



## Analysis of the Story "The Patient Stone" Based on Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey Theory

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**Abstract:** The main issue of the present study is the examination of the story "The Patient Stone" based on Joseph Campbell's (1904-1987) Hero's Journey theory. The value and significance of this research lie in the cultural and mythological importance of folk tales as well as the theoretical worth of Campbell's theory. This interdisciplinary study is conducted using a descriptive-analytical method. Its main question is: How do the stages of the story "The Patient Stone" correspond to Campbell's Hero's Journey? The hypothesis is that, given the mythical nature of this story, although not all stages of the Hero's Journey may be applicable, it certainly includes many of them. The outcome of the research is that in the story "The Patient Stone," the hero undergoes a perilous journey without receiving help from an external individual. The twelve stages of Campbell's Hero's Journey, including "The Call to Adventure," "Crossing the Threshold," "Difficult Trials," "Crisis," "Resurrection," and "Return to the Ordinary World," are present in this story; however, it lacks the stages of the hero's refusal of the return, the magical flight stage, and the arrival of external help to bring the hero back, and he simply returns to the community.

**Keywords:** *Joseph Campbell, Myth, Hero's Journey, Folk Tales, The Patient Stone Story.*

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## **Introduction**

The true myth of the hero is the story of his gradual perfection. It is the discovery of unconscious forces and the connection of these forces with the conscious self. "In myth and legend, humans confront their inner forces. Children see themselves as brave and capable heroes in stories, and adults know that difficult passes to perfection lie ahead" (Rokni, 2014: 40). Heroic myths must serve as guides and models in the human transition through all the thresholds that life inevitably places before them. "The primary function of myths and rituals has been to create symbols by which the human spirit can advance and overcome the constant illusions that seek to keep it in the same state" (Campbell, 2005: 22). Myths are masks of the divine through which humans everywhere have tried to connect themselves with the wonders of existence. They illuminate the spiritual dimension of human life (cf. Campbell, 2019: 16). "Time and place are lost in mythical phenomena; the language of myths is the language of symbols" (Kazazi, 1993: 127). Therefore, there is a need to decode myths. Mythical symbolism examines the signs present in myths and their relation to deeper concepts and beliefs. In mythical symbolism, efforts are made to reveal the hidden meanings behind these symbols across different cultures and societies and to examine their connection with human life and worldview. In fact, the study of folk tales is a fundamental component of folklore and anthropology. Every word acts as a symbol or signifier of something else and carries a meaning deeper and broader than its appearance. "A symbol is something, generally a somewhat tangible object, that replaces another thing and thus signifies a meaning. A symbol is also a representation or manifestation that reminds one of a thought, image, or emotional state by virtue of resemblance or any relation, whether obvious and evident or conventional" (Setari, 2002: 13).

The mythical tales of every nation are rooted in the culture of that nation. Collecting, studying, and analyzing these stories confronts us with a treasury of mythical symbols and collective and ethnic archetypes which ultimately serve as a useful, reliable, and efficient tool for a deeper understanding of the cultural traits of Iranian peoples, their cultural interactions with other peoples, identifying similarities and differences among them, and examining the evolution of Iranian culture. The most important question of this study is: How and to what extent does the story "The Patient Stone" correspond to the stages of the Hero's Journey theory by Campbell? The hypothesis is that most stages of the Hero's Journey seem to be found and analyzed in this story.

The present study is conducted based on field studies using an analytical-descriptive method and relies on library sources for explanation, comparison, and analysis.

