

Interview with Maria Souza of womenandmythology.com about the stages of *The Heroine's Journey*

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Maria offers a 10-week-long course focused on the wisdom provided by the stages in *The Heroine's Journey*. She has participants from all over the world and the following questions were submitted by women in her women's circle from Shanghai, China, Russia, France, India, Brail, Mexico, Colombia, Croatia, Egypt, Peru, Argentina, Australia, Kazakhstan, UK, Malta and the Netherlands. We talked about fear; the contribution of the women's movement to the Illusory Boon of Success; the mother-daughter relationship; identifying the inner masculine; successful women's leaders; and dualism.

ABOUT FEAR

In your book, you mention beautifully that where there's fear, there is power too. What practice or advice could you share to overcome fear, make it an ally, and use it for transformation? (Pamela)

What is underneath the fear? Is it anger, is it loneliness, is it embarrassment, is it sadness, is it a broken heart, is it the fear of death? Of the future? Suffering is caused by our clinging to and grasping at the illusion of permanence. Most of us cannot accept that one day we will die. Most of us are afraid of change. So first we have to figure out what is feeding our fear (fear of being alone, being inadequate). Write to your fear or write from the character of fear (She). Describe her. How does fear serve you?

Practices to deal with fear: Certainly meditation helps us breathe through our fear. Staying in the present instead of projecting into the future. May I also suggest the following practices:

Loving-Kindness Practice from the chant "May all sentient beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness."

"May I enjoy happiness and the root of happiness," or put this aspiration in your own words. "May (name) enjoy happiness and the root of happiness," or choose your own words.

Compassion Practice: "May I be free from suffering and the root of suffering" or your own words, for a person (name), friend, for someone for whom you feel neutral, for someone you find difficult, all beings throughout the universe.

ABOUT THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT & THE ILLUSORY BOON OF SUCCESS

I feel that the women's movement contributed to the Illusory Boon of Success by telling women we could have it all (family, motherhood, beauty, thriving career, great sex) at once. I think we can have all of these things, but not at the same time. Instead, it has to be spread out over a lifetime (in order to keep one's sanity). Could you talk a bit about the impact of the women's movement on the Heroine's Journey? Where the movement got it 'right', and where, perhaps, it steered us 'wrong'?

I agree that the women's movement contributed to the Illusory Boon of Success that I describe as a myth in *The Heroine's Journey*. We can't have it all, certainly not all at once and many of us feel like failures for not being able to have it all or do it all. What has happened is that many women experience a sense of emptiness in trying to "have it all." They feel an inner imbalance that leads them to reflect on their choices, and when they feel this sense of emptiness they often discover that they chose a path that does not feed their soul. The ego rewards might fill material needs but they don't fill creative and spiritual needs. Women are so busy taking care the needs of others that their own needs get overlooked and they feel like imposters if they don't take care of everyone's needs. This emptiness is experienced at an unconscious level through dreams, body awareness, health crises, accidents (falls) and a deep yearning to express themselves creatively.

Women need the time and space to refuel and there are too many demands on women by their partners, family, and society. They have to learn to say "No, I have needs too." My friend Susan and I started the "No Society" to give each other support when we needed to say No.

HEALING the MOTHER-DAUGHTER Split

In your book, you mention the difficulty of healing the mother-daughter split. How do you deal with this difficulty or the realization that this wound will never be completely healed?

Become a good enough mother to yourself (what would that be like for you? Do you need affirmations that your mother gave you? Could you give yourself some gift that you imagine a good enough mother might give you?) and develop relationships with other women (and men) who are good enough mothers. What would a nurturing mother look like to you? Some women expect their mother to be unconditionally loving; do you think that's possible?

Write to your mother (whether she's alive or dead and whether you send it or not) and acknowledge to her and to yourself that the initial wound may never be healed. She may have done the best she could as a result of the family and culture and historical time in which she grew up. I didn't realize until my mother was dying that I carried around an internal list of how my mother had abused and failed me. I wanted her to say she was sorry on her death bed. Instead, I blurted out, Mom I'm so sorry for my part in our difficult relationship (I hadn't acknowledged that before). That was very healing for me. She may not have heard it but I heard it and stopped wanting an all-nurturing mother. I realized that I wanted an archetype (The Great Mother) not a human woman.

HEALING THE INNER MASCULINE

For me, it is easy to visualize how to heal the feminine: gardening, meditation, quiet time, body time, etc.. But what are examples of healing the masculine? What are some everyday actions we can recognize and heal the inner masculine?

First it's necessary to examine how you identify your inner masculine and how to make it conscious. My positive inner masculine is a creator who takes the images/ideas I have and

helps me to actualize them. My negative inner masculine is the driver that tells me I can't stop; I have no value unless I am working. I struggle with this every day. I know I keep myself busy so that I won't feel grief or fear. As long as I'm writing or teaching or seeing clients I don't have to feel the immensity of grief I feel.

In developing a positive inner masculine, start with communication. We need our messaging to be clear; we need to own our thoughts, our feelings, our insights, our needs, our voice (without apologizing).

We need to strive for authenticity rather than perfection; to be willing to collaborate, to be empathetic; to have respect for Nature, to focus on climate, to value life over material success. To learn to honor the expertise of other points of view, to act decisively; to have a knowledge of history.

