for this creature, and the only one who can heal me is the one who delivered the blow, you know.
MOYERS: So we often hurt most the person we love, and heal the hurt by the love that hurt.
CAMPBELL: That's—something like that, that's the paradox of the job.
MOYERS: What did you mean, Joe, when you said that the triumph of Tristan's view of love and vision of love, this beginning of romantic love in the West was "libido over credo"?
CAMPBELL: Well, the credo, "I believe," and I believe not only in the laws, but I believe that these laws were instituted by God, and there's no arguing with God. I mean, these laws are just a heavy weight on me, and disobeying those is sin, and it has to do with my eternal character.

MOYERS: And the libido?

CAMPBELL: The libido is the impulse to life.

MOYERS: Comes from where?

CAMPBELL: Comes from the heart.

MOYERS: And the heart is what?

CAMPBELL: The heart is the organ of opening up to somebody else. That's the human quality, as opposed to the animal qualities, which have to do with, primarily with self-interest. Opening up to that which is other is the opening of the heart, and that's as the troubadours saw it, it is the opening of the heart.

MOYERS: I can certainly understand, though, why the Church was threatened by this, because how can you have a church if everyone's libido is his or her own god?

CAMPBELL: Why not? Why can't the Church handle that? If you can sanctify a marriage that has been arranged, why can't you sanctify a marriage where two people have joined each other?

MOYERS: So the courage to love became the courage to affirm against tradition, whatever knowledge stands confirmed in one's own experience.

CAMPBELL: Yeah.

MOYERS: Why was that important in the evolution of the West?

CAMPBELL: Well, it was important in that it gives the West this accent, as I've been saying, on the individual, that he should have faith in his experience, and not simply mouth terms that have become to him from other mouths. I think that's the great thing in the West. The validity of the individual's experience of what humanity is, what life is, what values are, against the monolithic system.

MOYERS: Was there some of this in the legend of the Holy Grail?

CAMPBELL: Yes. Wolfram has a very interesting statement about the origin of the Grail. He says the Grail was brought from heaven by the neutral angels. There was the war in heaven between God and Lucifer, and the angelic hosts that sided one group with Lucifer, and the other with God. Pair of opposites, good and evil, God and Satan. The Grail was brought down through the middle, the way of the middle, by the neutral angels.

MOYERS: What is the Grail representing, then?

CAMPBELL: Well, the Grail becomes the, what we call it, that which is attained and realized by people who have lived their own lives. So the story very briefly is of this—I'm giving it now as Wolfram gives it, but this is just one version. The Grail King was a lovely young man, but he had not earned that position. And the Grail represents the fulfillment of the highest spiritual potentialities of the human consciousness. And he was a lovely young man, and he rode forth from his castle with the war cry, "Amor!" And as he's riding forth, a Moslem, a pagan warrior, a Mohammedan warrior, comes out of the woods, a knight. And they both level their lances at each other, they drive at each other, and the lance of the grail king kills the Mohammedan, but the Mohammedan lance castrates the Grail King.

What that means is that the Christian separation of matter and spirit, of the dynamism of life and the spiritual, natural grace and supernatural grace, has really castrated nature. And the European mind, the European life, has been as it were, emasculated by this: true spirituality, which would have come from this, has been killed. And then what did the pagan represent? He was a person from the suburbs of Eden. He was regarded as a nature man, and on the head of his lance was written the word, "Grail." That is to say, nature intends the grail. Spiritual life is the bouquet of natural life, not a supernatural thing imposed upon it. And so the impulses of nature are what give authenticity to life, not obeying rules come from a supernatural authority, that's the sense of the Grail.

MOYERS: And the Grail that these romantic legends were searching for is the union once again of what had been divided? The peace that comes from joining?

CAMPBELL: The grail becomes symbolic of an authentic life that has lived in terms of its own volition, in terms of its own impulse system, which carries it between the pairs of opposites, of good and evil, light and dark. Wolfram starts his epic with a short poem saying, "Every act has both good and evil results." Every act in life yields pairs of opposites in its results. The best we can do is lean toward the light, that is to say, intend the light, and what the light is, is that of the harmonious relationships that come from compassion, with suffering, understanding of the other person. This is what the Grail is about.

MOYERS: When we say God is love, does that have anything to do with romantic love? Does mythology ever link romantic love and God?

CAMPBELL: Well, that's what it did do. Love was a divine visitation, and that's why it was superior to marriage. That was the troubadour idea. If God is love, well, then, love is God, okay.

