

WIDOWHOOD:
FROM GRIEVING TO HEALING

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a theoretical study of widowhood for older women. It is suggested that widowhood can offer a woman the opportunity for self-discovery and transformation. The “golden years” are not only a time for play, for travel, a time free from the obligations we had during our working years, but also offer us a time for introspection, a time to withdraw and to come to terms with our humanity. The loss of a husband triggers the memory of prior losses, and the sadness that lies heavily upon the widow must be respected.

In our society, the widow is encouraged to grieve for her husband and to experience her feelings; however, she is to do so in a nice and clean way. Our society frowns upon overt expression of emotions. Early on in childhood, we learn to be brave and strong and bear our pain alone. We expose only a happy face to the world and hide our sadness. This dissertation will show that we are likely to hide old wounds and repress feelings that need release if we are to be the authentic individuals we are meant to be by nature. Instead of *treating* our wounds it is important to *retreat* into them, so that we can listen to the suffering of our souls and pay attention to the needs of our spirits.

Old age can be a special gift of time for the widow to discover potential she never thought she had. Widowhood need not only be a negative time; it can also be a positive, exciting and interesting experience for the older woman as she embarks upon a journey of self-discovery and transformation.

I dedicate this writing to the memory of
my husband,
my mother, my father, my grandmother,
and to all the many people who touched my heart
and
for one reason or another are no longer in my life.

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Chapter 1: A Study on Widowhood

Introduction

Today the feminist movement has proven that women can go beyond their limited traditional roles as wives and mothers. Older widows too can develop aspects of their nature that they may have had to abandon while serving the needs of their husbands and children. The purpose of my study is to show that widowhood need not only be an empty, meaningless time in the life of an older woman. Rather than merely *adjusting* to the life of a single older woman, she can now explore new vistas of consciousness leading to growth and transformation of her selfhood.

Widowhood is a time of transition for women, as they move from one phase of their lives to another. Such times are experienced as traumatic, when one aspect of the woman — the wife — dies before something new can be born. Such events demand a shift in consciousness for the individual.

Death ushers in new life; however, it may take a long time before the woman can appreciate and enjoy the freedom to create a new life for herself. Older women who were raised in the patriarchal tradition may find it difficult to pay attention to their own needs instead of serving those of others, as marriage demanded of them. I believe women can be helped by using their grief to go more deeply within themselves. As a single woman, the widow can now follow her own spirit through the wilderness of her grief. Her inner journey can be a potentially transformative experience.

My Personal Experience of Widowhood

My personal experience of widowhood forms both a case study and the basis for my exploration into this subject. I was devastated when my husband died after a forty-six-year marriage. In spite of having the support of my loving daughters, grandchildren and friends, I felt abandoned, I felt like an orphan and rejected by the world. It felt as if I had a gaping wound on one side of my body where my husband was torn away from me. I felt as if I had aged overnight - suddenly I was an old woman.

I had lost the deeper sense of myself and eventually realized that I had fallen into the grips of the shadow or negative archetype of the widow. Amazing, how easily one can fall prey to such a destructive stereotype when one loses the structure upon which one's identity was built. I truly believed that I actually was this poor helpless widow, was feeling and behaving like a useless creature, needy for love, which, I was convinced, only my husband was able to give me. Where was he when I needed him so badly?

As a follower of C. G. Jung, I knew that I could not run away from my grief, that I had to face it, had to live through it, in order to integrate the experience into my total personality. It was not easy. I felt the concern of my children and friends, who wanted me to go out and distract myself. They wanted to see the woman they knew before her husband had died lively and engaged with the world. Unfortunately, she had died together with her husband and now she had to wait until a new woman could emerge. I could not will myself out of my predicament, but had to surrender to a higher power; I had to be patient, often pushing beyond my old boundaries.

My journal was my best friend and always by my side. I used active imagination, guided imagery, and listened to the messages coming from the unconscious. Widowhood became my spiritual path through the wilderness of my grief, searching for God only to realize later that the divine had been by my side all the time.

Even though initially widowhood was the most terrifying and painful experience of my life, over time I started to appreciate my freedom. It was not easy, because over the years I had denied my own powers and had transferred them to my husband. I wondered whether I could allow myself to enjoy life without him. I questioned again and again whether I was worthy of all the validations I received from strangers. The most difficult task during that phase in my grieving process was to stay with both the negative and the positive aspects of my new life, avoiding identifying with one or the other pole of the opposites.

Today I feel much stronger and much more my own person than I had ever been in my marriage. In this dissertation I want to share my experience with other widows and offer them support on their spiritual path to selfhood.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance on a number of levels: personal, psycho-spiritual and cultural. On a personal level my study is significant because, by sharing my own experience of widowhood and the insights gained from it, I bring a positive and creative attitude to the discussion, opening the possibility for others to experience similar growth and transformation.

On a psychospiritual level, my study is particularly important because it shows how loss and grief affect and demand a shift in consciousness. I show that

widowhood offers women the possibility of becoming whole within themselves when they no longer have to suppress important parts of their own nature, fearing to compete with their husbands or reluctant to give up a dependency role. This is different from the more common emphasis on widowhood as a time for re-adjustment to the outer world, with the implication of accepting a reduced self-image. I encourage the widow to trust her instinctual and intuitive nature and to find her own spiritual path through her grieving process, using the self-healing powers of her psyche to create a new life for herself.

On a cultural level, my study offers a more positive image of widowhood for older women and removes the stigma attached to it. Even though the new wave of feminism has given more freedom to women, the single older woman is still considered less than whole without a mate. Instead of her fighting against the stigma attached to widowhood, I suggest that the widow move past this dualistic thinking by going deeper into herself, celebrating her strength and beauty.

I believe that older women can benefit from my study by approaching their solo lives as an important time of growth. Other women will benefit as well, as widows become role models for younger women by encouraging them to be who they truly are instead of abandoning their powers to the social pressures of married life. Women no longer need to be defined by their married status or identify with its limited traditional role of wife and mother, but can now be true to their own individuality. They can learn to lovingly and joyously accept the best and the worst in themselves and others.

By bringing a more introverted attitude toward suffering in harmony with the more common extroverted, scientific approach, I hope to help the bereaved to

experience and understand their grieving process consciously. This shift in consciousness can move the experience of widowhood from the personal to a deeper archetypal level, helping the widow to stay within the tension of two apparently contradictory feelings: those of missing and yearning for her husband and at the same time experiencing the freedom to joyfully follow her own spirit.

