



JAA 2024

Analysis of the Kurdish Tale "Shirzad Shirdil" Based on Joseph Campbell's Theory of the Hero's Journey

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Article Information

Doi: [10.30495/JAA.2024.2006999.1031](https://doi.org/10.30495/JAA.2024.2006999.1031)

Received Date: 24/04/2024

Accepted Date: 08/06/2024

Available Online: 25/06/2024

Abstract: The present article, which has been written in a descriptive-analytical manner based on field studies in the field of popular literature, examines the oral and Kurdish tale "Shirzad Shirdil," which has not yet been fully documented, based on Joseph Campbell's (1904-1987) theory of the hero's journey. It aligns the stages of the tale with this theory and also addresses some of its symbols. The importance of the present subject is due to the cultural-literary value of folk tales and the interdisciplinary position of Campbell's theory. The main question is: How and to what extent do the stages of this tale correspond to the hero's journey? The hypothesis is that although this tale does not have all the stages of Campbell's hero's journey, it has most of them. Based on the research findings, since Shirzad is accompanied by the older dimension of his existence – Malek-Ahmad - both dimensions must necessarily attain transcendence. Therefore, to complete the hero's journey, the repetition of a stage such as the meeting with the goddess, the passage through the belly of the whale, the ultimate boon, the apotheosis, and the master of two worlds is sometimes manifested. Additionally, this tale lacks the stages of the hero's refusal of return, the magical flight, and the rescue from without.

Keywords: *Folk Tales, Hero's Journey, Joseph Campbell, Kurdish Tale, Tale of Shirzad Shirdil.*

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Introduction

Folk tales are replete with valuable cultural elements. Among them, Kurdish tales, due to the antiquity of this ethnic group, enjoy a high cultural richness, yet they have been less evaluated. The main issue of the present research is to analyze the Kurdish tale "Shirzad Shirdil" - which has not yet been published - based on Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey and to align its stages with the stages of this theory. The most important research question is: How and to what extent does this tale correspond to the stages of the hero's journey in Campbell's theory? The hypothesis is that it seems possible to find and analyze most of the stages of the hero's journey in this tale. The importance of this research is due to the value of Campbell's mythological theory of the hero's journey, as well as the value of Kurdish folk literature, including the story under study. The present research has been prepared based on field studies in an analytical-descriptive manner, and library resources have been used to explain, compare, and analyze. The tale of "Shirzad Shirdil," which has not yet been published, has been collected by "Farzad Farzi" from the people of Kermanshah (Narrator: Yar-Karam Karimi, Occupation: Farmer, Age: 75, Resident: Karend-e Gharb, Dalahu) and has been documented and made available to the author of the article in 1401 (2022-2023).

Research background

The research background indicates that the story of "Shirzad Shirdel" has not been fully published and is currently circulating orally among the Kurdish people. Brief excerpts of this story have been included in an article by Farzad Farzi and others (2023) on the theme of petrification and transformation in Kurdish stories and legends, where some of the characters were analyzed from the perspective of petrification, but the subject of the current research was not addressed. Regarding Campbell's theory, extensive research has been conducted in Persian literature, such as studies by Zahra Asghari and Reza Sattari (2022) on the mythological critique of the hero's journey in the Samnama epic, Mohammad Fouladi and Maryam Rahmani (2018) on the analysis and critique of the story of Bizhan and Manizhe based on Campbell's monomyth, Rahman Zabihian and Parvin Pikani (2016) on the analysis of the hero's journey archetype in Darabnama by Tarsusi, and Azarmidokht Rokni (2014) on the archetypes of the hero's journey and the crossing of the threshold in Iranian literature. However, it is clear that none of the above cases have addressed the subject of the current article and its conformity with Campbell's theory, and there is still a research gap in this regard.

Theoretical foundations

Folk tales

Folk tales, which often manifest in a mythical form, convey the deepest layers of the culture and identity of each people or nation, and the approach to them is interdisciplinary, as they are connected to mythology, philosophy, literature, psychology, religious studies, archaeology, mysticism, and art. "The term 'myth' is used with expansion and leniency to refer to the beliefs and reactions of people before the era of knowledge, writing, and history, that is, the era of primitive knowledge, primitive religion, and imagi-

nary justifications" (Shamisa, 2022: 11). Their language is the language of symbols (Kazazi, 1993: 127). Joseph Campbell's interpretive view is that he considers myth as a vast door through which the eternal cosmic energy is manifested in human culture (Campbell, 2005: 15). Through mythical folk tales, one can understand that "the first step, that is, detachment, emphasizes the inner world rather than the outer world, a movement from the greater world to the smaller world. Contrary to what appears on the surface, the main task of a hero is to withdraw from the stage of the present world and move towards where the real problems have settled, that is, the inner world" (Ibid: 27-28). Myths are the masks of the divine that humans have always tried to connect themselves to the wonders of existence through them. They illuminate the spiritual basis of human life (see Campbell, 2019: 16) and "the inner driving force resides in the heart of children's fairy tales. Folk fairy tales usually have a happy and joyful ending. They represent the victory of the soul, not the body" (Campbell, 2005: 39).