## **Research Background**

Many studies have been conducted on mythology and Campbell's theory, and numerous Persian literary texts have been analyzed based on this theory; however, no research has been done regarding the correspondence of the story "The Patient Stone" with Campbell's theory, indicating a research gap in this field. Some of the most important theoretical backgrounds are as follows: Marjan Alizadeh Zehtab (2023 and 2024) in the articles "Analysis of the Mythical Story of Malek Mohammad, Malek Ahmad, and Malek Jamshid Based on Joseph Campbell's Theory" and "Analysis of the Kurdish Story Shirzad Shirdel Based on Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey Theory" analyzed two folk tales according to Campbell's pattern; however, it is clear that the story "The Patient Stone" was not the subject of the author's study. Sakineh Ahmadian and Mehdi Shabani (2016) in the article "One Story in Three Languages/Comparing the Plant 'Kharoub' in the Story of Solomon from Rumi's Masnavi with 'Baobab' in The Little Prince and

'Forty Needles' in the Story of the Patient Stone" have addressed the "Forty Needles" in the story "The Patient Stone."

The individuality pattern of the female hero was examined by Mehdi Kheirandish, Masoumeh Bazrafshan, and Marzieh Sadeghzadeh (2017) in the article "The Individuality of the Female Hero in the Legend of The Patient Stone with Reference to Mordecai's Individuality Pattern." Additionally, Seyed Ahmad Vakilian (2003) included the story "The Patient Stone" in the book "The Culture of Iranian Folk Tales."

### ***Theoretical Foundations***

#### ***Folk Tales***

The term tale in its literal sense means "to follow" or "to trace," but in literary terminology, various definitions have been proposed for this type of narrative. "A tale is an imaginative narrative in prose or verse in which the emphasis is placed primarily on extraordinary and unusual events" (Alout, 1989, p. 50). A tale typically possesses a simple storyline that the reader either reads or listens to, ultimately arriving at a particular conclusion. "Folk tales, which often appear in a mythical form, reflect the deepest layers of the culture and identity of every people or nation, and approaching them requires an interdisciplinary perspective; for they are connected to mythology, philosophy, literature, psychology, religious studies, archaeology, mysticism, and art" (Aliakbarzadeh Zehtab, 2024, p. 92). "By 'myth,' in a broad and somewhat figurative sense, we mean the beliefs and reactions of human beings prior to the era of knowledge, writing, and history—that is, the period of primitive sciences, early religion, and imaginary explanations" (Shamisa, 2022, p. 11). tale and myth are also intrinsically interconnected and cannot be regarded as separate. "The main feature of the tale is its emphasis on extraordinary events, and its most important purpose is suggestion, attraction, entertainment, and also the promotion and dissemination of human principles and social, cultural, regional, and traditional values. Values such as brotherhood and equality, justice and courage, generosity and love are vividly manifested in tales" (Anousheh, 2002, p. 1121).

#### ***Mythology***

Myths are not merely expressions of human reflections on the fundamental meaning of life; rather, they serve as guiding principles according to which people live, and they can provide a logical justification for society. Although mythology has been interpreted and defined in various ways, it can be summarized in one essential definition: "A myth is a symbolic narrative or manifestation concerning deities, angels, supernatural beings, and, in general, cosmology, which a people employ to interpret their existence" (Salari, 2023, p. 12). Mythical stories are not simply tales meant to depict triumph, defeat, bloodshed, or peace. If one only considers their superficial layer, they appear to be nothing more than the realization of the impossible in the imaginative mind of a creative people. However, upon closer examination, one realizes that profound concepts lie at the heart of every myth. The myths of a nation, now long buried under the earth, in fact, reveal their way of perceiving life. One can grasp the worldview of a people only by studying these beliefs. "Joseph Campbell, the American mythologist, anthropologist, and writer, maintains that although myths exhibit differences due to environmental and cultural conditions—what he calls 'local masks'—they follow a common pattern and share fundamental archetypes" (Zekriazadeh, 2024, p. 34).

"Myths of humankind manifest themselves in various ways in every time and place across this inhabited world" (Campbell, 2005, p. 15). "Myth is the living spirit of everything that has

emerged from human intellectual and physical activity” (ibid., p. 15). It can thus be argued that myth is reasoning in the form of a justification for all human actions. “In other words, myth is a true history that took place at the dawn of time and has provided a model for human behavior. By imitating the paradigmatic deeds of a god or mythical hero, or even merely by retelling their adventures, the individual in a traditional society withdraws from ordinary time and, in a magical way, enters the Great Time, the Sacred Time” (Eliade, 2002, p. 24).

