

The Hero's Journey – a bit different project life cycle of EVS

The Hero's Journey is a pattern of personal growth and transformation, which was introduced by Joseph Campbell, an American **mythologist**, writer and lecturer, best known for his work in **comparative mythology** and **comparative religion**. He has studied myths and fairy tales of different cultures from all over the world and discovered, that they all follow the same pattern – which we call today The Hero's Journey or The Monomyth.

What more, we can apply the same pattern to many situations in our lives, it is being used by moviemakers to create successful stories and... it can be also very well used as a map of going through the experience of EVS. The word Hero might seem to refer to men only... but it applies also to women, Heroines. We were using now this concept for many years while working on reflection and planning process with EVS volunteers and also to educate EVS coordinators and mentors about the possible steps of volunteer's inner and outer journey. And, of course, also coordinators, mentors and other actors are going through their own Hero's Journeys. The concept was widely accepted and appreciated in EVS world, especially because:

- It is archetypal – it touches something which most of us can understand and relate to
- It is universal – it applies to all the different cultures
- It is simple – you can easily and in short time explain it to anybody
- It brings understanding, acceptance and empowerment – as a map of life situation

So how does The Hero's Journey go...

1. The ordinary World, „sleeping“

The Hero is living his or her conventional life, sometimes comfortable, sometimes not...

2. Call to adventure

At some point, there is a call for adventure, inner push that something has to be changed, or a message from outside. A person learns about the possibility of EVS, get's inspired by friends example, is kicked out of a job, feels need to do something new, wants to become independent from parents, receives an invitation from beloved person – coordinator of EVS in a different country. Or any other way.

3. Refusal of the call

Very often the Hero hesitates at the beginning, doubts own abilities, fears to leave the comfort and the well known world, deny the adventure.

A potential volunteer might be lost in offers, fear to leave the job, underestimate own ability to handle one year abroad or just feel lazy.

4. Meeting the mentor, guide; receiving special item, tool

If the hero decides to accept the call, usually a guide, wise person, appears to support the hero. He or she brings some wisdom and also some special item, like the magic sword, which will be very useful later. While now, we don't know yet...

In EVS world this could be EVS coordinator, ex-volunteer, friend,... or attending predeparture training. Time to collect pieces of wisdom, which we maybe don't understand so well yet, but we will value them later.

5. Crossing the threshold

There is a clear moment when the Hero crosses the threshold and steps from the known reality into the unknown world. The adventure can start.

EVS volunteer is entering the new country, new organisation, a new culture.

6. Unknown World. Test allies and enemies; trials. Preparation.

The hero is learning to live in new reality, finding out who are the allies and who are enemies – beings or symbolical ones, overcoming first obstacles, going through challenges. It is a time of training and discipline, getting ready for the "real" challenge.

EVS volunteer is getting to know the organisation and its culture, new environment, colleagues, co-volunteers... learning the language, how to handle with pocket money, how to be useful, how to co-live with other strangers in a flat,... Partly honeymoon time of discovering many new things, partly the hard time of learning. Good time for on arrival training, good time for small reachable goals and easier tasks, which can be fulfilled. Here the role of EVS mentor is important, to help with the orientation, and also EVS coordinator is in this period may be giving more than receiving for the organisation/community.

7. Big ordeal

Time of a big ordeal, fatal challenge, that has to be solved by the hero. Beating the dragon, visiting the dark cave, symbolical death. The moment, when the hero is left alone and has to prove his or her abilities. Time to remember magical sword or piece of wisdom from a guide and use it.

EVS volunteer is working on the own mini-project, on a difficult task from the organisation, solving the critical interpersonal situation. It can be anything, what is the real challenge for volunteer – whether it is connected with work or personal life. In this moment, it is necessary to leave him or her the space for acting and responsibility, for facing the challenge. Time of preparations, of "parenting" the volunteer is over. He or she is stepping into adulthood of the EVS time. As it is important to be of support and accompany volunteer step by step, so that he or she can integrate well, now it is time to step back and let the volunteer fly. While, somewhere around, there is still midterm evaluation meeting, to give the injection of motivation and empowerment.

8. Getting the treasure, change, new insights, reward

When the hero beats the dragon, there is a reward. Sometimes princess and half of the kingdom, but always a symbolical rebirth, the hero is never the same as before. He or she is transformed – wiser, stronger, adult, more responsible,... richer with new powers.

EVS volunteer has grown, gained new competencies – skills, knowledge and attitudes. Youthpass can be the guide, which helps to see and acknowledge these new superpowers. And there is the community to recognise them and appreciate them, celebrate with the volunteer.