Theoretical Tools

I have interwoven conceptual ideas of loss, grief, and widowhood with my own personal experiences. These conceptual ideas come mainly from the collective works of Jung and his first and second generation followers. I received from these theorists ideas about the integrative process of individuation, the assumption of a deeper meaning for existence, and the way that profound life experiences usher in important shifts in consciousness. It is this deeply spiritual, psychological and philosophical perspective that I brought to my study.

Jung's (1923/1953a, 1953b, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1960, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1973) theories in particular play a major part in this study. His archetypal perspective offers a move from the personal to a more collective way of understanding the inner life. I use the power of myths, symbols and metaphors to examine the archetypal perspective of widowhood, as they present us with different ways of experiencing and understanding emotions and feelings.

I also lean heavily on feminist research methodology, which brings a more subjective and empathic approach to gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to be a woman, particularly an older widow. These and many other sources have led me to understand that patriarchal attitudes toward women have robbed them of their power, their wisdom and their future. I employ the perspective

offered by some second-generation Jungian female analysts, especially Woodman and Bolen. Woodman (1990, 1992) offers insight into feminine consciousness, which appears to be different from the masculine. Bolen (1984, 1994, 2001) presents a deeper understanding of the growth and transformation process widowhood offers older women, particularly the place of the goddess in their psyches. Bolen introduces the archetype of the widow, Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, the fire within, who welcomes the older widow to come home to herself.

Chapter 2. The Nature of Grief

Grief as Self-Discovery

The purpose of this dissertation is not to praise widowhood, but to suggest that this special time can offer a woman an opportunity to grow and to discover aspects of her personality that she could not develop while taking care of the needs of others. The grieving process can become a discovery process as the widow finds her own way through her grief. Staubacher (1994) offers a prayer for the widow as she embarks on her journey: “I will open myself to the discoveries my heart and head will make. Grief is a healing journey, and I will trust my heart to lead my head in this journey” (p. 7). We need to pay attention not only to our hearts but also to our heads. To get stuck in our grief may lead to a condition Bowlby (1980) calls “chronic mourning”; however, if we cut ourselves off from our feelings and only think our way through the grieving process, we remain in a state of numbness that Bowlby recognizes as the initial reaction to the loss of a loved one.

Packer (1995), a Buddhist spiritual leader, agrees that merely meditating on our grief is not enough; we must go “through it to a place where it is no longer the *pain* of loss, but an *understanding* of loss” (p. 32). Experiencing our grief is not enough, we also have to understand its meaning.

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the grieving-discovery process of older widows, not only because I am one, but because there are millions of older widows like me who have come through their grief to discover who they are and to lead full and exciting lives. Who are they? How come there are so many and how do they deal with their losses?

The grieving process is uniquely different for everyone, and apart from a few autobiographies, relatively little is known of what happens as a woman makes the transition from married life to widowhood. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) there are more than nine million widows over the age of sixty-five in America, compared to slightly more than two million widowers. A woman widowed at the age of sixty-five has an average life expectancy of nearly twenty more years (U.S. Census Bureau 1996). Almost seven and a half million women aged sixty-five and older live alone, many of them widows, compared to fewer than two and a half million men of the same age group who live alone (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

Several pivotal reasons explain the staggering numbers of older widows: one is that “because of their higher relative age and lower life expectancy, husbands die relatively far more frequently than wives” (Bowlby, 1980, p. 82). The second and more telling reason is that five times as many men as women remarry within two years after the death of their spouse.

In a study on gender differences in the *Depressive Effect of Widowhood in Later Life*, Lee, DeMaris, Bavin, and Sullivan (2001) suggest that

The widowhood “effect” is greater for men largely because married men are less depressed than married women. . . marriage is a stronger barrier to the symptoms of depression for men. Married men are the least depressed of any gender or marital status category, and they retain this advantage over married women in all of our models. (p. 60)

These researchers also show that since marriage has a more positive effect on men, widowhood is more difficult for men to endure. This is rather ironic when we remember the strong cultural bias that women are not supposed to be able to survive without men taking care of them. But women do survive alone and often

do so very well. Nonetheless, that does not mean that women are not also suffering from depression and anxieties.

Most research papers on the topic of widowhood are written by social workers who consider teaching coping skills and helping the bereaved to adjust to their new lifestyles the most important tasks of their professional services. They encourage widows and widowers to find support systems in the community, to socialize and partake in activities offered by senior centers. The purpose is to keep mourners busy in order to distract them from their grief, preventing them from falling into deeper depression and encouraging them to make new social connections. “Increased social activity is one way older adults can potentially reduce the perceived psychological distress associated with widowhood ” (Utz, Carr, Nesse, & Wortman, 2002, p. 532). I do not disagree with this reasoning. After all, one must build a new life after the death of one’s husband. However, this approach did not work for me. I found it difficult to socialize with strangers whose only common denominator was our grief.

My Grieving Process

Soon after my husband died, I joined a grieving group at a local Hospice. I wanted to share my grief, I wanted to tell my story and listen to those of other widows. I was convinced that only other women who had lost their husbands would understand me. I had the need to tell my story again and again. Being stuck in my story was only the beginning of taking my feelings to a deeper level, trying to understand what had happened to me. Hillman (1999) points out that to repeat our stories over and over is important for soul-making:

These stories, repeated and repeated, over and over, show the lore-making, mythologizing function of the psyche, which turns the disasters and celebrations of the family, of the town into foundation stones. . . . It is as if the soul begs for the same stories so that it knows that something will last. (p. 64)

The group I initially joined was very helpful when my pain was at its worst. It helped me not to feel so alone in my pain. But after a couple of months I did not want to be around people who made what seemed to be ridiculous suggestions, such as to find a companion or to take a cruise in order to relieve my grief. I did not want to smile and pretend that I was doing well when my heart was breaking. I left the group and began a very different kind of journey.

The decision to embark on a journey into the depths of my soul was not a conscious one. It slowly evolved as I felt the need to retreat, to indulge in my pain and make my own spiritual path through my grief.

It has become customary to speak of the spiritual path as if it were something like a well-marked highway . . . People speak of being ‘on the path’ as if it were clear where it starts and stops. . . . The spiritual path means *making* a path rather than following one. It is a very personal process, unique to each individual. . . . In building a path through the self to the far shore of awareness, we have to carefully pick our way through our own wilderness. (Epstein, 1999, pp. 118-119)

My heart was breaking, yet I wanted to experience the full force of it. I knew that I could not run away from my pain. I was terrified of being a widow and wrote the following in my journal: (Since my journal is an important witness of my discovery process I interlace relevant sections from it in italics throughout this dissertation.)