### ***Campbell and the Theory of the Hero's Journey***

By examining the myths of various cultures around the world, Campbell has explained the process of the formation of the heroic archetype. Campbell's theory, in addition to being mythological, has a mystical and spiritual perspective and is based on Jung's theory of the unconscious (cf. Campbell, 1990: 121). In explaining the unconscious, it should be noted that Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) first proposed the theory of the conscious and individual unconscious mind, and Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), the Swiss psychologist, in completing Freud's theories, introduced the concept of the collective unconscious (Jung, 2001: 79). Therefore, Campbell's theory is entirely interdisciplinary, linking mythology, religion, mysticism, psychology, self-awareness, anthropology, archaeology, and folklore. According to Campbell's theory, the hero's journey takes place in three stages: separation, initiation, and return. “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; there he encounters fabulous forces and wins a decisive victory. When he comes back from this mysterious adventure, he has the power to bestow boons upon his fellow men” (Campbell, 2005: 40). Campbell, in his well-known work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, categorizes the stages of the hero's journey into three stages: “separation,” “initiation,” and “return,” and presents specific sub-stages for each. Initiation marks the boundary of the end of the natural human state and the novice's entry into culture; however, from the perspective of ancient and traditional societies, culture is not a human achievement but has a supernatural origin (Eliade, 2015: 11). Overall, according to Campbell, the first stage, namely departure or separation, is divided into five steps: 1- The Call to Adventure 2- Refusal of the Call 3- Supernatural Aid 4- Crossing the First Threshold 5- Belly of the Whale or Passing through the Realm of Night. The second stage, initiation, in which the hero sets foot on the path of difficult trials and moves toward transcendence, is divided into six steps: 1- The Road of Trials 2- Meeting with the Goddess 3- Woman as Temptress 4- Atonement with the Father 5- Apotheosis 6- The Ultimate Boon. The third stage, return, includes six parts: 1- Refusal of the Return or Denial of the World 2- The Magic Flight 3- Rescue from Without 4- Crossing the Return Threshold 5- Master of Two Worlds 6- Freedom to Live or Performance of the Ultimate Boon (cf. Campbell, 2005: 40–46).

### ***Discussion and Analysis***

#### ***Summary of the Story “The Patient Stone”***

A girl named Fatemeh, each time she went to school, heard a voice saying: “Fatemeh's fate is dead.” Her family, who could not understand the reason for hearing this voice, out of fear, left the city and on the way reached a garden. When Fatemeh entered the garden, the entrance gate disappeared, and a wall came between her and her parents. Fatemeh wandered in the garden full of blessings and reached a mansion where, in its seventh room, she saw an enchanted young man whose body was covered with forty needles. There was a note next to the young man stating that if someone prayed beside him for forty days with the least amount of food and water and pulled out one needle from his body each day, he would awaken. Fatemeh did this for thirty-nine days, but on the fortieth day, due to exhaustion, she fell asleep. Meanwhile, a gypsy girl, whom

Fatemeh had brought to the garden as a companion out of loneliness, imitated her prayer, pulled out the last needle, and when the young man awoke, she presented herself in Fatemeh's place. The young man, who was a prince, married the gypsy girl and placed Fatemeh as a servant in the kitchen. When the prince decided to go on a journey, he asked his wife and Fatemeh, the servant, what they wanted as a souvenir. The gypsy girl asked him for clothes, and when the prince asked Fatemeh what she wanted, she said: "The Patient Stone." The prince searched for the Patient Stone for a long time until he found it only with a shopkeeper. The shopkeeper told him that this stone is desired only by one who has a heart full of sorrow. When the prince brought the Patient Stone to Fatemeh, she told the whole story to the stone at night and in the end said: "Patient Stone! Patient Stone! / You endure, I endure / Either you break or I break!" At that very moment, the prince, who had been listening and had heard the entire story, entered, embraced Fatemeh, and told the stone: "You break." The stone broke, and Fatemeh fainted. In the morning, the prince, having realized the truth, punished the gypsy girl and married Fatemeh.