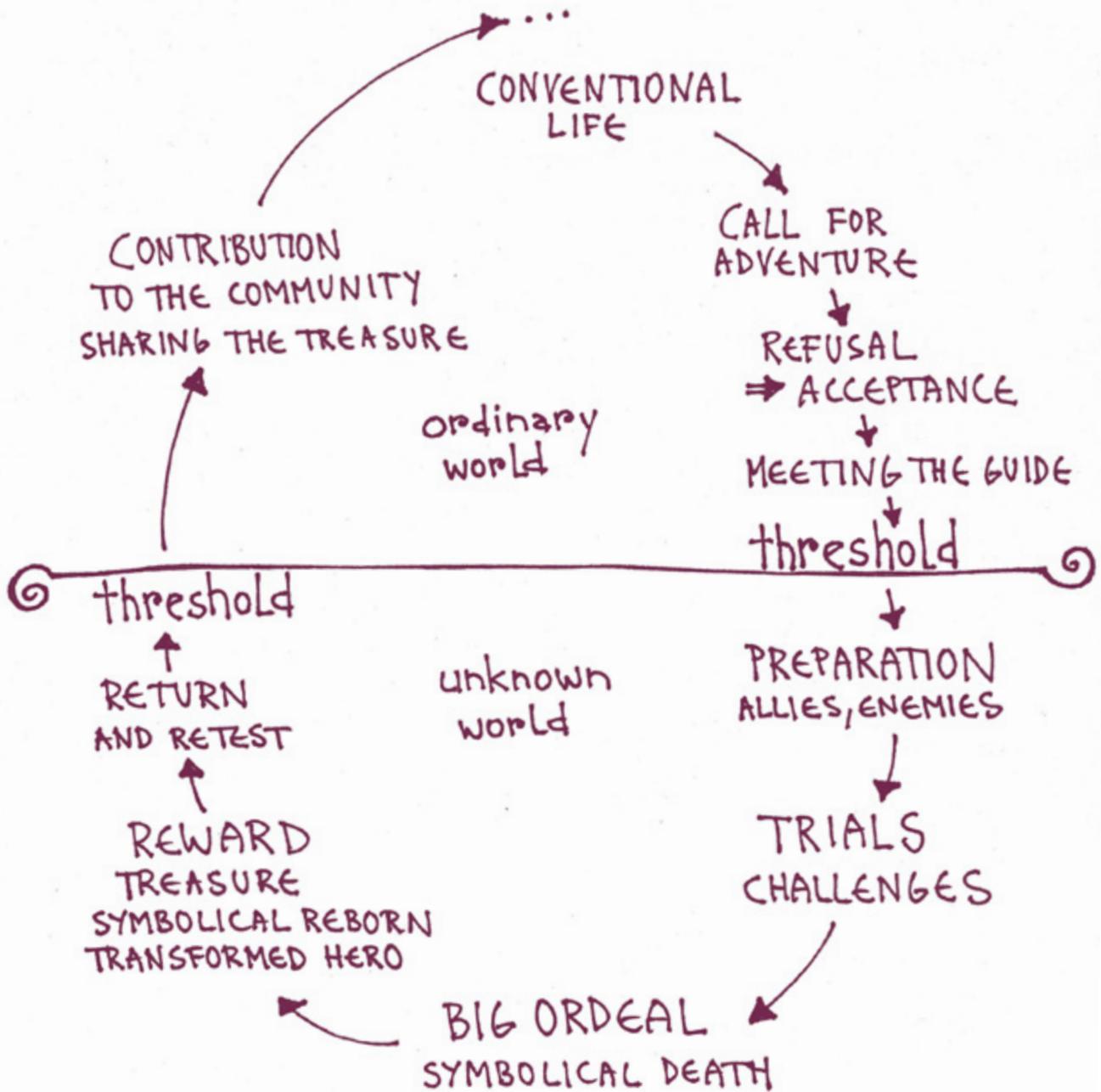
9. The way back, retest

The hero starts the returning journey. There is usually a re-test on the way, which proves, that the new superpowers are actual and stable, that the hero is able to use them.

EVS volunteer is slowly turning his or her head towards home. It is the difficult part often. Should I stay or should I go? How to close well the experience? How to leave a good footprint? How to come back and handle again new situation? Cultural shock after coming back home can be sometimes stronger, than the when coming for EVS.

The Hero's Journey / Monomyth

BY JOSEPH CAMPBELL



10. Crossing the return threshold

The hero is crossing the threshold once again, leaving the unknown (not anymore J) world, stepping into the everyday life – of different quality.

EVS volunteer is finishing the service. Mostly leaving back home, sometimes staying in the hosting country, sometimes continuing somewhere else.

11. Bringing the treasure back to the community

Here is the crucial part, when the hero comes back home and uses his or her new superpowers in the service for the community. Suddenly the whole adventure starts to make a sense.

EVS volunteer is using his or her new competencies after EVS. EVS annual meeting and support of sending organisation can be useful in finding good ways to do so. Time to act, time for follow-up activities and dissemination. And here we are touching the aim of the whole EVS programme, to raise responsible adults who are contributing to their communities.

Can you see the links between the Hero's Journey and EVS? Where in the cycle is your volunteer? What does it mean for you? – What kind of support, the leadership he or she needs at the moment so that it serves to him or her and the organisation/clients/community as well? And where do you see yourself?

Usually, we are in life on many parallel Hero's Journeys, in different stages. Seeing where we already have the treasures and how we are useful for the community can help us to overcome the challenges in topics, where we are still on the way, or support us not to refuse the call and step into the adventure once more. Have a good journey!

Resources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hhk4N9A0oCA> – Matthew Winkler, video explaining Hero's Journey

*Helena Kosková,
free-lance trainer, long-term experience
with topic of EVS , Czech Republic*