Again, the feeling of nothingness, of being forgotten, of not existing. Unless I am with a man I am a nothing. Of course this is bull, but

*the truth is that the love I feel for Bob and he felt for me is vital for me.
Without it I may starve to death. I am petrified of this.*

When a woman gets old she is no longer seen and when she speaks up she annoys people. There is something very negative about the old crone, the witch, the woman who wears black and covers her head in grief. She has to be weak and needy so that people can pity her. When she carries her tragedy with pride, they hate her, her strength disturbs them. I recall the beautiful young widow In “Zorba the Greek”, who was stoned to death. She did not die with her husband but took a lover and paid for it with her life.

The widow is no longer a sexual being, no longer governed by nature’s law. She is a has been. I know that we no longer believe in this myth. Or do we? The single woman, young or old, is still a threat to society. She interferes with harmony and balance. Two is a unit. One is incomplete. Ridiculous. Still, I cannot deny that I am very frightened.

I dreaded the idea of being a single older woman. My image of widowhood was very negative. Soon, I became aware that indeed a stigma was attached to widows:

There is, unfortunately, an unspoken stigma to widowhood, which the single person must learn to overcome The role of the widow in our society is one without definition: she is socially and culturally ignored Having to reach out for new roles and greater social mobility after overcoming her grief, the widow generally has difficulties in cultivating new relationships and in acquiring new companionships. She sees herself as an outsider, a fifth wheel of the wagon. She feels every reason to be unmotivated in reaching out socially. (Brayer, 1986, pp. 201-202)

Unfortunately, the couple’s world often excommunicates widows, with old friends no longer finding places for them in their social groups. I suggest that

the widow represents the shadow side of our youth-oriented society, threatening to others who would like to deny their own aging process. Nor do older married people want to be reminded that they too may have to face such grief one day. It is as though some remnants of the “old world” are still hidden within our psyches, which hold the myth that a woman cannot survive without a man and that marriage is the backbone of our society.

I was not prepared for this exclusion. At first I felt angry, but since most other widows complained about this same issue, I knew it was not personal. Nonetheless, I felt very much alone and had the image of being in a small rowboat, in the middle of the ocean, bobbing up and down on top of the waves, no land in sight. Strangely enough I was not frightened, only very sad. There was nothing to do but to surrender to my sadness and allow the waves to carry me.

I had been a follower of C. G. Jung since I met my husband in 1950. I knew the symbolic significance of water and in particular the waters of the oceans.

The darkness and depths of the sea symbolizes the unconscious state of an invisible content that is projected . . . there is always an attraction between conscious mind and projected content. Generally it takes the form of a fascination. . . . this brings with it the necessity of a descent into the dark world of the unconscious, the perilous adventure of the night sea journey whose end and aim is the restoration of life, resurrection, and the triumph over death. (Jung, 1968, p. 329)

I knew that the unconscious beckoned me to surrender, that I had to go deeper within my suffering in order to find the strength to face my new life as an old woman. However, I did not want to go under the sea. Rather I wanted to go underneath the earth:

It is hard to keep the spirit up when every bit of energy pulls me down. I feel like lying on the ground, crying, clawing at the earth under me, perhaps an attempt to dig myself into a hole. I want to feel the cool, the moist, the darkness and the silence of the womb, where I want to be taken care of, fed by the juices of my mother, and now wanting to feel nourished by the riches of the earth.

Being aware that I made everybody around me uncomfortable by retreating into myself, I had to give myself the space to incubate and allow myself to emerge from my hiding place when I was ready. I had to be patient and had to allow the moisture of the earth to caress the seed of the new me,

I missed Bob terribly and three weeks later I wrote the following:

The pain is getting worse, not better. The longing to touch you, to see you, to talk to you is so intense that it is burning in me. The finality is so devastating. I wake up crying, I go to bed hurting. Friends tell me that I should be grateful for what we had; some people never experience such an intense relationship as we had. Yes, they are right. My head says yes, my heart is feeling the emptiness within me. I am impatient with myself. Why can I not let go and see the beauty of life, regardless of Bob? I do not want to be in pain. I fought Bob's depression all my life. Now I seem to have to sit in my own.

My belief in God does not help me. Actually I have lost my belief. Destiny. What is my destiny? To experience widowhood? Is there a lesson in it and if there is what can it possibly be? I don't believe in this any more. There is nothing to support my misery, nothing to help me bear the

tears with more dignity. I feel like a pouting child who is not getting what it wants. It is Bob I want back or nothing.

A few weeks later this child made another appearance in my journal when I was angry with myself for not letting go of my obsession of wanting Bob back:

I feel like a child who insists on having something it cannot have. All my life I had to be reasonable and put up with whatever I had. I never dared to hope for a better life, and always said: "Well that's how it is." That was one part of me, the other was dreaming and waiting for the prince charming who would take me from my depressed home and bring me happiness.

I was thrown back to my childhood. The feelings of abandonment went back to my mother's death when I was seven years old. I had never really grieved for her but had always avoided dealing with her death, insisting that I was too young to have actually known her. This grief had been festering in me all these years and it was only after Bob died that I felt the pain of never having known my mother. How painful it must have been for her, leaving two little girls orphaned when she was dying.

This seven-year-old child finally gave herself permission to scream, to behave unreasonably not only in the privacy of her home, but also in public. I wished I could have cut myself off from my feelings and acted like a perfect widow, bearing my grief with dignity, like Jackie Kennedy appeared to do as she walked behind the coffin of her dead husband. But this was not me. I found it more painful to hold back my tears, I could not hide behind a persona. I could not run away from facing the pain fully and consciously. Bob was gone and he would

not come back and hold me in his arms. Where was his hand so I could grasp it and not feel so alone? Bob was not here when my world was collapsing and I needed him to assure me that everything was going to be all right. Nothing ever was going to be all right again, not the way it used to be.

Facing the Shadow

Eventually, I discovered that there was also something exciting about the challenge of making it on my own. Only two years before Bob's death, we had moved from Los Angeles to the Bay Area in order to be close to our children and grandchildren. Bob and I had both worked as psychotherapists. Bob was a diplomat Jungian analyst, I was a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with a Jungian orientation. I did not want to open another practice in a new place, and after Bob died I did not know what to do with all my free time.