### ***Stages of the Hero's Journey in the Story "The Patient Stone"***

#### ***First Stage: Departure or Separation***

##### ***The Ordinary World***

At the beginning of the story of "The Patient Stone," everything is ordinary. The hero is a girl named Fatemeh who lives her usual life in an ordinary family. She goes to school every day, studies under Molabaji, and returns home. Of course, there are various versions of this story. "Seyed Ahmad Vakilian, in his analysis of this tale, quotes from Aarne/Thompson that this tale has eleven Greek versions, one Albanian version, one Egyptian version, and thirty-eight Turkish versions" (Darvishian, 2001, Vol. 7: 233). "In the various versions of The Patient Stone, there are several common points: the unusual way the girl or the story's hero reaches the boy, the boy being pierced with needles, pins, or nails, reviving the boy by removing the needles, pins, or nails from his body, the gypsy girl (maid) taking the hero's place, the hero's silence, and finally her confiding in the stone, her words being overheard by the boy, the maid being punished, and the girl and boy marrying" (Kheirandish et al., 2017: 1).

##### ***The Call to Adventure***

In this story, the "call to adventure" is triggered by the hero's hearing of a mysterious voice. The girl repeatedly and unexpectedly hears a voice saying "Fatemeh's fate is dead," and each time she is astonished by it. This voice calls her to movement and change. This voice signifies an invitation to a mysterious destiny. According to Campbell, the hero may be a person endowed with special gifts whom society has either honored or scorned and rejected (Campbell, 2005: 67).

##### ***Refusal of the Call***

The hero keeps hearing the voice as a secret in her heart for a long time but finally shares it with her family. They, too, find no rational explanation for this voice. "The refusal of the call is the situation in which the individual stands behind the wall of the boredom of daily life and has no power to change course" (Campbell, 2005: 67). In fact, the hero is not yet able to be reborn but is ultimately compelled to enter the path. "Therefore, the hero, whether man or woman, is the one who is able to overcome and transcend personal or local limitations and to arrive at generally beneficial and typically human forms" (ibid.: 30). As a result, Fatemeh's family decides to sell all their belongings and set out on a journey. This decision marks the hero's point of separation from her previous safe and familiar world.

### ***Meeting with the Mentor***

In the story of “The Patient Stone,” there is no mentor in the traditional sense, but when the hero sees the prince lying asleep on the bed for the first time, she notices a paper beside him containing the instructions for saving the prince. This text written on paper can serve as a written guide that seems to have been placed at the hero’s disposal by the universe.

### ***Crossing the Threshold***

Fatemeh’s entrance into the magical garden and the closing of its entrance gate behind her symbolize the crossing from the ordinary world into the extraordinary. In the mythology of the hero’s journey, “crossing the threshold” is the moment when the hero actually enters the unknown world; a world whose laws are different from the ordinary one, and from which there is no return to the previous state. In the story of The Patient Stone, this moment occurs when Fatemeh and her family sell all their possessions and embark on the journey. With this decision, they leave behind their safe and familiar world and step into a dangerous and unknown path, the outcome of which is uncertain. This crossing is not only physical (leaving home and birth-place) but also internal: Fatemeh enters a realm where she must confront her pains, accept her fears, and seek answers. “Beyond them, darkness and danger await: just like the danger that, without parental care, awaits children, and without the support of the tribe, awaits those who have stepped beyond the defined boundary” (ibid.: 85). The crossing of the threshold in this story is that very moment when Fatemeh, together with her family, after hearing the voice, abandons her past life and possessions and embarks on the unknown journey; a journey that leads her toward liberation and inner transformation. “At every stage of the journey, the hero is confronted with tests that are in fact the resolution of psychological knots” (Rokni, 2014: 40). The gate of entrance and exit symbolizes the beginning or the end of a stage, but in this story, this gate disappears, symbolizing that the hero has no way back and no escape; she is compelled to embark on her heroic journey and transcend the ordinary world.

