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Following our enthusiasm

by Rich Heffern

"Follow your bliss," advised scholar of mythology Joseph Campbell in his famous interviews with Bill Moyers, stressing the importance to the spiritual life of cultivating our unique interests, passions and loves. In what do you most delight? Where is your heart of hearts? To what does your body and soul wholeheartedly want you to go? What keeps you fresh and eager? What kindles your enthusiasm?

Campbell's bliss happened to be studying world mythology. Yours might be growing orchids, reading good mysteries, quilt making, home schooling your kids, union organizing, mastering the dulcimer and playing in a bluegrass band, ballroom dancing, writing haiku poetry, amateur astronomy, constructing your own log house, teaching fourth grade, grassroots political activism, refurbishing old Harley Davidsons, contemplatively walking, fine liturgy, photography, gardening, cooking and eating fiery Cajun dishes, your ministry -- you name it. You know what it is.

Campbell compared what happens when one follows one's heart to a favorite image from the Middle Ages, that of the wheel of fortune. "There's the hub of the wheel," he said, "and there is the revolving rim. If you are attached to the rim, you will be either always above going down or at the bottom coming up. But if you are at the hub, you are in the same place all the time, at the center."

That center where we dwell our enthusiasms and deep gladness is the way our yearning to create finds expression. When we find and poke at it, that touch is like probing a fat, throbbing nerve crammed full of joy and happiness. Channeled through our deepest loves, this urge to create comes from the source of our existence. God is not a being who exists among others, but is the origin of all that exists, encompassing everything though not outside anything. The divine mystery remains incomprehensible, yet also knowable and revealed in many ways -- in the natural world, in scripture, in the living of our lives, and particularly in our passions and delights.

Campbell also said that it is in following our bliss that we are most alive and most keenly feel the blood

flowing through our veins. The word "enthusiasm" literally means "God in us."

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