One day while browsing through the pages of a New-Age magazine, I saw the solution to my problem: a full-page advertisement for a doctoral program at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). I had always been defined by my marital status, and the idea of becoming a doctor in my own right was exciting. Even though I had achieved a professional identity, deep within me I considered myself the wife of Dr. Stein in the most traditional sense. I also thought that by entering graduate school I could lose myself in academia and pay less attention to my grief.

I was very much mistaken. In fact, just the opposite happened. My encounter with some of the students, bright, attractive younger women, threw me into confusion. When I enrolled in a creative writing class given by a popular feminist teacher I developed a strong aversion to the thinking of some of these

women. I was appalled when they talked about wanting to rewrite the Bible, substituting *she* for *he*. Transferring the power from men and giving it to women, replacing God with the Goddess, was not my idea of helping the basic power struggle of the sexes.

My mind reacted in defense of the status quo: Had these women never experienced the positive aspects of the patriarchy, I asked myself. The fact that men and women were assigned certain roles was comfortable, and women were proud to perform their duties. Marriage partners were committed to each other and to the community to keep social order and to oversee the upbringing of children. "It takes a village to raise a child" was a meaningful cliché for me. Today's nuclear family members, often separated from the extended family, are so much more dependent on each other for fulfilling their physical and emotional needs - not necessarily a healthy situation.

Something in me was provoked by the young women in the writing class. I didn't trust their spiritual search or the love they said they felt. I questioned whether they were capable of true relationships, or whether they were simply angry at men and wanted to turn the tables. Then I noticed that I called them *these women*. I did not like *them*, yet I was also fascinated by *them*. I was envious of their claims of being on a spiritual path and their appearance of being well adjusted and all-loving. I too wanted to find a spiritual path.

Every time I refer to others as *these people* or as *them* with a demeaning attitude, I know that I was projecting an aspect of my own personality that I refused to own. It became increasingly obvious that these young women represented, what is called in Jungian terms a "shadow problem" for me.

“The term shadow” writes my husband (Stein, 1973), “refers to all those rejected and repressed aspects of the personality; it contains infantile, inferior and morally reprehensible tendencies, but it is also the carrier of many rejected natural, life-promoting impulses” (p. 59). I asked myself what aspect of my personality I could have been rejecting or repressing.

What is it about these women that infuriates me so much. They are so sure of themselves. They are strong and opinionated. They appear to be loving and spiritual, yet I do not really feel them to be so. These women do not really know what it is like to live under the patriarchy, since they reject men altogether. Do they know that men too were enslaved by the patriarchy and had to play their role in the marriage? They had to be the know-all and had to take care of us women, they were responsible for our welfare. Why are these women so angry?

After I stayed with this issue for a few days, the answer came to me.

Could it be that *these women* carry the rage for us, mothers, who refused to accept the abuse we suffered during the patriarchy? Did I not want to see it because I was too dependent on Bob? Did other women feel the same way? Why did we live so long in denial? Suddenly I realized that these new-age women were not only angry at men but also at their mothers, who allowed themselves to be emotionally abused. According to today’s standards of domestic violence, it is likely that most, if not all wives in traditional marriages can be considered to have been abused women. As Dutton (1995) explains, not only physical behavior is considered abusive, but so are “all forms of emotional abuse [that] are coercive techniques to generate submission” (p. 30).

For centuries women accepted their role because few questioned societal rules or expectations, as current feminists have. I was raised with the idea that marriage was the only way a woman could fulfill her destiny and obtain security. Lerner (1993) describes the life of a single woman before the 19th century, painting a picture of the conditions that influenced many women's choices to marry:

Single women might choose celibacy and the religious life, in which case they depended on their superior and the male clergy; they might choose celibacy and dependency on male members of their family of origin; they might barely make a living as servant or governess in the household of strangers, in which case their dependency was thorough and humiliating. A single woman might choose the life of prostitution, in which case she could hardly be considered independent, since her very existence depended on the "protection" and sanction of various authorities. A small percentage of women led economically self-dependent lives on the margins of society as peddlers, vagrants, beggars, thieves. A small percentage were spinsters, brewers, innkeepers and farm workers. There were propertied widows who could live independent lives, but their properties originated in a prior dependency on a man.

For the vast majority of women, marriage and motherhood were their lot and their main means of securing access to resources and economic protection. This was the reason women could not readily conceptualize bonds of sisterhood or develop a consciousness of common interest through their status as wives. (pp. 120-121)

Women's status improved somewhat in the 19th century when they were allowed to own property, and in the 20th century when they fought successfully for full enfranchisement. But 19th-century views of single women as spiritually as well as physically impoverished persisted to some degree throughout the 20th century.

Was this image of the single woman so deeply ingrained in my psyche the reason I felt ashamed to admit that I was widowed the first time I had to fill out a form after Bob had died? Here was my shadow emerging from the depths of my

unconscious. As long as I was married I had felt inflated, superior to the single woman. Now I was confronted by single women who saw in me only a mother with her traditional values. Yet these women were not the spinsters Lerner described. These were bright and independent women, something I had prided myself on having achieved. Now I had to face the possibility that I may have been wrong about myself.

This insight changed my feelings not only toward *these women*, but also toward myself. I realized that I, too, was now such a woman, standing on my own, able to own my strength, my intellect and my lovingness. It was no longer I and *them*, we were now equals.

I also came to recognize another shadow problem — this time around spirituality. My knowledge of God was on an intellectual conceptual level, but I had no emotional connection to it nor to the God I imagined. When, in one of my classes, we were asked to describe the God of our childhood, the vision of the old man with the beard came to me. There he was again, the man on the throne, the collective image and symbol of Western patriarchal civilization.

After all the years of studying, I was amazed at how primitive my image of God still was on an emotional level. Soon after re-meeting my childhood God, another important experience exposed my shadow. As the students processed an exercise, I noticed how analytical I became and how quickly I moved from an emotional experience to a psychological explanation. Surprised, I realized that instead of spiritually by-passing shadow problems, I was psychologically by-passing feelings.

Hesitantly, ashamed and embarrassed, I shared my new awareness with the whole class. I explained that I had not been in touch with my feelings and that my lack of emotionality and lovingness had been expressed by conceptualizing and intellectualizing. To my surprise, everybody accepted me. I was surrounded by searchers, people who were making their own way through life just as I was.