### ***The Road of Trials***

In the story of “The Patient Stone,” the road of trials is the challenging and arduous part through which the hero, Fatemeh, must pass in order to reach her goal. “The road of trials is the entry into tests that hold the danger of death and facing the dreadful aspect of the gods” (Campbell, 2005: 113). It is the process of setting aside, transcending, or transforming the images left from our childhood or past that dominate our present state, the very ones that humans also see in nightmares (ibid.: 43), and eventually, the individual will find their own way of salvation (ibid.: 108). In this story, the road of trials includes the following:

### ***The Forty Needles***

The reflection and influence of mythology in various aspects of post-mythical human life is clear and confirmed. One of these manifestations can be traced in the diverse functions and mysteriousness of numbers in mythological and mystical texts. The number four and its well-known multiple, forty, have had and still hold a special place in human thought. These numbers also symbolize the mystical perfect man. The sanctity of these numbers in myths, mysticism, religion, science, philosophy, and folk beliefs attests to this claim. Their recurrence in mythology, the mystical forty-day retreat, the age of forty as the age of maturity, the shrines of the Forty Saints, women sewing forty-patch quilts, books of Forty Traditions, religious practices of forty nights or forty days among people, the fortieth day after death, the four rivers of paradise, and others are examples of this (cf. Goudarzi et al., 2018: 82). In other words, forty represents a mul-

tiplicity derived from unity; it symbolizes the multiplicity of created beings, all of which have been brought forth from the One God. This number also holds a special place in folklore and religion and represents perfection and maturity; the Prophet of Islam was appointed to prophethood at the age of forty, and in general, forty years of age in folk culture signifies individual maturity (cf. Aliakbarzadeh Zehtab, 2023: 30). In the story of "The Patient Stone," the needles can be seen as symbols of the heavy burden, inner pains, and troubles in which the enchanted young man is trapped. Each needle represents a hidden pain or wound that must be removed one by one with patience and care over forty days for the young man to regain peace and health. On the other hand, the needles may be seen as symbols of the sufferings and hardships that a person must endure in order to attain healing and liberation. Furthermore, this gradual, daily process of removing the needles may symbolize persistence, patience, and continuous effort to resolve problems. The needle also recalls the "Needle of Jesus" as a symbol of the slightest worldly attachment, a reference frequently made in Persian literature by many poets, including Khaqani Shirvani (1120–1190) in his Christian-themed poem (cf. Khaqani Shirvani, 2000: 4), because it is said that the needle prevented Jesus from ascending to the seventh heaven (cf. Lahijani, 1971: 252–253). The story goes that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ascended to the seventh heaven in his *mi'raj*, but Jesus, whose mother was also a seamstress, without knowing it, had a needle in his collar and thus could ascend only to the fourth heaven (cf. Shamisa, 1987: under "Needle") because the needle symbolized a slight worldly attachment, and Jesus, as it were, could not fully rid himself of worldly ties; thus, unlike the Prophet of Islam, he could not ascend to the seventh heaven, the highest rank.