Campbell and the Theory of the Hero's Journey

In his most famous works, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" and "The Hero's Journey", Campbell, by establishing himself in human cultures and subcultures, has analyzed the path of the evolution and development of the archetypal hero. With a view that is accompanied by a thick analysis of Sufism, he has sought the ritual mystical secret of primitive man in the background of mythological archetypes, in contrast to the dark and complex world around him. His exploration leads to the meaningfulness of the world and the divinization of the material world surrounding him (Ghaemi, 2010: 43-45). Nowadays, with modern life, it seems that man has fallen into the grip of the modernity that he himself has created, trapped in the clutches of industry, worldliness, machine life, separation from nature, and being caught in a whirlpool of selfishness and distress; "Previous generations overcame psychological dangers with the help of symbols and spiritual practices belonging to their mythological and religious heritage, but today we have to overcome these dangers alone. However, we can still see our human existence in the many myths and legends that have remained for us or have been collected from the ends of the world, but to benefit from them, we must submit to purification and surrender" (Campbell, 2005: 112). Campbell, in "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" and "The Hero's Journey", has examined the myths of different cultures around the world. His mythological perspective, which is accompanied by mysticism and spirituality, is based on Freud's and Jung's theories of the unconscious; Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) proposed the theory of individual consciousness and unconsciousness, and Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) the Swiss psychologist - although he disagreed with Freud's views in many cases - introduced the collective unconscious to complete a part of his theories (Jung, 2001:79). He considered the collective unconscious as a collection of very ancient pre-historical experiences that are manifested in archetypes (Jung, 1958: 157). Campbell has based a large part of his theory on Jung's views and has repeatedly acknowledged his great influence from Jung in his works (see Campbell, 1990: 121). According to Campbell's theory, the hero's journey takes place in three stages of separation, initiation, and return, each of which has its own sub-components (see Ibid: 40-46); "A hero withdraws from everyday life and embarks on a perilous journey to the realm of super-



natural wonders; there he encounters amazing forces and achieves a decisive victory. Upon returning from this mysterious journey, he has the power to bestow blessings and grace upon his companions" (Campbell, 2005: 40). The purpose of "initiation is the end of the natural human and the entry of the novice into culture, but from the perspective of ancient and traditional societies, culture is not the achievement of man, but has a supernatural origin" (Eliade, 2015: 11). According to Campbell, the hero, regardless of his land and ethnicity, the basis of his journey does not differ much (Campbell, 2005: 46). The result of all heroic journeys is the unlocking of locks and the release of the energy of life in the body of the world (Ibid: 48). This is why the present article, instead of focusing on the (Kurdish) ethnicity of the story in question, has only addressed the elements of the hero's journey in it. In fact, this view reflects the value of this Kurdish story, as the following paragraphs will show how this ethnic story fits into global patterns and has the valuable aspects of international myths.

Research and Analysis

Summary of the Story "Shirzad Shirdal"

Abandoned by his impoverished parents in a ruin, an infant is raised by a lioness alongside her cubs. While hunting, the king slays the lion and its cubs, but brings the valiant child, who had fought heroically, to the palace and names him "Shirzad Shirdal," cherishing him like his own son, Malek-Ahmad. Later, Malek-Ahmad falls in love with a portrait of "Qamarnaz" that adorns the entrance of a ruin. Years ago, this portrait was given to the king by a dervish who was in love with Qamarnaz but had given up hope of finding her. The king warns his son against this love, as Qamarnaz resides on the "Peak of Qaf" and has seven valiant brothers, each the king of a different country. Determined to find Qamarnaz, Malek-Ahmad is accompanied by his valiant brother Shirzad, who is compelled to protect his brother on their journey to the Peak of Qaf. Along their way to the Peak of Qaf, the two brothers pass through three watermelon fields. Witnessing his brother's fear, Shirzad disregards his brother's lies about the ripe and large watermelons in the fields and proceeds to gather them himself. At night, he takes over his brother's watch and battles three malevolent demons guarding the three fields, killing them and hiding their bodies from his brother's sight, casting them into valleys to prevent him from being frightened. They then arrive at a mysterious castle, which is actually a terrifying well surrounded by a wall. Malek-Ahmad remains outside, and when Shirzad descends the well's stairs, he suddenly finds himself in a place of great beauty and jewels in the depths of darkness. He discovers a sleeping demon who has held the beautiful daughter of a king captive from her city for years, having also extorted tribute from the city's inhabitants for years before that. While captivated by the princess, Shirzad repeatedly attacks the demon's one leg, cutting it off and eventually defeating the demon in a day-long duel with the princess's help. As the demon dies, thunder and lightning fill the air, plunging everything into darkness for a while. The two emerge from the castle unharmed, and Shirzad informs his brother that "she is not Qamarnaz. We shall find her soon."