When I think how long I had been digging deeper and deeper into concepts and idea, instead of trusting my feelings, I felt sad. Had I been avoiding feeling the pain of losing my mother, my home, my country when Hitler invaded Austria? I realized that I had been trying to find God through my intellect, trying to understand the concepts of spirit and psyche instead of allowing the power of the divine to enter my heart.

I had faced shadow figures years before in my Jungian analysis, where over the years I had become aware of repressed or abandoned aspects of my personality. Why was I now having one epiphany after another? The difference was that I was no longer able to run home and hide behind the love and safety of my marriage. Moreover, at the time I had gone into analysis I wanted to improve my relationship to my husband and not for myself. There is no doubt that I personally benefited from the psychological work I had done, but the emphasis was always on my marriage. Bob's death made me face problems I encountered with people in the outer world, problems I never considered important when I had his protection.

Even though I had searched for selfhood for years, the process of self-discovery could not be culminated until I was no longer protected by the man upon whom I had projected the *one and only* who was capable of taking away my

pain. I had used Bob's love to feel strong and whole. Now I had to find this strength within myself. I had to internalize Bob into my psychological wholeness. I also learned that the divine worked in miraculous ways. It had led me to my graduate studies, to the very place where I felt supported not only in my search for selfhood, but also in finding my way to a new, mature image of God.

The interior journey I embarked on after Bob died led me to discover aspects of my personality that I had abandoned years ago in order not to feel the pain of my mother's death. As long as I had Bob I could hide behind the love he gave me. Now I had to love myself, all of it, the best and the worst of it.

The Pain Experience of Grief

When we talk about death, loss and grieving, we usually think of something negative, something we don't want to face because it is too painful. The idea of death fills us with an array of often paradoxical emotions; we feel pain and often despair and hope, we feel both exhausted and energized; we turn away from the terror of death and are also fascinated by it.

Baken (1968) believes that part of the nature of death and suffering is to seek a deeper understand and meaning of it:

Pain is the common companion of birth and growth, disease and death, and is a phenomenon deeply intertwined with the very question of human existence. . . . To attempt to understand the nature of pain, to seek to find its meaning, is already to respond to an imperative of pain itself. No experience demands and insists upon interpretation in the same way. Pain forces the question of its meaning, and especially of its cause insofar as cause is an important part of its meaning. (p. 57)

My own experience has shown me that there is a meaning to our suffering, that when we go to a deeper level of understanding our grief, we will discover

also its deeper meaning. The journey is often a slow and arduous process, but essential and rewarding. When a loved one is torn from us not only our emotions but also the physical, spiritual, and mental sides of our nature are affected by it. We call it a “pain experience.”

An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language (Skeat, 1961) indicates that the root of the word bereave means to rob, to take away by violence; to deprive. We are robbed of a loved one and are in pain. We feel an emptiness, a numbness within us. Grief hurts, it makes our bodies tighten and causes a variety of physical symptoms, including sleep disorders, intestinal problems, headaches and bodily fatigue.

That emotional tension causes physical pain was already known to the ancient Greeks. Hillman (1960) quotes Anaxagoras’s belief that “all stimuli disturb stability; an increase of stimuli increases tension and increases pain; pleasure accompanies a reduction of tension and a return to a well-balanced, homeostatic paradise” (p. 67).

The Stress Component of Grief

Stress and pain act as alarm systems for actual or potential hurt. In recent times laboratory experiments have proved that excessive emotional stress can affect physiochemical processes in the body. Selye (1977), father of the modern stress theory, was concerned with what excessive emotional and unabated stress does to our systems. He believed that it was immaterial whether a pleasant or an unpleasant situation caused emotional stress, what was important was its effect on our physiological adaptive system.

Selye (1977), like the ancient Greeks, explains that humans, by nature, are meant to live in a state of internal harmony. The tendency of the body is to maintain a steady, balanced state despite external changes. After any stressful experience, the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems work to re-establish a state of equilibrium, or homeostasis. However, when a stress condition has unusual intensity or duration, the ability of our bodies to adapt is impaired. Excessive stress over a long period of time can weaken the body's defenses and may contribute to disease. Thus, both the physical and the psychological dimension of pain and grief have to be taken into consideration to bring about healing.

Psychiatry considers the loss of a spouse the most stressful experience in a person's life. In 1973, psychiatrist Richard Rahe published a list of life stressors in the order of their impact, in an effort to predict the possibility of a person suffering a physical breakdown from intensive stress. He predicted that the higher the sum of emotional stressors suffered during one year, the more likely an individual can fall prey to a physical illness. He concluded that of all stressors, the death of a spouse was the most traumatic experience, and assigned it 100 points, followed by divorce, which was assigned 73 points. Marital separation rated 63 points, the same as detention in jail or another institution. The death of a close family member was valued as 53 points.

Stress Reaction Differs in Men and Women

Although Rahe (1973) did not mention a difference in the reaction to stress between men and women, laboratory tests have shown more recently that such differences do exist. Bowlby (1980) tells us that "[Widowers] die relatively

far more frequently than [widows]” (p. 82). This difference was not credited to the physiology of the sexes, but linked to studies showing that societal expectations for men to be “strong” and not to express their emotions increase their stress levels. As a result, widowers are more vulnerable to illness than widows and therefore more likely to die sooner. As noted, men are also more likely to seek relief of their grief through remarriage.

In a recent study, women were shown to have a biological basis for their greater resiliency. When stress was tested only on men, nobody knew that women’s physiological reaction to stress was different from that of men. In a UCLA study on friendship among women, Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung, and Updegraff (2000) discovered that release of the hormone oxytocin as part of the stress response is different in women than in men. They explained that in the animal world the release of oxytocin facilitates nest building and pup retrieval. In women it has a bonding and calming effect. It buffers the fight-or-flight response to stress and encourages women to tend to their children and gather with other women. When a woman engages in this “tending or befriending” behavior, the release of oxytocin increases, which further counters stress and increases the calming effect. This calming response does not occur in men because testosterone — which men produce in high levels when under stress — seems to reduce the effects of oxytocin. Estrogen, on the other hand, enhances it. The study notes that newly widowed women who had close friends were more likely to survive the experience without any new physical impairment or permanent loss of vitality than women without such close associations.

