the path. You start imagining a new future—one where you are not so "secure," maybe, but where you are doing what you actually want to do. The possibility of undisturbed sleep returns, and you start eating properly again. You are quieter, less arrogant, more accepting—except in your weaker moments. Others make remarks, some admiring, some envious, about the change they perceive in you. You are a man recovering from a long illness—a man reborn.

NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTION: THE NATURE OF THE MIND

It is reasonable to regard the world, as forum for action, as a "place"—a place made up of the familiar, and the unfamiliar, in eternal juxtaposition. The brain is actually composed, in large part, of two subsystems, adapted for action in that place. The right hemisphere, broadly speaking, responds to novelty with caution, and rapid, global hypothesis formation. The left hemisphere, by contrast, tends to remain in charge when things—that is, explicitly categorized things—are unfolding according to plan. The right hemisphere draws rapid, global, valence-based, metaphorical pictures of novel things; the left, with its greater capacity for detail, makes such pictures explicit and verbal. Thus the exploratory capacity of the brain "builds" the world of the familiar (the known), from the world of the unfamiliar (the unknown).

When the world remains known and familiar—that is, when our beliefs maintain their validity—our emotions remain under control. When the world suddenly transforms itself into something new, however, our emotions are dysregulated, in keeping with the relative novelty of that transformation, and we are forced to retreat or to explore once again.

The Valence of Things

"Anyone who considers the basic drives of man…will find that all of them have done philosophy at some time—and that every one of them would like only too well to represent just *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive wants to be master—and it attempts to philosophize in *that spirit*."[49]

> "It is true that man was created in order to serve the gods,
> who, first of all, needed to be fed and clothed."[50]

We can make lists of *general* goods and bads, which might appear reasonable to others, because we tend to make judgments of meaning in relatively standard and predictable ways. Food, to take a simple example, is *good,* assuming it is palatably prepared, while a blow on the head is *bad* in direct proportion to its force. The list of general goods and bads can be extended with little effort. Water, shelter, warmth and sexual contact are

good; diseases, droughts, famines and fights are bad. The essential similarities of our judgments of meaning can easily lead us to conclude that the goodness or badness of things or situations is something more or less fixed. However, the fact of subjective interpretation—and its effects on evaluation and behavior—complicate this simple picture. We will work, expend energy and overcome obstacles to gain a good (or to avoid something bad). But we won't work for food, at least not very hard, if we have enough food; we won't work for sex, if we are satisfied with our present levels of sexual activity; and we might be very pleased to go hungry, if that means our enemy will starve. Our predictions, expectations and desires condition our evaluations to a finally unspecifiable degree. Things have no absolutely *fixed* significance, despite our ability to generalize about their value. It is our personal preferences, therefore, that determine the import of the world (but these preferences have constraints!).

The meaning we attribute to objects or situations is not stable. What is important to one man is not necessarily important to another; likewise, the needs and desires of the child differ from those of the adult. The meaning of things depends to a profound and ultimately undeterminable degree upon the relationship of those things to the goal we currently have in mind. Meaning shifts when goals change. Such change necessarily transforms the contingent expectations and desires that accompany those goals. We experience "things" personally and idiosyncratically, despite broad interpersonal agreement about the value of things. The goals we pursue singly—the outcomes we expect and desire as individuals—determine the meaning of our experience. The existential psychotherapist Viktor Frankl relates a story from his experiences as a Nazi death camp inmate that makes this point most strikingly:

> Take as an example something that happened on our journey from Auschwitz to the camp affiliated with Dachau. We became more and more tense as we approached a certain bridge over the Danube which the train would have to cross to reach Mauthausen, according to the statement of experienced traveling companions. Those who have never seen anything similar cannot possibly imagine the dance of joy performed in the carriage by the prisoners when they saw that our transport was not crossing the bridge and was instead heading "only" for Dachau.
>
> And again, what happened on our arrival in that camp, after a journey lasting two days and three nights? There had not been enough room for everybody to crouch on the floor of the carriage at the same time. The majority of us had to stand all the way, while a few took turns at squatting on the scanty straw which was soaked with human urine. When we arrived the first important news that we heard from older prisoners was that this comparatively small camp (its population was 2,500) had no "oven," no crematorium, no gas! That meant that a person who had become a "Moslem" [no longer fit for work] could not be taken straight to the gas chamber, but would have to wait until a so-called "sick convoy" had been arranged to return to Auschwitz. This joyful surprise put us all in a good mood. The wish of the senior warden of our hut in Auschwitz had come true: we had come, as quickly as possible, to a camp which did not

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The Vision Quest

Two weeks after Campbell returned to New York, in October 1929, came the Wall Street Crash. Unable to find a job, and unwilling to resume the PhD program at Columbia, Joseph Campbell retired at the age of twenty-five to a friend's cabin in Woodstock, New York, with his sister, Alice, a student of the Russian sculptor Alexander Archipenko, to read and to try his hand at writing fiction. For the next couple of years "the callow young author," as he described himself, read voluminously and wrote unsuccessfully.