Together, they set out to return the princess to her city, transforming the mourning



city into one filled with joy and celebration. The king declares that he has vowed to marry his daughter to whoever finds her. Shirzad postpones his marriage to the king's daughter until the end of the journey, entrusting the bride to her father and declining the king's offer to accompany them with an army. Instead, he opts for the company of a guide. Before reaching the Mount of Qaf, they successively ascend seven peaks, each guarded by seven elephant-bodied sentinels. Shirzad fights the guardian of the first peak, cuts off his ear, places it in his palm, and subdues him. With the help of his brother, who is constantly fearful, he progresses to the seventh peak. Suddenly, they fall asleep from exhaustion, and Shirzad dreams of a radiant old man named "Khirusne" (a gnostic elder in the Kermanshah region) who gives him his ring and says, "Whenever you face trouble, call my name and seek my help."

Before long, a colossal hero, his face covered with a handkerchief, attacks Shirzad to drive him away from his domain. The battle between them is prolonged, and Shirzad, overwhelmed, remembers Khirusne and calls upon him for aid. Suddenly, the hero is lifted into the air like straw and slammed hard to the ground, his turban falling off, revealing to Shirzad that he is a woman. He is deeply ashamed and saddened by his actions. Qamarnaz tells him that her seven valiant brothers will return from the city soon, but in the end, Shirzad defeats them one by one. During the battles, Malek-Ahmad, on his brother's advice, only curses and says, "Do not make me rise and protect my younger brother." Coincidentally, the brothers' spirits are also weakened, believing that he is probably much stronger. Qamarnaz declares that she has vowed to marry whoever defeats her, but Shirzad says that he is betrothed and that she must marry his brother, as he has been in love with her for a long time. Qamarnaz and her brothers agree, believing that Malek-Ahmad is braver than Shirzad. Seven nights and seven days are spent in feasting and wedding ceremonies. After that, the bride and groom are left alone, and everyone goes hunting for deer.

Stages of Shirzad Shirdal's Hero's Journey

Stage One: Departure or Journey

Call to Adventure

The newborn infant is abandoned by his parents in a ruin, and this rejection marks the beginning of his journey. The ruin symbolizes the abode of treasure. Here too, Shirzad's inner treasure is revealed in the ruin. According to Campbell, a hero can be a character with special gifts who has been cherished by his society or has been humiliated and driven away (ibid: 46) (For birth in the hero's journey, see Rokni, 2014: 61-63). A lioness, seeking water - as a symbol of light, truth, purity, and innocence - finds the infant and raises him. The lion is a symbol of Iranian national glory (for a study on the symbol of the lion, see Nikoui et al., 2020: 461-468). Elsewhere in the story, the hero's journey also begins for Malek-Ahmad. He too falls in love with the portrait of Qamarnaz, which is hung from the threshold of a ruin that is the abode of his inner treasure, and faints. Malek-Ahmad is the less developed and less capable aspect of Shirzad. He is incapable of protecting himself, and the stronger, more spiritual, and braver aspect, Shirzad, must accompany him. In the course of the story, the order and sequence of the stages are dis-



rupted due to the existence of this less developed aspect, as the stages of Malek-Ahmad's hero's journey are always behind his more transcendent aspect - Shirzad. Malek-Ahmad is constantly weak and fearful. He is even incapable of picking watermelons (a symbol of sweet and juicy spiritual reward and outcome) at night (night; a symbol of darkness, fear, and darkness) in the land of demons. He either makes excuses for picking them, picks a small watermelon, lies out of fear, or flees from night duty. Shirzad does not show it, he does everything alone. He is at peace with himself because he has the capabilities to traverse the path of ascension. He is so developed that he does not humiliate or belittle his brother, his other aspect, and does not fight with him over his weakness. Shirzad never fights with him over his weakness and lack of courage. He even simply overlooks his brother's lies that he has been on duty until dawn when he has actually been sleeping, and does not bring it up, because he knows that his other aspect's strength and stamina is only up to a point. Shirzad even scares the demons with his brother's lack of power and turns this weakness into strength with this trick.

Refusal of the Call or Foolish Flight from the Gods

The king of the city, who has come to hunt the lion, kills the lion and its cubs after his soldiers are killed by the amazing boy; the lion, which symbolizes the boy's undeveloped spiritual aspect, is killed so that, by placing him on the path of difficult tests, a superior spiritual aspect can emerge and excel. It is as if his weak spiritual aspect must be destroyed in order for a divine and more transcendent aspect to emerge in him. Shirzad is invited to begin the journey but fights with the king and thus refuses the invitation, initially refusing the path of ascension. "Refusal of the call is a situation in which the individual is behind a wall of everyday boredom. He does not have the power to change his path" (Campbell, 2004: 67). In fact, he is not yet able to be reborn, but in the end he is forced onto the path; he is taken prisoner and put in a cage.

Supernatural Aid

In the hero's journey, the guide gives the news of entering a new stage. The stage that must be faced is a strange but familiar stage for the unconscious, which the conscious mind may be surprised or even afraid of (ibid: 64), but the guide, the old man or the mentor has come to reduce doubts and show the way. The old man gives him hunger, hunger for what is low and base (raw meat) and guides him to a transcendent stage of eating cooked meat instead of raw, because raw meat on fire, which is a symbol of enlightenment and burning impurities, has reached a higher stage. The supernatural helper elevates Shirzad from the animal level to the human level, tames him, and teaches him human language and customs. Finally, the boy is freed and is named Shirzad by the king. This promotion is with the help of a supernatural helper. Shirzad was basically the king's son, only this had to be actualized. From this point of view, the hero is a symbol of those creative and liberating images that are hidden within all of us and are waiting for us to recognize them and bring them into the arena of life (see: ibid: 47).

