

## **The Call to Adventure** **By Denise Snaer, Santa Monica, California**

WHAT if you were told that right now, as you are, you could be the star of your own movie? And what if your role was the lead, the hero in the greatest adventure story ever told? Through our practice of Buddhism in the SGI, we find that is just the case.

Harrison Ford once said the reason he continues to make movies is because moviegoing is one of the last remaining activities of community—the one place where many people of different ages from all walks of life gather in a darkened theater and together embark on the journey of a hero. I thought about this concept further. The movies that are huge box-office successes are the ones that portray true heroes. For example, Rose and Jack in *Titanic*, Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* with Harrison Ford starring as Indiana Jones, and Linda Hamilton playing Sarah Connor (risking her life for her child whose destiny is to save the world) in *Terminator 2*.

The reason for this is that human beings, no matter what their differences, all share the same feelings, struggles and triumphs. Studies have shown that people go to movies to worry. They want to see the hero put to the test, and then triumph in the end! Audiences easily identify with the universal themes attached to any hero's journey. They feel a sense of hope, freedom and mission in their own lives when the hero overcomes all obstacles and gains the treasure. Treasure is portrayed as both inner and outer gain, as in our Buddhist concept of "oneness of life and environment." The hero may start out rushing off to rescue the lady of his dreams. Or she may be on a quest to find the Holy Grail, but ultimately what our hero gains is a sense of freedom and self-esteem from having faced all obstacles and won!

To prove my point, most screenwriters, as I am, have studied the works of mythologist Joseph Campbell. It has been said that the universe loves symbolism, so let us look at Campbell's ideas regarding heroes. In his work *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Campbell outlines the hero's journey for us: The Ordinary World, The Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Meeting the Mentor, Crossing the First Threshold, Tests, Allies and Enemies, Approach to the Inmost Cave, Ordeal, Reward (Seizing the Sword), The Road Back, Resurrection and Return with the Elixir.

ACCORDING to Campbell: "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."

After mastering mythology and thoroughly delving into the complexities of human nature, you may ask, "Who was Campbell's favorite hero?" According to the author, "A majestic representation of the difficulties of the hero-task, and of its sublime import when it is profoundly conceived and solemnly undertaken, is presented in the traditional legend of the Great Struggle of the Buddha" (p. 31). The adventure of this hero goes like this: Shakyamuni, the young Prince, passes through the palace gates and assumes the life of a monk. His journey toward enlightenment is

filled with obstacles, challenges and an iron will to chart areas within the life of man that no one had been able to conquer successfully. His journey takes him to the Bodhi tree, where he does battle with the devil and all his forces. The final defining moment of his journey results in his attainment or revelation of enlightenment.

The famous story of the "Temptation of Mara" follows. As Campbell recounts it, the dangerous god Mara appears mounted on an elephant and carrying weapons in his thousand hands.

"He was surrounded by his army, extending twelve leagues before him, twelve to the right, twelve to the left, and in the rear as far as to the confines of the world; it was nine leagues high. The protecting deities of the universe took flight, but the Future Buddha remained unmoved beneath the Bodhi tree. Mara then assailed him, adamant about breaking his concentration.

"WHIRLWIND, rocks, thunder and flame, smoking weapons with keen edges, burning coals, hot ashes, boiling mud, blistering sands and fourfold darkness, the Antagonist hurled against the Savior, but the missiles were all transformed into celestial flowers and ointments by the power of Gautama's ten perfections." Mara, annoyed, sent forth his daughters, Desire, Pining and Lust, surrounded by voluptuous attendants (think, "James Bond"), but the mind of the sage was not distracted.

"The god finally challenged his right to be sitting on the Immovable Spot, flung his razor-sharp discus angrily, and bid the towering host of the army to let fly at him with mountain crags. But the Future Buddha only moved his hand to touch the ground with his fingertips, and thus bid the goddess Earth bear witness to his right to be sitting where he was. She did so with a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand roars, so that the elephant of the Antagonist fell upon its knees in obeisance to the Future Buddha. The army was immediately dispersed, and the gods of all the worlds scattered garlands.

"HAVING won that preliminary victory before sunset, the conqueror acquired in the first watch of the night knowledge of his previous existences, in the second watch the divine eye of omniscient vision, and in the last watch understanding of the chain of causation. He experienced perfect enlightenment at the break of day.

"Then for seven days Gautama — now the Buddha, the enlightened — sat motionless in bliss; for seven days he stood apart and regarded the spot on which he had received enlightenment."

Here the Buddha faced a desperate inner struggle over whether to reveal what he had awakened to, knowing he would be disbelieved, or to keep it within him.

Campbell concludes his account: "The Buddha was finally persuaded to proclaim the path. He went back into the cities of men where he moved among the citizens of the world, bestowing the inestimable boon of the knowledge of the Way."

Shakyamuni's mission was one of compassion to free all humankind from suffering. Yet Shakyamuni's heroism would have been pointless or lost had Nichiren Daishonin not revealed the key for us to unlock our inner treasure. Without contemporary heroes like Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda, we would all have missed

our “casting call” for the greatest adventure there is! So what kind of heroes are we? What is our journey? Our journey is one of decision! We have been called to adventure as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. We have decided to undertake the search to find our True Identities! Once we have tapped the treasure of our Buddhahood, we have all decided to use this power to create unshakable selves, revealing our brilliance as reflected in society and the world in general.

Everyday heroes like Rosa Parks, John Glenn, Dr. Martin Luther King, to name a few, are epitomized by their quiet, unwavering decisions translated to action that benefits and changes the world.

As practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, we are fully engaged in the drama of our lives moment by moment, re-writing our personal script to create a collection of stories of victory. Buddhism is win or lose, therefore, with each challenge we undertake and win, we have earned ourselves a standing ovation from humanity, and the “Academy Award” of the universe. We are real-life heroes, explorers in the business of destiny-changing, charting new courses in our various fields as humans who practice Buddhism, using our well of boundless compassion to transform the world.

THE Journey of a Hero is our journey of human revolution, of realizing our most personal dreams. We are the heroes of our own stories—our lives. We are the heroes of our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters, our neighbors, every life we touch. Every action we take is important because just like the audiences who flock to theaters to see the hero win, the eyes of the world are on us. We are not just members of a value-creation society. *We are this society.* By nature, we are compelled to create value by taking the hero’s run again and again, tapping the source and returning with new treasure every time. Unlike the movies, we have the absolute assurance that armed with the sword of faith in the Gohonzon, constantly evoking the Mystic Law, we will achieve consistent victory in adventure after adventure, within the expansive universe of our lives! No dream is outside the realm of our faith. No experience or struggle wasted, and our ultimate treasure is twofold: our gift to humanity, and the treasure we find within ourselves--our Buddhahood! What could be a more worthy adventure than this?

For us to be the heroes may be an uncomfortable prospect. To be a true hero, we must challenge our way of being in the world. In Maureen Murdock’s book *The Heroine’s Journey: A Map for Every Woman’s Quest*, she quotes Kathleen Noble: “Awakenings require you to respond consciously, to accept the invitation to create yourself anew, and to undertake the challenge no matter how frightened or inadequate you may feel. Thus, each awakening call demands not only that it be heard, but that you find the courage to trust and affirm the call whenever it arises, wherever it takes you, and however much it challenges your way of being in the world” (p. 8). □