Over recent years other physiological differences in the way men and women respond have been documented. Legato (2002) has found differing blood pressure levels in response to physical pain:

Men in pain are more likely to experience a rise in blood pressure, whereas women in pain experience an accelerated heart rate, more than do men. In cases of severe pain women's blood pressure rises only a little or not at all, and as pain is increased their blood pressure falls. But in men blood pressure rises as soon as pain is experienced and it continues to do so as the pain increases. (p. 185)

Legato (2002) also points out that men and women metabolize drugs in different ways. Her book, *Eve's Rib*, is a testament to how little attention has been given to women's differing physiology over the years, and how "doctors are more likely to discount women's complaints than men's, out of a conviction that women are simply less able to bear discomfort than men. These prejudices are hard to expunge" (p. 193).

The American Attitude Toward Death and Grieving

Death is not a popular subject in America. We fear change. We are high achievers and fear not being in control of our future. We want the life we know to last forever. The more we hang on to what we have the more stressful will be the loss of a loved one. Hillman (1999) describes the situation:

It is so hard to set aside the advice given to us daily by those internalized coaches, the aerobic exercise director and the octogenarian Bulgarian goatherder: Keep active, walk uphill, eat yogurt, do your chores, practice your motor skills, work out, develop new interests and friends, don't worry, laugh, think positive. Try harder, do more. Last! . . . The more we try to last, the more afraid we become, for we are going against the innate intelligence of human nature. (p. 54)

We are living under the illusion that we are in control of nature. But how can we truly be spontaneous and ourselves when we hold on to an idealized image

of youth and beauty? We cannot, and the fear of aging — with the inevitability of death — haunts us.

Becker (1973) suggests that we deny the idea of death because we are terrified of it. He states:

The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else, it is a mainspring of human activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death; to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for men. (p. xvii)

When we deny death, not only our own, but also fearing the death of a loved one, we cannot live fully, as we protect ourselves against the pain we anticipate such loss will cause. Our solution is to avoid attaching ourselves deeply to another and to hold back on loving freely.

Becker (1973) believes that by denying the dark sides of life, Americans are in pursuit of a mindless kind of happiness:

Modern man is drinking and drugging himself out of awareness, or he spends his time shopping, which is the same thing. As awareness calls for types of heroic dedication that his culture no longer provides for him, society contrives to help him forget. Or alternatively, he buries himself in psychology in the belief that awareness all by itself will be some kind of a magical cure for his problems. (pp. 284 -285)

The medical professions helps us to understand death on a more intellectual level; however, understanding something conceptually is not a substitute for facing it emotionally, with the depth of one's being. Rather than accepting the reality of the dark side of life, we deny it and escape into an unreality. At the same time we are fascinated by the "bloody side of life," by death and other trauma. The media takes us to emergency rooms at hospitals; we watch murder stories; we are even exposed to the real drama of war. And still, we do not want to face the dark side of life. Part of our almost obsessive fascination

is the reassurance that it is all happening to others, not to us. And so we watch the drama on television and feel for the pain of others, not our own.

Becker (1973) makes a strong indictment against our repression and denial of death and believes that society created the fear of death in order to keep people in submission. He mentions a psychologist who remarked to him, “the whole idea of the fear of death was an import of existentialists and Protestant theologians who had been scarred by their European experience or who carried around the extra weight of a Calvinist and Lutheran heritage of life-denial” (p. 14).

The Judeo Christian ethic can be seen as having conspired in our denials, as it makes us responsible for our misfortune. Perhaps we can understand this attitude better when we realize that the root of the English word “pain” is the Latin word *poena*, meaning punishment. The theory holds that we are in pain because we are being punished for having sinned. To redeem ourselves in the eyes of God, society demands that we endure our suffering with dignity, that we be strong and sensible and accept our tragedies gracefully. Neal (1978) explains:

The Jewish attitude toward pain is, whether or not it is an instrument of divine punishment, it is clearly a ‘curse.’ The Christians spiritualize it in the name of Christ, citing his suffering on the cross as the model of all suffering. (p. 33)

Why do we apologize for bothering people with our grief and sad stories ? We don’t want to upset them; we don’t want to remind them that they too may be confronted with misfortune. We hold on to the illusion that life is basically good, and that we are entitled to happiness. The bereaved is supposed to get over his or her grief as soon as possible in order to “recover from their state of intense emotionality and return to normal functioning and effectiveness as quickly and

efficiently as possible” (M. Stroebe, M. Gergen, K. Gergen, & W. Stroebe, 1992, p. 1206).

According to Bettelheim (1989), the American psychoanalytical establishment rejected Freud’s concept of *thanatos*, the death drive, because it went against what is called “the need for optimism” (p. 85). Even though Freud accepted grieving — what he called mourning — as a difficult psychological but absolutely necessary process in order to overcome the depression into which one has been projected by a loss, “Thanatos, the death drive,” Bettelheim says, “was and still is rejected by the American psychoanalytical establishment. . . . One speaks of visiting the corpse, as if to deny the fact that the person has died” (p. 85).

Another critic, Baker (1999), in her study *Mourning in America*, points to the impersonal way we approached death in America. “Death often occurs in a hospital or in a nursing home, where it is viewed not as an inevitable part of life, but as a failure of medical technology ” (p. 22). Our society is uncomfortable with the display of intense feelings, Baker says, and attributes this to the old pioneering psychology that demanded that people be tough. The image of John Wayne comes to my mind: The strong man, riding into the setting sun, the loner, the stereotype of the American, heroic, but also tragic in his isolation.

The Transference Object

Becker (1973) suggests that, like a child who looks to a grown up to shield him or her from the destructive powers of the world, the adult, too, often projects unconsciously such powers onto somebody. This person is called the transference object.

The child takes natural awe and terror and focuses them on individual beings, which allow him to find the power and the horror all in one place instead of diffused throughout a chaotic universe He binds himself to one person to automatically control terror, to mediate wonder, and to defeat death by the person's strength. But then he experiences "transference terror" the terror of losing the object, of displeasing it, of not being able to live without it. (pp. 145-146)

By transferring the power to protect ourselves from the evils of the world onto another person, we assume a form of helplessness, remaining dependent on such a special person for our well-being. What makes this person so special is that unconsciously we have chosen this person as our hero who can protect us from the terror of death. Women, because of their submissive role in society, have found it only natural to project this power to their husbands, the knights in shining armor. Unfortunately this causes many marriages to break up, women blaming their husbands for their unhappiness, feeling unloved. I believe that the fear of losing such a transference object is what makes the loss of a husband so tragic for a woman, having to face the world alone, feeling unprotected by her man.