### ***Chelleh-Neshini (Forty-Day Retreat)***

The number forty in *chelleh-neshini* is a symbolic and mythological number. Forty represents a multiplicity derived from unity, that is, it symbolizes the diversity and plurality of creatures that have all been brought forth from the One God. This number also holds a special place in folklore and religion and signifies perfection and maturity; the Prophet of Islam attained prophethood at the age of forty, and in popular culture, the age of forty generally denotes individual maturity. This number is also reflected in proverbs; for example, "as much as forty camel-loads," meaning an exceedingly large quantity and an indication of abundance. Moreover, the holding of fortieth-day memorials for the deceased is another manifestation of the importance of this number in folk culture. On the other hand, the number forty holds a special position in mysticism; *chelleh-neshini* means a forty-day retreat of abstinence from a particular act (such as speaking, eating, backbiting, etc.). This number also appears in various religious manifestations, such as *Arba'een*, and has been repeatedly used symbolically in literature (cf. Nemati & Bayati, 2015: 124–132). In explaining the concept and purpose of *chelleh-neshini*, it can be said that "this term refers to practices performed with the intention of asceticism, worship, renouncing worldly pleasures, and reducing food and sleep under specific conditions and rules. These practices, because they must be carried out over forty days, are called *chelleh-neshini*" (cf. Sajadi, 1991: under the term). The custom of seclusion and severe ascetic exercises has existed among various religions and nations, including Hindus, Iranians, Christians, Greeks, and others. For example, different Indian religions and beliefs shared this principle that the foundation of happiness, salvation, escape from the world, and renunciation of all physical pleasures and desires lies in self-mortification and the continuation of ascetic discipline. Based on this principle, the soul must be accustomed to various rigorous exercises and severe mortifications so that, in this way, its attachment to the world and physical pleasures is severed (cf. Aghaei et al.: 37). *Chelleh-neshini* in this story is one of the key semantic elements that embodies multi-

ple layers of meaning and symbolism. Fatemeh voluntarily and consciously steps onto the path of chelleh-neshini; a difficult and dangerous path that endangers both her body and soul. This decision demonstrates the peak of her patience, sincerity, and loyalty. In Iranian and mystical traditions, chelleh-neshini has always been a symbol of self-purification and passionate asceticism in pursuit of a higher goal. Through this forty-day retreat, Fatemeh devotes herself to saving another's life and, in fact, sacrifices herself so that another may live. The story is titled "The Patient Stone" precisely because the heroine, while passing through the stages of perfection and liberating the prince or her own soul, remains deeply secretive and confides her secret only to her Patient Stone (cf. Ahmadian et al., 2016: 103). In the face of the enchantment, which symbolizes darkness, entrapment, and evil, chelleh-neshini appears as the path to salvation; as if the only way to redemption is through the patient endurance of hardships and adherence to a spiritual covenant. This confrontation between good and evil recalls many mystical narratives in which liberation from darkness and attainment of light is possible only through enduring suffering and practicing ascetic discipline. Yet the bitter point of the story is where the result of all this suffering and sacrifice is claimed by another. Fatemeh struggles sincerely, but it is the gypsy girl who receives the reward. This part of the story reflects the bitter reality of the world: where patience and effort do not always lead to reward, and injustice can rob the rightful one of their due. This chelleh-neshini, though outwardly fruitless, inwardly fills Fatemeh's heart with pain and suffering, bringing her to the verge of emotional explosion. It is precisely at this point that the story reaches its climax with the Patient Stone; where Fatemeh, after silently and selflessly enduring her suffering, finally speaks and cries out for justice. Ultimately, Fatemeh's chelleh-neshini must be understood in connection with the status of women in folklore. Women who undergo forty-day retreats or devote themselves to prayer are often symbols of sacrifice, devotion, and purity. In this narrative, Fatemeh represents a woman who, with good intentions, without any expectation of reward and despite all dangers, commits herself to helping another. She is the symbol of the Iranian woman who endures suffering, swallow's bitterness, but at the right moment, raises her voice for the world to hear.

### ***Loneliness and Separation***

When the gate of the garden disappears behind the wall and Fatemeh is separated from her family, she is placed in complete solitude. This loneliness and separation from her loved ones is a difficult trial for her. "The crossing of the magical threshold is the stage of transition of man into another sphere, where he is reborn, and this belief has been symbolized in the form of the belly of the whale as the womb of the world" (Campbell, 2005: 96).