What are some of the positive aspects of the masculine that you admire? Being decisive, making things happen, being the bridge between image and actualization, being protective, making distinctions, setting goals, being strategic

What are some of the negative aspects of the masculine that one might embody? One, of course is the inner critic; being judgmental. Being aggressive, domineering, controlling, emotional unavailable, judgmental, rigidly adhering to law and order and interrupting.

DUALISM

In your book, you wrote "Dualism has allowed feminists to blame men for imbalance on the planet without taking responsibility for their desire for control and greed." Could you expand upon this idea?

Dualism is the theory that the mental and physical, or mind and body, or mind and brain, or male and female are in some sense, radically different kinds of things. Dualism says that the universe is under the dominion of two opposing principles one of which is good and the other evil. It locates ideas and people at opposite ends of a spectrum. In dualism we treat the other as an object outside of ourselves, something to better, to control, to distrust to dominate. We divide ideas and people into hierarchies of good/bad, us/them, black/white, right/wrong, masculine/feminine.

This type of polarization keeps some people poor, ignorant, or homeless while enabling others to be rich, well-tended and powerful. It allows nationalities to assert their supremacy over people with a different color skin, whose religious beliefs or view of reality they disdain (look at the banning of books)

In goddess cultures there was no separation between the secular and the sacred; religion was life and life was religion. The attitude that prevailed was one of linking rather than ranking, partnership rather than domination. Many of the ancient teachings that honor the interrelation of matter and spirit, body and mind, nature and the sacred, human and divine are returning. Mayan, Tibetan Buddhist, Native American, Goddess spirituality are reviving these ancient truths.

What I meant was that we project the aspects of ourselves that we don't like onto the men in our lives making them "evil or wrong" without really taking a look at how those same qualities within ourselves may be distorted. Like power or aggression. We see the "other" as being power hungry and domineering and fail to look at our own desire for control. Look at public figures like politicians who refuse to step down from their positions even though they are no longer healthy enough to serve.

As each of us heals our own feminine and masculine nature we change the consciousness on the planet from one of addiction to acquisition, conflict and domination to a consciousness that recognizes the need for affiliation, healing, balance, and inter-being.

How might our world leaders show up if they had a balanced masculine and feminine? Would their priorities and approaches to issues be different? (Rosa)

Yes, we saw how women leaders operate differently than male leaders during the pandemic. There was a difference between the mindset of competition (win or lose) versus mindset of collaboration. Aggression versus assertion (acting decisively with lock down); denigrating experts/scientists instead of seeking other's p.o.v which involves humility; being self-focused rather than interdependent

Women leaders were hailed as voices of reason amid pandemic chaos. No nonsense approach to the crisis in contrast to the bombastic approach of several of the world's most prominent male leaders (Boris Johnson, Trump, Putin)

Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand stood out for me because of her clear messaging which left no room for confusion. She had regular news briefings alongside top health officials and streamed videos of herself at home in her sweatshirt and told children of the country that they counted.

Chancellor Merkel of Germany was straightforward, down to earth, empathetic and personal. She said, "we are a **community** in which every life and every person counts." She appealed to everyone's sense of responsibility and their ability as citizens to assess the risk and do the right thing. She has the mind of a scientist and heart of a minister's daughter.

Prime minister Erna Solberg of Norway credits early lockdown and extensive monitoring for her country's slow infection rate. She spoke to young people and told them it's okay to be scared.

In this country Gretchen Whitmer governor of Michigan had enormous courage in the face of vigilantes who tried to kidnap her after she issued a stay-at-home order in response to the pandemic. In 2021 she called for a ban on all weapons inside the Michigan State Capitol in response to armed protestors.

If we had a world where feminine values had the same importance as masculine ones

there would be gun laws with age limits and gun owners would have to get a license to use a gun. Whitmer 's program recalled 400 guns. High-capacity guns would be outlawed completely. There would be fewer wars because children would be taught how to compromise, listen, and dialogue in schools eliminating the need to fight each other.

Women would have sovereignty over their own bodies so they could make a choice with their partner about when to have a family. We would reform the criminal justice system, educate the incarcerated and provide both jobs and housing once inmates are released. Childcare and health care should be funded by the federal government. At least 50% of positions in government should be filled by women.

ABOUT YOUR PROCESS

I'd like to know about the process of sharing the framework and decision to write a book. How did you know that it was time to share, and how did you decide that the book was the best format for sharing it? What were some of the hardest parts? What felt easy? Would you change anything if you updated it today?

It took me 8 years to write the book, during which time I facilitated a weekly women's group trying out exercises I had put together to go along with the stages. The initial impetus to write a book came out of listening to my patients talk about their lives. What they were going through mirrored the stages of the HJ as I envisioned it. I had been deeply influenced by the work of Joseph Campbell and the framework of the hero's journey. I used that framework for a year facilitating a monthly group of men and women and discovered that it didn't address the needs and issues of women. I'm a writer so it made sense to write the book. I also tried out the framework of the *Heroine's Journey* in my writing classes at UCLA Extension Writers' Program. I collected the stories of my clients and students and asked if I could use them.

What I would change: I'd update Road of Trials to address what young women are going through. The hardest part was carving out time to write with two children.