Also, a supernatural helper in the role of an old man comes to the king's sleep (a symbol of divine inspiration) and causes the king to leave the city to meet him and hand over the throne to Shirzad so that the story can continue. The portrait of Qamarnaz, which



causes Malek-Ahmad to fall in love and start the journey, reaches the king through a dervish who was in love with Qamarnaz himself but did not find her; the dervish who gave the picture of Qamarnaz to Malek-Ahmad's father (the king) is a guide who indirectly invited Malek-Ahmad to the path of heroism. It is as if he is a traveler who, despite stepping on the difficult path of growth and ascension, has not yet reached the capabilities that he can unite with the goddess and embark on the hero's journey, but he has been able to be an indirect guide on the path of ascension for another person. In another part of the story, when the two brothers cross seven peaks to reach the Peak of Qaf. Both of them fall asleep. Shirzad dreams of a radiant old man named "Khirusne" (a gnostic in present-day Kermanshah). This supernatural helper gives him his ring, which is a symbol of government and rule, and says that whenever he is in trouble, he should call his name to appear to help him. From here to the end of the story, the supernatural helper is this Khirusne (for more on the helper, see: Rokni, 2014: 135-140). When Puladzereh kidnaps Qamarnaz, a guide demon - the sixth demon of the story - who is a friend of the girl's brothers, puts Shirzad on his back and travels the six-month journey in six days, takes him to the demon's place of residence, and disappears. Also, Khirusne comes to Shirzad's aid to kill Puladzereh and gives him three arrows and teaches him that with the help of Qamarnaz he can get the demon's life glass from the white deer's horn, but if the arrows go astray the hero will die himself, which in due time, the last arrow works on the deer. Once again, when Shirzad, along with his brother and his wife - Qamarnaz - is on their way to the city of his fiancée and the city is under the control of a demon who has turned many into stone (for more on petrification, see: Farzi, 2023: 130-140) again Khirusne gives him three arrows and the hero, with the help of the princess, defeats the demon.

Crossing the First Threshold

Shirzad enters the stage of crossing the threshold to help Malek-Ahmad - who is on his way to the Peak of Qaf to find Qamarnaz but faints along the way. The Peak of Qaf is a symbol of the arduous, fearful, and sometimes unattainable path of human growth and ascension, and the seven warrior brothers of Qamarnaz are a symbol of the seven days of the week. The hero also faces other amazing challenges along the way; he kills three brother demons (three sons of Puladzereh) in three watermelon fields over three consecutive nights. The fact that they are three is a symbol of the three meals of the day and the daily challenges of human life (for the role of numbers in myths, see Hosseini, 2011: 123-125). Shirzad, away from the eyes of his sleeping brother, throws each of them into a valley (valley is a symbol of the cave, the depths of darkness, forgetfulness and the ultimate baseness) at night so that when he wakes up, he will not be afraid. "Demons are monstrous characters in myths, folk traditions and even nightmares. The demon seizes a collective benefit for himself. He is a monster who only beats the greed of my property and my property and the destruction that he brings and according to myths and fairy tales, it encompasses the entire world that is in his sphere of power" (Campbell, 2004: 67). According to Campbell; every hero who goes beyond the traditions of his society will inevitably face these demons. They are both dangerous and grant magical powers (ibid: 90). The demon in fairy tales is a symbol of the accumulated and hidden evils in



the very existence of the hero himself. Finally, the hero reaches ascension when he defeats the inner demon that has become an external symbol. So "everyone must know their inner demon and identify ways to deal with it. Knowledge of the demon of the soul comes through awareness, otherwise the stories of heroism have dealt with generalities and provided general maps" (ibid: 128).

The Belly of the Whale or Passing through the Realm of Night

Absolute darkness is a symbol of the womb of the world from which the hero must be born. A hero who has already died (not physical death) must now be reborn from the darkness. Like Joseph in the well, Jonah in the belly of the whale, Moses in the basket, Jesus in the tomb (ibid: 96). The hero dies to be reborn again because; "No being can enter another stage unless its existence is stopped" (ibid: 99). The two brothers arrive at a mysterious castle. Entering the castle is a symbol of victory and victory over the evils within. The castles are in the possession of demons and "usually ugly and large-bodied guards protect this absolute darkness which is the womb of the world" (ibid: 96). Both of them have been looking for a way into the castle for a long time. Shirzad realizes that the castle is actually a well. The well; a symbol of wickedness, blackness and deep confusion. Campbell has called the well the navel of the world (see: ibid: 180). The castle of this story is a well that is surrounded by walls. The wall is a symbol of the veil, a barrier that prevents entry into the navel of the world, that is, the well, so that not everyone can find their way there. Shirzad leaves his brother outside the castle and himself descends the stairs of the well (from the realm of night) to leave behind the evils and darkneses. Elsewhere, Shirzad, to save Qamarnaz, who is captive in Puladzereh's clutches, hides in the demon's hair and enters the cave or navel of existence with him. According to Campbell; the cave is "the umbilical cord that transfers the energy of eternity to the realm of time. The navel of existence is a symbol of permanent creation; the secret of the continuation of existence through a sustainable and life-giving miracle that is hidden in the depths of everything" (ibid: 47). The hero's worldly and material existence seems to be connected to it by an umbilical cord. He must go inside and cut the umbilical cord so that he can be freed from this darkness and be reborn again. Because Shirzad has two younger and older aspects, he must repeat the stage of meeting the goddess and uniting with her for the ascension of both aspects of himself. Therefore, some other stages, such as passing through the darkness or the belly of the whale, are repeated in this story.