MOYERS: There's that wonderful passage in Corinthians by Paul, where he says "Love beareth all things, endureth all things."

CAMPBELL: Well, that's the same business. Love knows no pain.

MOYERS: And yet, one of my favorite stories of mythology is out of Persia, where there is the idea that Lucifer was condemned to hell because he loved God so much.

CAMPBELL: Yeah, and that's a basic Muslim idea, about Iblis, that's the Muslim name for Satan, being God's greatest lover. Why was Satan thrown into hell? Well, the standard story is that when God created the angels, he told them to bow to none but himself. Then he created man, whom he regarded as a higher form than the angels, and he asked the angels then to serve man. And Satan would not bow to man. Now, this is interpreted in the Christian tradition, as I recall from my boyhood instruction, as being the egotism of Satan, he would not bow to man. But in this view, he could not bow to man, because of his love for God, he could bow only to God. And then God says, "Get out of my sight." Now, the worst of the pains of hell insofar as hell has been described is the absence of the beloved, which is God. So how does Iblis sustain the situation in hell? By the memory of the echo of God's voice when God said, "Go to hell." And I think that's a great sign of love, do you agree?

MOYERS: Well, it's certainly true in life that the greatest hell one can know is to be separated from the one you love.

CAMPBELL: Yeah.

MOYERS: That's why I've liked the Persian myth for so long. Satan as God's lover.

CAMPBELL: Yeah. And he is separated from God, and that's the real pain of Satan.

MOYERS: You once took the saying of Jesus, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven, for he makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust." You once took that to be the highest, the noblest, the boldest of the Christian teachings. Do you still feel that way?

CAMPBELL: Well, I think the main teaching of Christianity is, "Love your enemies."

MOYERS: Hard to do.

CAMPBELL: I know, well, that's it. I mean, when Peter drew his sword and cut off the servant's ear there, in the Gethsemane affair, and Jesus said, "Put up your sword, Peter," and put the ear back on, Peter has been drawing his sword ever since. And one can speak about Petrine or Christian Christianity in that sense. And I would say that the main doctrine of Christianity is the doctrine of *Agape*, of true love for he who is your—him who is your enemy.

MOYERS: How does one love one's enemy without condoning what the enemy does, accepting his aggression?

CAMPBELL: Well, I'll tell you how to do that. "Do not pluck the mote from your enemy's eye, but pluck the beam from your own," do you know?

Now, I have a friend whom I met by chance, a young Buddhist monk from Tibet. You know, in 1959 the Communists crashed down and bombed the palace of the Dalai Lama, bombed Lhasa, and people murdered and all that kind of thing. And he escaped, he escaped at the time of the Dalai Lama. And those monasteries, I mean, there were monasteries with 5,000 monks, 6,000 monks, all wiped out, tortured and everything else. I haven't heard one word of incrimination of the Chinese from that young man. There is absolutely no condemnation of the Chinese here. And you hear this from the Dalai Lama himself. You will not hear a word of con-

damnation. This recognition of the way of life through which that vitality of the spirit is moving in its own way. I mean, these men are sufferers of terrific violence, and there's no animosity. I learned religion from them.

MOYERS: Do most of the stories of mythology, from whatever culture, say that suffering is intrinsically a part of life and that there's no way around it?

CAMPBELL: I think I'd be willing to say that they do. I can't think of anything now that says if you're going to live, you won't suffer. It'll tell you how to understand and bear and interpret suffering, that it will do. And when the Buddha says there is escape from suffering, the escape from sorrow is nirvana. Nirvana is a psychological position where you are untouched by desire and fear.

MOYERS: But is that realistic? Does that happen?

CAMPBELL: Yes, certainly.

MOYERS: And your life becomes what?

CAMPBELL: Harmonious, well-centered and affirmative of life.

MOYERS: Even with suffering.

CAMPBELL: Exactly. There's a passage in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, isn't there? Be as Christ, for Christ did not think godhood something to be hung on to, to be clung to, but let go and came down and took life in the form of a servant, a servant even unto death. Let's say, come in and accept the suffering, and affirm it.

MOYERS: So you would agree with Abelard in the 12th century, who said that Jesus' death on the cross was not as ransom paid, as a penalty applied, but it was an act of at-one-ment, at-one-ment, at one with the race—

CAMPBELL: That's the most sophisticated interpretation of why Christ had to be crucified. Abelard's idea was that this — oh, this is connected with the Grail King and everything else — that the coming of Christ to be crucified and illustrating thus the suffering of life, removes man's mind from commitment to the things of this world in compassion. It's in compassion with Christ that we turn to Christ, and so the injured one becomes the savior. It is the suffering that evokes the humanity of the human heart.