### ***Hunger and Thirst***

The heroine stays by the young man's side for forty days and nights, caring for him while she is hungry, thirsty, and alone. These hardships are a test of her patience and determination.

### ***Sleeplessness and Fatigue***

Continuous day-and-night care for the unconscious young man leaves Fatemeh extremely exhausted and drained, but she still does not abandon her task.

### ***The Test of Faith and Hope***

As the end of the forty days approaches and she continues with great difficulty due to severe exhaustion, her faith and hope in the miracle of the young man's awakening are tested.

### ***Resistance Against Despair***

Enduring hardships, tolerating physical and emotional suffering, and continuing on the path with-

out immediate results constitute a significant part of the arduous journey that the heroine must undertake.

These are the obstacles and challenges that Fatemeh must overcome so that the young man may finally awaken, and the story reaches its climax and transformation. This arduous road is an essential part of the heroine's growth and transformation.

### ***The Gypsy Girl***

The gypsy girl first enters the story to ease the loneliness of the main heroine; for a time, she is her companion, but once she discovers her secret, she steals the position that the heroine has devoted herself to with all her heart and takes her place. The gypsy girl in this story is akin to an evil demon: "Demons are monstrous figures in myths, folklore, and even nightmares. The demon seizes collective benefits for itself. It is a monster driven only by the greed of 'mine and mine alone,' causing countless devastations that, according to myths and fairy tales, encompass the entire world within its domain" (Campbell, 2005: 67). In fairy tales, the demon symbolizes the accumulated and hidden evils within the hero's own being. Ultimately, the hero reaches transcendence only when he defeats the inner demon that has manifested as an external figure, and such a battle exists in most fairy tales (cf. Aliakbarzadeh, 2023: 98). Thus, "everyone must recognize their inner demon and learn how to confront it. The recognition of the demon of the self is achieved through awareness; otherwise, heroic stories only deal with generalities and provide general maps" (Campbell, 2005: 128).

The gypsy girl in this story is also a manifestation of the heroine's inner self, as Fatemeh is deceived by her own nafs (base self) and allows her into the palace. Yet this demon gradually reveals its vile nature. In the end, however, the heroine triumphs over her own nafs, embodied in the gypsy girl, and this animalistic self—the demon or the gypsy girl—receives its due punishment once its evil nature is revealed. Her presence in "The Patient Stone" is the heroine's hardest trial, for the greatest test any human faces is the struggle with their own self. The gypsy girl's identity as a gypsy symbolizes the wandering and instability of the human animal soul, as gypsies themselves have no permanence or fixed abode.

### ***Approaching the Inner Cave***

The seventh room of the palace, where the enchanted prince sleeps, is the symbolic cave that the heroine must confront. The central event of the story takes place in the seventh room. The number seven is symbolic, mystical, enigmatic, and mythological (cf. Hosseini, 2011: 100-105). In Eastern cultures, especially in Iran, this number is significant; examples include the days of the week, the seven stages of Iranian-Islamic mysticism (the Seven Valleys of Love), and its frequent use in Persian proverbs and customs, such as: "Seven wash basins but no food," "washing something seven times," "seven nights of wedding celebrations," "the seventh-day memorial for the dead," and Rostam's mythical battle against the seven demons. Furthermore, Fatemeh must remain in this cave in solitude for forty nights and remove one needle each day from the prince's body. The symbolic meaning of the number forty was previously discussed in the sections on "Forty Needles" and "Chelleh (forty-day retreat)." However, the key point here is that in the seventh room, representing the highest spiritual stage, Fatemeh encounters her spiritual self, which has been trapped by the needles of worldly attachments. Through her forty-day retreat, she is ultimately able to unite with the prince and destroy her inner demon, the gypsy girl.