The Second Stage of Initiation (Passing the Initiation Tests and Achieving Victory)

The Arduous Path of Tests

The Path of Tests represents the entrance into trials that pose a threat of death and involve encountering the fearsome faces of the gods (ibid: 113). It is the process of setting aside, transcending, or transforming the lingering images from our childhood or past that have taken hold of our current state, the very ones that humans see as nightmares even in their sleep (ibid: 43). Ultimately, the individual will find their way to salvation and reclaim their childhood joy (ibid:108). The Path of Hard Tests begins with Shirzad rescuing the maiden from the fourth demon - the demon who kidnapped the princess from her city - and fighting him. He first cuts off one of the demon's legs (as if cutting



off a part of his own breath's instrument of movement) because according to Campbell, "an aspect of the demon, like the father, is a reflection of me or my own sacrificial ego. This reflection arises from the childish sense that we have left behind but have projected forward" (Campbell, 2004: 136). Finally, with the princess's help, the demon is killed, and the princess is returned to her father. The hero then sets off for the peak of Mount Qaf, but due to the difficulty of the path of spiritual ascension, there are constant prohibitions along the way to prevent the hero from continuing the journey if he is not yet ready. Now, the king (the princess's father) initially forbids Shirzad from going to Mount Qaf, but when he sees his determination, he sends an army to accompany him, which Shirzad refuses, instead opting to go with a guide. Due to the presence of the hero's two lower and higher dimensions together (Shirzad and Malek-Ahmad), the Path of Tests continues. They must cross seven peaks - guarded by seven sentinels - before Mount Qaf. The number of peaks and sentinels is seven, the number of days of the week (cf. Hosseini, 2011: 100-105). It is a symbol of the various sufferings of life that must be endured and overcome. The sentinels are a symbol of screening, those who close the way of entry because not everyone can tolerate entering the path of heroism and self-knowledge, and the hero will face serious dangers that may threaten his life (cf. *ibid*: 84). Shirzad acts wisely, fights the sentinel of the first peak, cuts off his ear - which is a symbol of obedience - and puts it in his palm. He also obeys orders and takes the two brothers across the seven peaks. Continuation of the Arduous Path of Tests Along the arduous Path of Tests, Shirzad defeats the warrior Qamarnaz (who represents both a goddess of his lower dimension and his Oedipus complex) with the help of Khirrozaneh, and then subdues her seven valiant brothers. The Path of Tests continues for Shirzad even after the marriage of Malek-Ahmad and Qamarnaz. After leaving the newlyweds alone and going hunting, Malek-Ahmad is forbidden by his father's will (symbolizing wisdom and knowledge) from going to the roof of the castle. The hero's prohibition from something or a place is because he is not yet elevated enough to be able to confront it. Here, he is forbidden from the roof, which symbolizes elevation and transcendence, while Malek-Ahmad, Shirzad's lower dimension, has not yet reached transcendence and is more likely to fall victim to the demon of the soul in a high place. However, the bridegroom convinces the bride to go to the roof. Puladzereh appears, throws Malek-Ahmad down, and kidnaps the bride. The demon throws Malek-Ahmad from a high place that he is not yet ready for, dragging him from the peak to the abyss. He is not yet spiritually elevated enough to be in the position of becoming one with the goddess. So the demon, like an angry god, takes Qamarnaz from him. This tragedy occurs when the higher dimension, Shirzad, leaves his lower dimension, Malek-Ahmad, alone and he succumbs to his incompleteness. Thus, Shirzad enters the fight with the fifth demon and transforms Qamarnaz, who has been turned into stone by the demon with a stick, back into a human (for a discussion of petrification, see Farzi et al., 2013: 142). Stone symbolizes inactivity and inflexibility and change. A being that turns to stone has no choice of its own, and its life and movement are taken away from it. Using a trick he learns from Khirrozaneh, he obtains the demon's glass of life (glass symbolizes fragility and weakness) which is on the horn of a stag, takes command of the demon, and rides on its back to return Qam-



arnaz to her brothers and Malek-Ahmad. According to Campbell, "Sometimes the hero must deceive the gods who have appeared as demons in order to calm or kill them and save the world" (Campbell, 2004: 189).