MOYERS: So you would agree with Abelard that mankind yearning for God and God yearning for mankind in compassion met at that cross.

CAMPBELL: Yes. And by contemplating the cross, you are contemplating the true mystery of life. And that love for this experience, no matter how horrific the experience, the love for it.

MOYERS: So there's joy and pain in love.

CAMPBELL: Yeah, there is. Love, you might say, is the burning point of life, and since all life is sorrowful, so is love. And the stronger the love, the more that pain, but love bears all things. Love itself is a pain, you might say, but is the pain of being truly alive.

MOYERS: As Joseph Campbell pursued his quest across Europe for the stories of love and chivalry, he paused often to visit the great cathedrals. They too reflected the glory of love, the love of Mary, mother of God. Reverence for the power of the female is another grand theme in ancient mythology. In the primitive planting cultures, woman contributed importantly to the economic life of the community by participating in the growing and reaping of crops. And as the mother and nourisher of life, she was thought to assist the earth symbolically in its fertility. In fact, some believe there was even a golden age of the goddess until she was driven from the imagination by the emergence of patriarchal authority.

Of late, however, scientists have resurrected the name of an ancient goddess, Gaia, to express the idea of Earth as a living body on which we depend for life. In the last half of this conversation with Joseph Campbell, he takes us back to the time when the love of God meant the love for mother goddess, and he unites these themes in one image, the virgin birth, which to him represents the birth of spirit from matter, the birth of compassion in the heart.

(Interviewing! The Lord's Prayer begins, "Our Father which art in heaven.")

CAMPBELL: Yes.

MOYERS: Could it have begun, "Our Mother"?

CAMPBELL: This is a metaphorical image, this is a symbolic image, and to make the point that it's not your father, your physical father, we have "Our Father who art in heaven." But heaven again is a symbolic idea, where would it, heaven, be? It is no place. All of the references of religious and mythological images are to planes of consciousness or fields of experience potential in

the human spirit, and these are to evoke attitudes and experiences that are appropriate to a meditation on the mystery of the source of your own being, I would say. So there have been systems of religion where the mother is the prime parent, the source, and she's really a more immediate parent than the father, because one is born from the mother, and then the first experience of any infant is the mother, so that the image of woman is the image of the world. You might say that mythology is simply a translation of the world into a mother image. We talk of Mother Earth and so forth.

MOYERS: But what happened along the way, Joe, to this reverence that in primitive societies was directed toward the goddess figure, the great goddess, the Mother Earth? What happened to that?

CAMPBELL: That comes in primarily with agriculture and the agricultural societies.

MOYERS: Fertility and all of that?

CAMPBELL: It has to do with the earth, the human woman does give birth as the earth gives birth to the plants. She gives nourishment as the plants do. So woman magic and earth magic are the same, they are related. And the personification, then, of this energy which gives birth to forms and nourishes forms is properly female. And so it is in the agricultural world of ancient Mesopotamia, the Egyptian Nile, but also in the earlier planting culture systems, that the goddess is the mythic form that is dominant.

MOYERS: Because of this obvious perception of creation issue, fertility.

CAMPBELL: That's right, and when you have a goddess as the creator, it's her own very body that is the universe. She is identical with the universe. And in Egypt, you have the mother heavens, Nut, the goddess Nut, who is represented as the whole heavenly sphere.

MOYERS: So it would be natural for people trying to explain the wonders of the universe to look to the female figure as the explanation for what they saw in their own lives.

CAMPBELL: Not only that, but then when you move to a philosophical point of view, the female represents what in Kantian terminology we call the forms of sensibility. The female represents time and space itself. She is time and space, and the mystery beyond her is beyond pairs of opposites, so it isn't male and it isn't female. It neither is nor isn't, but everything is within her, so that the gods are her children. Everything you can think of, everything you can see, is the production of the goddess.

Oh, this is a wonderful story. The Vedic gods are together and they see a strange sort of amorphous thing down the way, like a kind of smoky fog. And they say, "What's that?" They don't know what it is. And Agni, the god of fire, says, "I'll go find out who that is." So he goes up to this smoky thing and he says, "Who are you?" And from the smoky thing the voice says, "Who are you?" And he says, "I'm Agni, I'm the lord of fire, I can burn anything." And out of the fog there comes a piece of straw, it falls on the ground, it says, "Let's see you burn that." He can't burn it. He goes back, he says, "This is strange."