Courage to Live

Although the thought of death is terrifying, death is inevitable, and we must have the courage to confront death in order to live fully. Running away from our fears of death is not going to change the reality of life. The Tibetan master Sogyal Rinpoche (1995) says:

Why do we live in such terror of death? Perhaps the deepest reason why we are afraid of death is that we do not know who we are. We believe in a personal, unique, and separate identity; but if we dare to examine it, we find that this identity depends entirely on an endless collection of things to prop it up: our name, our "biography," our partners, family, home, job, friends, credit cards. It is on their fragile and transient support that we rely for our security. So when they are all taken away, will we have any idea of who we really are?

..... We live under an assumed identity, in a neurotic fairy-tale world with no more reality than the Mock Turtle in *Alice in Wonderland*. Hypnotized by the thrill of building, we have raised the houses of our lives on sand.

.....This world can seem marvelously convincing until death collapses the illusion and evicts us from our hiding place. And what will happen to us then if we have no clue of any deeper reality? (February 22)

Sogyal Rinpoche also says: “Even Buddha died. His death was a teaching to shock the naive, the indolent, and the complacent, to wake us up to the truth that everything is impermanent and death an inescapable fact of life.”

Sooner or later we will have to face the entirety of life, otherwise we will live in constant fear, not only of death but also of life. Repressed emotions and feelings often express themselves in physical symptoms. Yet since our society is more acceptable of physical than emotional dis-ease, a patient may never have to deal with his or her grief. The doctor will try to heal the body, whereas the soul does not get the attention she needs and deserves. Lewis (1978) said: “Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to beat. . . . It is easier to say ‘my tooth is aching’ than to say ‘My heart is broken’” (p. 156).

Unfortunately, fear of death can prevent us from opening ourselves to the love for another individual. What if we should lose this person? Lewis (1978) shares his grief after losing his love:

Grief still feels like fear. Perhaps, more strictly, like suspense. Or like waiting; just hanging about waiting for something to happen. It gives like a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn't seem worth starting anything. I can't settle down. I yawn, I fidget. I smoke too much. Up till this I always had too little time, Now there is nothing but time. Almost pure time, empty successiveness. (pp. 38-39)

Our lives come to a halt while we process the many emotions that overcome us when faced with the death of a loved one. It takes courage to grieve

consciously. May (1975) points out that the word “courage” has its roots in the French word *coeur*, meaning heart. Facing fear makes our heart pump harder, similar to the flight-and-fight response when confronted by something dangerous. In the same way as the body prepares for a physical reaction, the psyche too is challenged to stand up against a possible attack.

Jung (1960) believed that the psyche has a compensatory function: “Just as the body reacts purposively to injuries or infections or any abnormal condition, so the psyche functions react to unnatural or dangerous disturbances with purposive defense mechanisms” (p. 253).

May (1975) proposes we listen more closely to our bodies because they let us know when something is wrong. We may get a funny feeling in the pit of our stomach, but we don’t want to listen. We must learn to be sensitive to our feelings and learn to trust the self-healing powers not only of our physical but also of our psychic being.

I propose a new form of courage of the body: the use of the body not for the development of musclemen, but for the cultivation of sensitivity. This will mean the development of the capacity to listen with the body. It will be, as Nietzsche remarked, a learning to think with the body. It will be a valuing of the body, as the means of empathy with other, as expression of the self as a thing of beauty and as a rich source of pleasure. . . . It is the courage to invest one’s self over a period of time in a relationship that will demand an increased openness. Intimacy requires courage because risk is inescapable. We can no know at the outset how the relationship will affect us. Like a chemical mixture, if one of us is changed, both of us will be changed. (pp. 15-17)

Chronic Grief

From my work with patients with chronic physical pain, I know how emotional pain and grief can express themselves in physical symptoms. In their despair, people will turn for help to the physician, who will medicate their

symptoms to ease their pain. However, much physical pain has an emotional component even a psychological precedent. The doctor treating the physical pain rarely deal with the basic emotional problems that may be the cause of the discomfort. As long as we remain emotionally or physically stressed, the wound within the suffering soul will fester like a tumor. Any additional traumatic event will open old scars until we finally allow ourselves to feel the pain that caused the original wounding.

As related to the pain of grief, in his thorough study of attachment and loss, Bowlby (1980) warned that a prolonged absence of conscious grieving can lead to “chronic mourning.” As long as we do not accept the death of a loved one as irreversible, it is not “conscious grieving.” Bowlby postulated four phases, which, though not always clear-cut, are common responses to the loss of a loved one. As mourners move through the grieving process they initially experience a *numbing* phase; they proceed through a state of *yearning* to a phase of *disorganization*, before reaching the final phase of greater or less degree of *reorganization*. When a bereaved is unable to reorganize his or her life, mourning can turn into a chronic condition, which Bowlby calls a disordered variant of mourning. He continues:

Absence of conscious grieving can be regarded as a pathological prolonged extension of the phase of numbing, whereas the various forms of chronic mourning can be regarded as extended and distorted versions of the phases of yearning and searching, disorganization and despair. (pp. 138-139)

We yearn for the significant person upon whom we have bestowed magical powers. We need these transference objects to bring love and happiness into our lives. We feel helpless without them and insist that only they can heal us.

The more we yearn for this deceased loved one, the more we hurt; and the more we hurt, the more distressed we will be, until we get caught in a vicious cycle of yearning and grieving. Eventually we will fall into a depression.

Faced with the dilemma that the one person who, we believe, could relieve us from our suffering, is not available, we must find the healing powers within ourselves. However painful it may be, we have to go into our pain, our grief, in order to find healing from within. The same applies to a depression. Harding (1970), a Jungian analyst, explains the meaning of depression:

One meaning of the experience of depression is that our wholeness, our individuation, the Self, can no longer wait while we follow egotistic ways or even seek for legitimate ego fulfillment, and so the Self brings us, drives us, into the wilderness of depression, for God waits in that place, and communication between earth and heaven is even then about to be revealed to us if only we will attend to the vision. (p. 15)

It is a time when all defense systems shut down, when the individual feels unprotected and vulnerable, needy and frightened. However, it is also a time for renewal, when the old is dying so that the new can be born.