Finally, in 1931 he traveled in the family Model A Ford to California to look for a job. Through the young nutritionist Adelle Davis, he met John Steinbeck and the biologist Ed Ricketts, who rekindled his interest in the relationship between mythology and biology. He sailed with Ricketts up the West Coast to Alaska on the Inside Passage, where they collected intertidal fauna and Campbell played the balalaika with Russian goldminers.

In 1933, he accepted a teaching job from his old master at Canterbury prep school, but resigned at the end of the term and went "back on the Depression." Serendipitously one of his short stories sold, a now long-lost piece called "Strictly Platonic." On the $300 windfall he earned from the story he returned to Woodstock for two more years of self-imposed exile, studying in depth the authors who had galvanized him in Europe: Joyce, Spengler, Mann, Freud, Jung, Frazer, and Frobenius. In spring of 1934 came a job offer from Sarah Lawrence College, which he immediately accepted. There, for the next thirty-eight years, he taught enormously popular classes in comparative literature and mythology.

CAMPBELL: I think the most important period of my scholarship and study followed my return from Europe. I came back to the United States about two weekends before the Wall Street Crash. And there wasn't a job in the world. I went back up to Columbia to go on with my work on the PhD and told them, "This whole thing has opened out."

"Oh, no," they said. "You don't follow that. You stay where you were before you went to Europe."

Well, I just said, "To hell with it."

My father had lost all his money but I had saved some as a student. I used to play in a jazz band and so I piled up money during a few years. And on that, you might say, I just retired to the woods. I went up to Woodstock and just read, and read, and read, and read, for *five* years. No job, no money. I learned then that you don't need money to live if you're a young man who didn't get himself involved sooner than he should have, before he had the ability to support what his involvement might be.

So during the years of the Depression I had arranged a schedule for myself. When you don't have a job or anyone to tell you what to do, you've got to fix one for yourself. I divided the day into four four-hour periods, of which I would be reading in three of the four-hour periods, and free one of them.

By getting up at eight o'clock in the morning, by nine I could sit down to read. That meant I used the first hour to prepare my own breakfast and take care of the house and put things together in whatever shack I happened to be living in at the time. Then three hours of that first four-hour period went to reading.

Then came an hour break for lunch and another three-hour unit. And then comes the optional next section. It should normally be three hours of reading and then an hour out for dinner and then three hours free and an hour getting to bed so I'm in bed by twelve.

On the other hand, if I were invited out for cocktails or something like that, then I would put the work hour in the evening and the play hour in the afternoon.

Go Tell It on the Mountain (James Baldwin)

"James Baldwin"
by Robert Bone,
in *The Negro Novel in America* (1965)

Introduction

In *The Negro Novel in America*, Robert Bone explores blues as an important subject in James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. A musical form derived in part from the African-American spiritual, blues, according to Bone, is representative of the "New Negro" or "Harlem Renaissance" movement as it is now most often referred to. During John Grimes's internal quest, we hear "the sound of all Negro art and all Negro religion, for it flows from the cracked-open heart." Bone contends that John's journey toward sexual and racial freedom also mirrors Baldwin's life. Ultimately, John's journey deals with identity, the sense of self he forges amid two ritualized ways of experiencing suffering: Christianity and the blues.

Bone, Robert. "James Baldwin." *The Negro Novel in America*. Revised edition. New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1965. 215–39.

The best of Baldwin's novels is *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), and his best is very good indeed. It ranks with Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* as a major contribution to American fiction. For this novel cuts through the walls of the store-front church to the essence of Negro experience in America. This is Baldwin's earliest world, his bright and morning star, and it glows with metaphorical intensity. Its emotions are his emotions; its language, his native tongue. The result is a prose of unusual power and authority. One senses in Baldwin's first novel a confidence, control, and mastery of style that he has not attained again in the novel form.

The central event of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* is the religious conversion of an adolescent boy. In a long autobiographical essay, which forms a part of *The Fire Next Time*,[1] Baldwin leaves no doubt that he was writing of his own experience. During the summer of his fourteenth year, he tells us, he succumbed to the spiritual seduction of a woman evangelist. On the night of his conversion, he suddenly found himself lying on the floor before the altar. He describes his trancelike state, the singing and clapping of the saints, and the all-night prayer vigil which helped to bring him "through." He then recalls the circumstances of his life that prompted so pagan and desperate a journey to the throne of Grace.

The overwhelming fact of Baldwin's childhood was his victimization by the white power structure. At first he experienced white power only indirectly, as refracted through the brutality and degradation of the Harlem ghetto. The world beyond the ghetto seemed remote, and scarcely could be linked in a child's imagination to the harrowing conditions of his daily life. And yet a vague terror, transmitted through his parents to the ghetto child, attested to the power of the white world. Meanwhile, in the forefront of his consciousness was a set of fears by no means vague.

To a young boy growing up in the Harlem ghetto, damnation was a clear and present danger: "For the wages of sin were visible everywhere, in every wine-stained and urine-splashed hallway, in every clanging ambulance bell, in every scar on the faces of the pimps and their whores, in every helpless, newborn baby being brought into this danger, in every knife and pistol fight on the Avenue."[2] To such a boy, the store-front church offered a refuge and a sanctuary from