



# Myths of Light: Eastern Metaphors of the Eternal (The Collected Works of Joseph Campbell)

By Joseph Campbell

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Master mythologist Joseph Campbell had a genius for finding the unifying symbols and metaphors in apparently distinct cultures and traditions. In *Myths of Light: Eastern Metaphors of the Eternal*, Campbell explores, with his characteristic clarity and humor, the principle that underlies all the great religions of India and East Asia, from Jainism and Hinduism to Buddhism and Taoism: the transcendent World Soul.

Joseph Campbell began his comparative study of the world's religions with a chance meeting with the renowned Indian theosophist Jiddu Krishnamurti on a trans-Atlantic steamer. Though Campbell was deeply fascinated by mythologies and religions from every continent, Asia's potent mix of theologies captured his imagination more than any other, and offered him paths to understanding the essence of myth.

In *Myths of Light*, Campbell explores the core philosophies and mythologies of the East, comparing them through vivid examples and stories to each other and to those of the West. A worthy companion to *Thou Art That* and to Campbell's *Asian Journals*, this volume conveys complex insights through warm, accessible storytelling, revealing the intricacies and secrets of his subject with his typical enthusiasm.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this volume of previously unpublished lectures and articles, the late world folklorist and comparative mythologist Campbell extols the myths of Asian religions, though, as always, the whole of humanity is the author's intended audience. With jaunty, American optimism, Campbell delves into the stories and imagery, as he defines them, of Buddhism and Yoga and other "Oriental" systems of belief, to find a well of deep humanistic wisdom in each one, sharply in contrast to the anti-spiritual habits of the West. "You may have practical ethics and that kind of thing, but there is no spirituality in any aspect of our contemporary Western civilization," Campbell writes, suggesting that Western society "is disintegrating as a result" of the loss of religious myth. Campbell molds his stories into Jungian vessels of mystical awe, finding recurring archetypes and story lines embedded in large swaths of the Asian continent; sometimes a sort of fetishizing awe towards the object of his study creeps in: "When one goes to the Orient, of course, one may be physically shocked by the squalor and misery of the people and the life they're living there. Yet this coordinating principle comes shining through all the poverty in a strangely fascinating way, shining with the radiance of this mythic world." Campbell excels in telling the stories themselves—which feature brahmins and yogis, gods and monsters, as they disguise themselves as charioteers, eat themselves up and spy on mortals—and in his glancing descriptions of traditions foreign to us: Japanese "play language," an exceedingly polite mode of speech, for instance, or Jainism's insistence on quenching "all desire for life." His persistent, unifying interpretations can sometimes deflate the power of these traditions, but this is nevertheless a solid primer.

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### Review

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— ***Publishers Weekly***

"Campbell has become one of the rarest of intellectuals in American life: a serious thinker who has been embraced by the popular culture." — *Newsweek*

### About the Author

**Joseph Campbell** (1904–1987) is widely credited with bringing mythology to a mass audience. His works, including the four-volume *The Masks of God* and *The Power of Myth* (with Bill Moyers), rank among the classics in mythology and literature.

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