Well, Vayu, the lord of winds, says, "I'll try." So he goes and the same thing, "I can blow anything around." Throws it down, "Now, let's see you blow that." Well, he can't. He goes back. Then a woman arrives, a beautiful, mysterious, mystic woman. And she instructs the gods and tells them who that is. "That is the ultimate mystery of being, from which you boys have received your strength. And he can turn it on or off for you," you know. And there she comes as the one who illuminates the gods themselves concerning the ultimate ground of their own being.

MOYERS: It's the female wisdom.

CAMPBELL: It's the female as the giver of forms. She is the one who gave the forms and she knows where they came from.

MOYERS: I wonder what it would have meant to us if somewhere along the way, we had begun the prayer "Our Mother," instead of "Our Father." What psychological difference would it have made?

CAMPBELL: Well, it makes a psychological difference in the character of the cultures. You have the basic birth of civilization in the Near East with the great river valleys then as the main source areas, the Nile, the Tigris-Euphrates, and then over in India, the Indus valley and later the Ganges. This is the world of the goddess; all these rivers have goddess names finally.

Then there come the invasions. These fighting people are herding people. The Semites are herders of goats and sheep, and the Indo-Europeans of cattle. They were formerly the hunters. They translate a hunting mythology into a herding mythology, but it's animal oriented. And

when you have hunters you have killers, and when you have herders, you have killers, because they're always in movement, nomadic, coming into conflict with other people and they have to conquer the area they move into. This comes into the Near East, and this brings in the warrior gods, like Zeus, like Yahweh.

MOYERS: The sword and death, instead of fertility.

CAMPBELL: Right. Particularly the Hebrews. They really wipe out the goddess. The term for the goddess, the Canaanite goddess, that's used in the Old Testament, is "the abomination." And there was a very strong accent against the goddess in the Hebrew, which you do not find in the Indo-European. There you have Zeus marrying the goddess and then the two play together. I think it's an extreme case that we have in the Bible, and our own Western subjugation of the female is really, I think, a function of biblical thinking.

MOYERS: Because when you substitute the male for the female, you get a different psychology, a different cultural bias.

CAMPBELL: Particularly if you cut the female out and don't have any—I mean, if the male is on top like this and the female is the subordinate all the way, you have a totally different system from that when the two are facing each other.

MOYERS: And it's permissible in your culture to do what your gods do, so you just—

CAMPBELL: Well, that's exactly it. So I would see three situations here. One, the early one of the sheer goddess, when the male is hardly a significant divinity, you see, she is the total thing. And then this other one of the Hebrew, of the goddess—the male the total thing; in fact, he takes over her role. And finally then the classical one where the two are in interaction.

MOYERS: There are women today who say that the spirit of the goddess has been in exile for 5,000 years, since the events that you—

CAMPBELL: Well, not that—you can't put it that far back, 5,000 years. She was a very potent figure in Hellenistic times in the Mediterranean. And she came back with the Virgin in the Roman Catholic tradition. I mean, you don't have a tradition with the goddess celebrated any more beautifully and marvelously than in the 12th and 13th century French cathedrals, every one of which is called "Notre Dame."

MOYERS: What about the virgin birth? Suddenly the goddess reappears in the form of the chaste and pure vessel chosen for God's action.

CAMPBELL: Well, in the history of Western religions, this is an extremely interesting development. The virgin birth comes in by way of the Greek tradition. When you read your four gospels, the only one with the virgin birth in it is the gospel according to Luke, and Luke was a Greek.

MOYERS: And there was in the Greek tradition images, legends, myths of virgin births?

CAMPBELL: All of them. I mean, Leda and the swan, and Persephone and the serpent, and this one and that one and the other one. The virgin birth is represented throughout.

MOYERS: This was not a new idea, then, in Bethlehem and—

CAMPBELL: No. What is the meaning of the virgin birth? In India, there is this system of the *kundalini*, as it's called, the idea of the centers, psychological centers up the spine. And the represent the psychological planes of concern and consciousness and action. The first is at the rectum, and this is that of alimentation. The serpent represents this, you know, a traveling esophagus going along just eating, eating, eating, eating. And all of us are—we wouldn't be here if we weren't eating. And then the second, the second center is at the sex organ center, and that's the urge to procreation. The third center's called—is at the navel, and this is where you eat and want to consume. And it's not the alimentary eating, it's the mastering and smashing and trashing of others, do you see? This is the aggressive mood.