Even after rescuing Qamarnaz, Shirzad continues to face other difficult tests. When he travels with his brother and his wife to his fiancée's city, he finds the city under the spell of a small demon. The seventh demon of the story is small, while previously the demons were mountain-bodied and immense, as if the hero has been able to fight the evils within himself and reach elevation, so the demon of his soul has become small. This demon turns anyone it looks at into stone (for further study, see Farzi et al., 2013: 130-140). The hero frees the people of that city from the clutches of the demon with the help of three arrows he gets from Khirrozaneh, one of which he shoots into the demon's forehead (symbolizing the center of thought and reflection). Now Shirzad faces another test: the petrified people who must once again be turned into humans. The hero learns the cure for petrification before killing the demon; he cuts the demon in half, throws the fat of his body into the fire, and pours it over the petrified people who have been petrified for fifty or seventy years, and thus transformation takes place. Illness and cure seem to go hand in hand. One must become one with the pain, feel it, become aware of it in order to be cured. For it seems that those freed from petrification have somehow incorporated part of the demon's essence into their own being. Thus, the cycle of evil and wickedness never stops in the world and always flows and circulates like the fat of the demon's existence in the world. As if in the transformation of these petrified people, Shirzad has no choice but to accept the sequence of evil, but on the other hand, the fire melts the fat of the demon's existence and some of the evil is destroyed because fire is a purifier, a guide, and a life-giver.

Encountering the Goddess

The Goddess (Mother Earth) is the embodiment of all beauty, goodness, and desires. She is the mother, sister, lover, and bride. She is the manifestation of the promising perfection and brings with her joy. She is the peace and assurance of the soul that at the end of exile in a world of inadequacies, it will once again recognize the gift that the hero once created, and that gift is a good, comforting, nourishing, beautiful, and young mother. Just as we knew and tasted her in the distant past. Like one who has slept in timeless time, she dwells peacefully at the end of the timeless sea (ibid: 117). "It seems that the hero must reclaim his childhood from her. This stage is the process of setting aside, transcending, or transforming the lingering images from our childhood and past" (ibid: 108). "The goddess is a symbol of the kind and helpful power of life. The promise that the peace we experienced in the womb at the beginning is not lost but is supportive and will be in the future as well" (ibid: 77). Shirzad had embarked on this journey to accompany him in finding his brother's lover and to protect her. However, because he was sincere and pure and took care to protect his brother and overlook his flaws, meaning he was at peace with his underdeveloped dimension, and he showed courage in fighting the demons of his soul, the spiritual treasure (the Goddess) and love first appeared to him, but he postpones marrying the girl until after the end of the heroic



journey because the decision to marry her does not belong to this stage and the hero has not yet reached the stage of completion of initiation, has not fully crossed the path of tests, but has met the Goddess, so he postpones the sacred marriage to her to a more transcendent stage. According to Campbell, "The goddess or mother is not necessarily kind; she can be a fierce and strong mother who has instilled aggressive self-destructive tendencies in her child's psyche" (ibid:117). "The mother can have both fearsome and kind aspects" (ibid:122); Shirzad encounters a gigantic creature that covers its face with a turban before entering Mount Qaf and after receiving a ring from Khirrozaneh (the invisible helper). Shirzad takes refuge in Khirrozaneh in the fight with him. Then, by bringing up his name, the hero is lifted into the air and slammed hard to the ground, the turban falls off his head, and Shirzad realizes that he is a woman and none other than Qamarnaz. Shirzad, who has been accompanied by the weaker dimension of his own existence, his brother, meets two goddesses throughout the story; he marries one and the other - Qamarnaz - to his brother. Qamarnaz's divine aspect is stronger, and perhaps Malek-Ahmad, who is the weaker dimension, needs a stronger goddess. Qamarnaz, who has sworn to marry the hero who defeats her, tells Shirzad this, but Shirzad is not willing to disrupt the harmony of the cosmic order and is faithful to his fiancée. He tells her that her brother is in love with her and has come after her. So Qamarnaz and her brothers agree and Qamarnaz and Malek-Ahmad are married. Shirzad meets his goddess-princess twice: once when he has not yet reached the stage of transcendence, Qamarnaz - the goddess - has not saved his lower dimension - Malek-Ahmad - and has not united the two, and again when his lower dimension has also reached transcendence and they have returned to her city to see the princess. Now, after killing the demon who turned the people to stone, his union with the goddess takes place because the hero has now grown and reached transcendence, and according to Campbell, "Meeting the goddess means meeting love, and this gift is nothing but enjoying life as a small example of the concept of eternity (ibid: 126).

Woman as Temptress

Qamarnaz as the Embodiment of the Oedipus Complex. Qamarnaz is both the goddess of this story and the "experience of the Oedipus complex" (cf. ibid: 128). When her turban falls off her face in battle, Shirzad is deeply ashamed. Shirzad's guilt and shame are not just because of fighting a weaker force and being unable to defeat her. In fact, he has clashed with his mother, whom he was in love with based on the Oedipus complex, and fighting with his mother is shameful. "These symbols represent the repressed desires of the mind and body" (ibid: 120). "Every dilemma is a sign of a lack of awareness, and regret is an awareness that comes too late" (ibid: 128).