### ***The Ordeal or Crisis***

The thirty-ninth to the fortieth night marks the climax of the heroine's crisis. Loneliness, ex-

haustion, neglect, and the betrayal of the gypsy girl push Fatemeh's suffering to its peak.

### ***The Reward***

The reward initially seems to go to the gypsy girl, but in reality, the reward stage of the story is merely postponed.

### ***The Road Back***

When the prince prepares to travel, he asks Fatemeh what gift she would like him to bring back. Fatemeh requests the "Patient Stone." This point in the story marks the beginning of her return to the truth and the revelation of her identity.

### ***Resurrection***

When the heroine confides in the "Patient Stone," saying, "Patient Stone! Patient Stone! / You are patient, I am patient / Either you burst, or I will burst!" there is a possibility that her body might collapse and she may die. Yet, from the very beginning, she willingly accepts this risk and steps onto the path. Not everyone can endure the path of heroism and self-discovery, for it entails grave dangers that may even threaten one's life (cf. Hosseini, 2011: 84). However, in this story, when the heroine finally speaks her heart to the "Patient Stone," the prince overhears her words and learns the truth. This moment symbolizes the heroine's rebirth and her triumph over suffering.

### ***Return to the Ordinary World***

"After penetrating the source and receiving grace and blessing from its masculine, feminine, human, or animal manifestation, the hero's quest comes to an end. Now this adventurer must return with his boon, which has the power to transform life" (Campbell, 2005: 203). The prince chooses Fatemeh as his wife. The townspeople hold a celebration, and justice is restored. "If, at the moment of triumph, the hero has the blessing of the goddess or the god, he is clearly destined to return to the world with an elixir for the renewal of his society. In this case, all the powers of the supernatural stand ready to protect him" (ibid., 206). The heroine of "The Patient Stone" returns with love, honor, and identity.

### ***Conclusion***

The folktale of "The Patient Stone" is an outstanding example of Iranian cultural narratives that remarkably align with Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" model. This study, through the lens of comparative mythology, traces the transformation of Fatemeh—the story's heroine—from an ordinary state to her ultimate metamorphosis. The twelve stages of the hero's journey, including "The Call to Adventure," "Crossing the Threshold," "Tests," "The Ordeal," "Resurrection," and "Return to the Ordinary World," are clearly identifiable in the narrative. Initially, Fatemeh conceals her inner call, but upon revealing it to her family, she resolves to embark on a journey toward her destiny. She endures solitude and asceticism, undertakes a forty-day retreat, and suffers greatly to heal the prince. Midway through the story, the arrival of the gypsy girl—who embodies a demonic figure—disrupts her progress. The gypsy girl seemingly claims Fatemeh's reward and appears victorious; however, this stage only delays the true victory. When Fatemeh finally speaks out and confides in the Patient Stone, she achieves her ultimate triumph. Fatemeh, as the heroine of the story, in the cave-like seventh room of the palace (symbolizing the highest and seventh mystical stage), ultimately confronts herself. Just as the gypsy girl represents Fatemeh's animalistic self, the prince represents another dimension of her being—her divine and spiritual self (the serene soul), which has been bound by the forty needles (forty symbolizing multiplic-

ity) of worldly attachments and must be purified through asceticism and the forty-day retreat. Thus, in the end, Fatemeh metaphorically slays her animal self (the gypsy girl) with the help of her spiritual self (the prince) and attains salvation and union with her divine essence (marriage to the prince). In this narrative, unlike many classical patterns, the heroine does not receive help from an external savior. Her only guide is the cosmic writing above the prince's head, which reveals the method of salvation. Furthermore, the story does not include the stages of "Refusal of the Return" or "Denial of the World," as the heroine willingly returns to her community. Like most folktales, this story concludes with a positive and joyous ending.

***Data Availability***

The data underlying the results presented in this paper are not publicly available at this time but may be obtained from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

***Conflict of Interest:*** The results obtained in this research do not conflict with any individual or organization.

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