Now, the first is the— an animal instinct, the second is an animal instinct, the third is an animal instinct, and these three centers are located in the pelvic base, do you see. The next one is at the level of the heart, and this is the opening of compassion. And there you move out of the field of animal action into a field that is properly human and spiritual. Now, in each of these centers there is a symbolic form. At the base, the first one, there is the form of the *lingam* and *yoni*, the male and female organs in conjunction. At the heart chakra, there is again the male and female organs in conjunction, but in gold. This is the virgin birth. It's the birth of spiritual man out of the animal man. Do you understand?

MOYERS: And it happens?

CAMPBELL: When you are awakened at the level of the heart to compassion and to suffering

with the other person. That's the beginning of humanity. And the meditations of religion properly are on that level, the heart level.

MOYERS: You say it's the beginning of humanity, but in these stories, that's the moment when gods are born, the virgin birth, it's a god who emerges from that chemistry.

CAMPBELL: Yeah, and you know who that god is? It's you. All of these symbols in mythology refer to you. You can get stuck out there and think it's all out there, and so you're thinking of Jesus and all the sentiments about how he suffered and all; what that suffering is, is what ought to be going on in you. Have you been reborn? Have you died to your animal nature and come to life as a human incarnation?

MOYERS: Why is it significant that this is of a virgin?

CAMPBELL: Well, it is that the begetter is the spirit. It is a spiritual birth. The virgin conceived of the Word, through the ear.

MOYERS: The Word came like a shaft of light.

CAMPBELL: Yes. And now, the Buddha was born from his mother's side, at the level of the heart chakra. That's a symbolic birth; he wasn't born from his mother's side, but symbolically he was.

MOYERS: But the Christ came the way you and I come.

CAMPBELL: Yes, but of a virgin.

MOYERS: Which is a power greater than—

CAMPBELL: And then, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, her virginity was restored. So nothing happened physically, you might say. It's not a physical birth. It's symbolic of a spiritual transformation, that's what the virgin birth is about. And so deities are born that way who represent beings who act in terms of compassion, and not in terms of the lower three centers.

MOYERS: If you go back into antiquity, do you find images of the Madonna as the mother of the savior child?

CAMPBELL: Well, what you have as the model for the Madonna actually is Isis, with her child honus at her breast. This was the actual model for the Madonna symbol.

MOYERS: Isis? Tell me that story.

CAMPBELL: This is a prime myth in this period of the Goddess as the redeemer, the one who goes in quest of the lost spouse or lover, and through her loyalty and descent into the realm of death, recovers him. Isis and her husband Osiris were twins who were born of the goddess Nut. And their younger relatives were Seth and Nephthys, who were also twins born from Nut. Seth planned to kill his brother Osiris, and he took Osiris' measurements secretly and had a wonderful sarcophagus built that would exactly fit Osiris. So there was a hilarious party in progress one time among the gods, and Seth tries in this sarcophagus, and he says, "Anyone whom this perfectly fits can have it as his sarcophagus." And everybody at the party tried, and when Osiris got in, of course he perfectly fit. Just at that time, 72 accomplices come rushing out and they clap the lid on, strap it together and throw it in the Nile.

Now, this is the death of the god. Whenever you have a death of an incarnation, a god like this, you're going to have a resurrection, you can wait for that. So he goes floating down the Nile and is washed ashore in Syria. And a beautiful tree grows up and incorporates the sarcophagus in its own trunk. So this is this wonderful tree with a glorious aroma. And the local king has just had a son born to him, and he is also at the same time going to build a palace. The aroma of this tree is so wonderful, he cuts it down and brings it in to be a central pillar in the main room of the palace.

Poor little Isis, whose husband has been thrown into the Nile, starts this wonderful quest for Osiris. So she comes to the place where the palace is, and learns of the wonderful aroma and she suspects this is Osiris. And she gets a job as nurse to the just-born little child. Well, she lets the child nurse from her finger. And she loves the little child, and she decides to give it immortality. So she does this by placing him in the fireplace in the fire, to burn away gradually his mortal body. But being a goddess she could keep that from killing him, you understand. And when that would happen, she would convert herself into a swallow, and fly mournfully around the pillar where her husband is.

Well, one evening the child's mother came in to this room while this scene was in progress, saw her child in the fireplace, let out a scream, and that broke the spell, and they had to rescue the child from incineration. Meanwhile the swallow had turned into this gorgeous nurse, Isis,