Reconciliation and Harmony with the Father

The father, as the earthly father, is the same as God. According to Campbell, "Both mercy and wrath are of God, and you must be at one with him" (ibid: 137). "Ultimately, the hero is reconciled with the father through the aid of the Goddess, and realizes that the two are one and reflections of each other" (the realization of the unity of existence) (ibid: 152). The princess's father is another aspect of Shirzad's divine spiritual guide



who leads him. It is as if the earthly father is and Shirzad has reached harmony and reconciliation with him through the Goddess-Princess; the first time his reconciliation and harmony with him is not complete because his heroic journey is not finished, and he promises to return. When he returns again and frees the city from the sorcerer's stone curse, he fully reconciles and harmonizes with the king as the earthly father. The hero, by reviving the people who had been turned to stone by the demons of his own ego, inactive and stagnant, has set their divine spirit back into flow and movement, as if reconciling with his true father. He does this with the aid of the love of the Goddess. At the end of the story, Shirzad also reconciles and makes peace with his foster father upon returning to his city and accepting the inheritance of kingship, and on the seventh day of the celebration when he meets his biological father after many years - who is not only accepted by the king but also becomes a minister and lives in the palace with his mother - it seems the peak of reconciliation with both fathers (the king who is the symbol of his divine father, and the biological father who is the symbol of his physical and worldly father) is achieved. Similarly, Malek-Ahmad also, after going through the heroic stages, has returned to the city with the Goddess-Ghamarnaz and reconciled and harmonized with his father.

Become like God

The realization of the oneness and union with God (the unity of existence). The hero no longer fears anything nor desires anything (ibid: 155). It seems the peak of Shirzad's deification occurs when he is able to transform the people who had been turned to stone for fifty or seventy years back into humans. This godlike and salvific behavior had been performed by the hero on a smaller scale earlier as well; when he struck the demon's staff on Ghamarnaz's head, he transformed her back from stone to human. This oneness and union with God on a smaller scale is also evident earlier when he saves the princess from the demon, restoring her to her city when everyone had despaired of the girl being alive, and in Shirzad's protective behavior towards his younger brother. Also, when Shirzad returns to his city accompanied by the Princess, Malek-Ahmad, and Ghamarnaz, he seems to have become godlike, as the king has chosen him as his successor, and the king is the symbol of the divine spirit.

The Ultimate Blessing Immortality and eternity

the belief in the absolute immortality of oneself and everything; the presence of this blessing manifests symbolically in the attainment of the elixir of life, abundance of food, wine, milk, and the holding of celebrations, for abundance is a sign of divine mercy (ibid). When Shirzad returns the Princess to her family, the king holds a celebration and feasts everyone, which represents the ultimate blessing. When Malek-Ahmad also marries Ghamarnaz, the Goddess's brothers hold a seven-night and seven-day celebration, which is the manifestation of the abundance of bounty and the ultimate blessing. Again, when Shirzad rescues Ghamarnaz-his brother's wife-from Puladzereh, and the two arrive at the castle on the demon's back, he hands over the bride to the groom, then breaks the demon's vial of life, and they all celebrate and feast over the demon's carcass, which is described as a mountain (note that Bisotun is located in Kermanshah).When Shirzad



goes to the city of his fiancée, accompanied by his brother and Ghamarnaz, and frees the people of that city, who had mostly been turned to stone by the demon's curse, and kills the demon, he brings joy, music according to ancient Iranian traditions, and abundance and blessing to that city. With their revival, the city is immersed in light and joy; this is the second time Shirzad has transformed the sorrow of a city into joy and become their savior (the first time was when he rescued the king's daughter and returned her). After returning to his own city (accompanied by the Princess, his brother, and Ghamarnaz), Shirzad is appointed by the king as the heir to his throne, and this represents the ultimate blessing and eternity that has finally become his share. The king also holds a seven-day celebration for him, and on the seventh day, Shirzad's real father, who had been searching for him for years, arrives in the city, is forgiven by the king, and is made a minister, allowed to live in the palace with Shirzad's mother, and the story ends in a happy resolution, representing the ultimate blessing; this extended family, as is the custom in folktales, lives for many years in happiness and joy together.

The Third Stage; Return to Society

This stage is vital for the continuation of the cycle of spiritual energy in the world, but from the hero's own perspective, it may be the most difficult stage, as introducing the path of awakening to people who are immersed in the world and its worldly problems is very complex and challenging. For it is possible that the hero may return and face the indifference and inattention of the people, and think that he has failed in his mission (ibid: 41). The two brothers easily return to their city with their wives.

Refusal of Return or Denial of the World

Perhaps after realizing the world of spirituality, the hero may no longer show any interest or desire to continue worldly life, and therefore may not feel the need to interact with people upon returning, or even see no need to return at all (ibid: 43). The story lacks the stage of the hero's refusal to return.

Magical Escape

The story lacks the stage of the magical escape, as Shirzad and his companions return to their origin.

Receiving External Help to Return

the Hero When the hero does not want to or cannot enter the stage of return, rescuing forces from the unseen or elsewhere compel him to enter this stage (ibid: 48). The story lacks this stage.

