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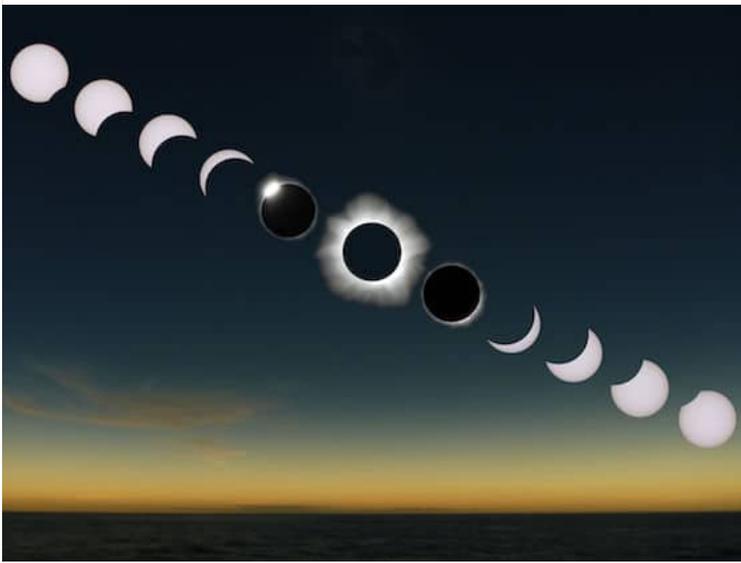
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TOTAL ECLIPSE AND THE MEANING OF INSUFFICIENT MEANING

August 22, 2017 / [Andrew Johnson](#)



People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. —Joseph Campbell

Yes, the rapture first and foremost. The purely physical plane as foundation, the phenomena as base matter, the rapture as emergence, first and sufficient. Has that not always been the case? See and touch first, symbol and language later, and only when necessary, only when it serves a purpose, serves survival. Try to remain right there, he says, in the experience. Do not add to what is already sufficient to make a life. Do not attempt meaning.

Totality lasted 89 seconds where I stood. It lasted that long, and could not last longer.

Could I have stood there staring at the corona around the black spot for days, in complete rapture? Yes. Did I wish rapture could be stitched into eternity, and eternity stitched into rapture? Of course. In another life I would seek such a thing: I would be the desert sage watching for the signs and traveling vast distances to see totality again and again. I would be the astronomer keeping maps of time always at hand and know with certainty when to book the next flight to South America or Siberia. I would be the man in the fighter jet chasing the shadow along the path of totality to see it, witness it, experience it on the purely physical plane for as long as it lasts. Except too much is in motion for such rapture to last.

Instead, I stood there, two feet firm on a baseball field in Sedalia, Missouri, with my wife and young sons and infant daughter, the audible sounds of awe spilling from our open mouths, even the baby, for nearly all of those 89 seconds, *Wow, Wooooooooowww*, and then, as if it almost never happened, it was over. Can I help it if my first thought was: *What was that that I just saw? And what just happened in my bones, my heart, and yes, this mind that always seeks to make meaning, even when perhaps there is none to be made?*

Can I help it if my second thought was, *Well, what now?*

But the infant daughter, those audible sounds of awe spilling from her open mouth: Truth is, she never looked up, had scant idea what was going on. The sounds she made were not made in awareness of the totality. She is all sensation and sight, little to no meaning-making has kicked in just yet.

And yet, perhaps I am wrong already. Of course she is making meaning. Her sounds are response to stimuli on this physical plane, and those sounds are on a slow path toward language. But this is not what Campbell was after: he was suggesting that the Western intellectual pursuit of meaning as the purpose of human life seemed to him to be missing the mark. It is something more simple, not to be worked out in the frontal lobe of the brain, but with the experience of the entire body.

The sounds she made were, from what I can gather, the sounds she has recently discovered in her body. She can now laugh and cry of course, but also scream, squeal, grunt, growl, and this, the most recent sound that fit so well in this brief scene of rapture: *Aaaaaawwwwww!!!!*

Well, what now?

After totality ended, my wife and I told the boys to put their paper glasses back on and watch for a few more minutes as the moon slowly began its departure from the sun's path. We returned to our picnic table, played board games, stared at the sidewalk where the maple leaves overhead cast sliver-shaped shadows on the ground. The baby sat there on the sidewalk, watching the slivers, waving her hands above the shadows as the wind blew above, causing the slivers to dance on the ground and across her small knees, and she looked up at me, smiled wide and flickered the silver-blue flares along the rims of her pupils for the briefest moment and let out from somewhere beneath her ribcage another *Aaawwwww!!!*

I stood there in awe. In rapture. And yes, somewhere in my bones, the question: *What now?*

[#eclipseweek](#), [eclipse 2017](#), [Joseph Campbell](#), [Missouri](#), [parenting](#)



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