Crossing the Threshold of Return or Returning to the Ordinary World

Sometimes the hero can cross the threshold of return and, while having attained higher levels of spirituality and understanding of the metaphysical world, can easily return to ordinary life and the mundane world. Shirzad too, upon his return, does not experience any conflict or confusion, and like many other folk mythological tales, can easily balance his elevated state and understanding of the truths of the world, his union with the essence of existence, and a completely ordinary life.

The Master of Two Worlds

This is when the hero can create a synthesis and union between the two worlds of the manifestations of time and the world of the causal depths. He can traverse both, be able to go back and forth between one world and the other, but without violating the specific rules of either (ibid: 237). Shirzad, through the sacred bond he establishes with the Goddess-Princess, and the bond he finds with the younger Ghamarnaz, seems to have become the master of two worlds and attained transcendence after emerging victorious from the difficult stages of the heroic journey. On the other hand, when Shirzad returns to his own city, he is appointed by the king as the heir to the throne, as if he has become the master of two worlds. He was essentially a king from the beginning, and this fact just needed to be actualized.

The art of being the master of two worlds is the ability to traverse and move between the two realms without one becoming contaminated by the other. Yet, at the same time, being able to view one through the lens of the other. This art sometimes manifests in the symbol of the hero having two faces or two different forms (ibid.). From the moment Shirzad's biological parents re-enter the story, they are not only accepted, but his father also becomes a minister, as if Shirzad has attained elevation in both aspects of himself. Shirzad, who himself has a higher and a lower aspect, and whose lower aspect, Malek-Ahmad, has also united with a Goddess and traversed the path of transcendence, now has two fathers: the king, who is his true father and nurturer, who facilitated his elevation in his heroic journey, representing his divine and higher aspect; and his biological father, who represents his material and worldly aspect. Now he has made peace and union with both worlds, with both aspects of himself that belong to different realms, as if he has become the master of two worlds.

Attaining Freedom in Life or the Nature and Function of the Ultimate Blessing

The final part of the heroic journey is the true liberation from the self. Non-glorification of the self, meaning the illusion that one is an exceptional being. Wealth and power are the lower aspect of the ultimate blessing, but the higher aspect of it is freedom and liberation from the self and attainment of the divine grace. Sometimes the hero is imbued with a sense of exceptionalism and superiority, creating a false image of himself and becoming self-righteous, but the goal of the heroic journey is to reconcile individual self-awareness with the cosmic will, and thereby eliminate the need to deny life. So the realization of the eternity of the world and its inhabitants leads to the rebirth of the self (ibid: 245). Shirzad does not seem to have been afflicted by such an illusory sense, and since folk tales usually have a happy ending, he is depicted living in abundance and joy alongside his loved ones, and this is the function and efficacy of the ultimate blessing.

Conclusion

The Kurdish folktale of Shirzad Shirdel largely corresponds with the stages of the heroic journey outlined by Campbell. However, since Shirzad's story has a foster brother named Malek-Ahmad, who is essentially the lower aspect of his being and has attained less transcendence compared to Shirzad, but must traverse the adventurous heroic jour-



ney alongside the higher aspect, the order of the heroic stages is disrupted. This is because the lower aspect is consistently a few stages behind Shirzad, and if Shirzad attains a higher stage, he must inevitably delay his own progress to the next stage in order to pull his brother up from the stage he is stuck in. For example, Shirzad meets the Princess as the Goddess, but postpones the continuation of this line of his own transcendence until he finds Ghamarnaz, the Goddess of Malek-Ahmad, rescues her from the demon, and restores her to Malek-Ahmad. At times, Malek-Ahmad, with the immaturity inherent in his lower aspect, acts in a way that delays or even regresses the progressive movement of the heroic journey. For instance, after marrying Ghamarnaz, although he is prohibited by the father of the bride (as a symbol of wisdom and guidance) from going up to the roof (as a symbol of transcendence) because he has not yet attained the spiritual elevation to be allowed in that elevated position, he disregards this symbolic and wise prohibition, and brings the demon Puladzereh into the story, who casts Malek-Ahmad down from the roof. It seems a cosmic force hurls him back to a position that is commensurate with his own, as he is not yet ready to be present in the higher realms. The demon also abducts Ghamarnaz, and Shirzad is inevitably burdened with many troubles to rescue his brother's wife. Consequently, this heroic journey, due to the dual aspects of the lower and higher hero, has its own unique complexities, such as encounters with two Goddesses, multiple stages of traversing difficult trials, two stages of passing through the belly of the whale, multiple ultimate blessings, multiple deifications, and multiple instances of becoming the master of two worlds. The story of Shirzad lacks the stages of the hero's refusal to return and the magical escape. Consequently, the stage of receiving external help to return the hero is also absent, and society is receptive to Shirzad. He, too, as a typical folk character, can easily harmonize between his state of transcendence and ordinary life. Finally, although this folktale is Kurdish and contains some elements specific to that region, such as the mention of the "Bisotun" mountain or the famous Sufi elder "Kheiruzneh" of that area, in its overall structure it is universal and, apart from the few mentioned instances, corresponds with Campbell's theory.

Conflict of Interest: *The authors declare that they agreed to participate in the present paper and there are no competing interests.*

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