I have learned that we cannot “think “ or “will” ourselves out of a depression, but must surrender to a higher power, call it the Self, or the God within. Only when everything is taken away from us do we realize that we are not in charge of our lives, but that we have to surrender to some higher power. It is hard to surrender to our feelings of grief; however, if we do, eventually the homeostatic powers of our nature will restore health and well-being. Grant (1997) says:

Only then can victims realize that they do not belong totally to themselves, but to the Spirit and to others. This realization comes about only when one is consumed by pain. It is impossible to refuse suffering without refusing life as a whole. Victims must seek to penetrate suffering and make it their own. Suffering must be incorporated and become the

path of development. It refocuses the attention from what one “has” to who one “is.” (p. 136)

About three years after my husband died I felt depressed and hopeless, wondering what the meaning of my life was. I had tried very hard to make a new life for myself, but suddenly I felt exhausted.

I wonder whether I have been pushing too hard to get over my grief. I am exhausted. What is so terrible about being a widow? What is the difference between a widow and a married, divorced or separated woman? The married woman lives with her husband; the divorced and separated women have husbands who are alive; however, these women do not live with their husbands. The widow is the only woman whose husband is dead.

Have I been carrying the dead body of Bob with me all this time? I feel very sad, I want to cry. I do not want to let go of him, but I know that my fate is different from his. I must live. His time was up and he had to leave us.

I felt very pained having to let go of Bob’s body. At the same time I felt relieved of the heavy burden I had been carrying with me for the last three years. The depression lifted; I felt sad but alive and ready to face a new life as an older woman, alone and widowed.

Cultural Relativism

What is considered a “normal” time for mourners to adjust to their new lives? The chronicity of a pain experience is greatly defined by cultural and historical rituals and religions. Discussing the subject of *cultural relativism* in

relation to grief, Nolen-Hoeksema (2001) writes: “there are no universal standards or rules for labeling a behavior as abnormal . . . cultural relativists believe that there are different definitions of abnormality across different cultures” (p. 5).

Baker (1999) concluded, “There is no timetable for grief, and the journey is filled with peaks and valleys. Just when you feel better, a fresh wave of pain pulls you back” (p. 26). Bowlby (1980) also studied cultural differences:

Common to mourning rituals is that they usually prescribe a time when mourning should end. Although the length of time differs enormously from culture to culture, the calendar year of traditional Jewry, at the end of which the bereaved are expected to find ways of returning to a more normal social life, is not atypical. In a number of societies special rites of mourning and commemoration are performed at that time. (p. 130)

Another point of cultural relativism is the different attitude societies have in regard to cutting bonds with the deceased. Some cultures believe that it is better to withdraw the energy invested in the deceased loved one in order to free it and build a new life for oneself; others allow for the bereaved to remain bonded to the deceased. Not only are there cultural differences, but M. Stroebe et al. (1992) point out that even within our own culture at different times in history there have been were contrasting views in regard to breaking bonds:

Within the romanticist context the concept of grief was far different from the modern one. Because close relationships were matters of bonding in depth, the death of an intimate other constituted a critical point of life definition. To grieve was to signal the significance of the relationship and the depth of one’s own spirit. Dissolving bonds with the deceased would not only define the relationship as superficial, but would deny as well one’s own sense of profundity and self-worth. It would make a sham of a spiritual commitment and undermine one’s sense of living a meaningful life. (p. 1208)

In contrast, they explain, the modern perspective calls for the bereaved to break the bond to the deceased as quickly as possible in order to “recover from their state of intense emotionality and return to normal functioning and effectiveness as quickly and efficiently as possible” (p. 1206).

The process of severing ties to deceased loved ones found expression in Freud’s *Trauer und Melancholie (Mourning and Melancholy)*, as cited in Jones (1955):

Mourning takes place after a severe loss of a loved person or of an abstraction, such as fatherland, freedom or other ideas. We do not regard it as pathological because we are confident that it will pass, or greatly diminish with time. . . . Some people, on the other hand, develop in similar circumstances a melancholic depression, which may be lasting. It resembles grief in the painfulness of the mood, in the withdrawal of interest from the outer world, and in an incapacity to undertake anything that has nothing to do with the loved person. As we say, the sufferer is so “absorbed” in the mourning that he has little left over for any other purpose in life. There is, however, one very striking difference between normal mourning and melancholia. With the former the pain and other manifestations are limited to the reaction to the loss of an external object, whereas melancholia gives the impression of there being an internal loss as well; there is a poverty of the ego, a sense of personal unworthiness. . . . The withdrawal [from melancholia] takes place step by step, from every single memory of the lost one in detail — a task for which much time and energy is needed. If this is successfully carried through the person becomes once more free and uninhibited. (pp. 329-330)

Freud’s ideas still resonate today in our culture. Withdrawing from the outer world leads to melancholia (depression), an inner loss, a sense of personal unworthiness. The exclusive focus on the loved one must be ended in order to free the energy needed to move back into life.

M. Stroebe et al. (1992) present us with cross- cultural examples, making us aware of how sensitive we must be to the particular grieving process of the individual, which is always affected by cultural beliefs and rituals. They relate a 1959 study by Mandelbaum describing one Native American view of their

relationship with the dead: “The Hopi believe that contact with death brings pollution, and they are afraid of death and of the dead person, whose spirit becomes a depersonalized entity” (as cited in M. Stroebe et al., p. 1207). This is in sharp contrast to the Japanese. M. Stroebe et al. relate the 1969 observations of Yamamoto, Okonoji, Iwasaki, and Yoshimura: “the maintenance of ties with the deceased is accepted and sustained by the religious rituals of Japan” (as cited in M. Stroebe et al., p. 1207). The Japanese accept dependency on others as natural whereas, the American society insists that one has to get past such dependency and helplessness in order to become a socialized individual. As Becker (1971) writes:

Basking in the mother’s omnipotence must be curbed in the interests of (the child’s) own survival. The ego as a self-governing organ can come into being only by passing through a succession of frustrations that make it possible for him to survive on his own. (p. 40)

Stages of the Grieving Process

Postmodernity offers us a more flexible view on how an individual is supposed to grieve for a loved one. Whereas modernity asked for a separation from the deceased as quickly as possible, today we believe that the grieving process can take as long as necessary for each person to accept the finality of the loss.

Kübler-Ross (1969), a pioneer on the subject of death and dying, noticed that most terminally ill people pass through common states of mind while letting go of their bond to this world. These stages begin with denial and continue through bargaining, anger, and depression until final acceptance of death.

Since then, professionals have applied the Kübler-Ross (1969) stage model to many major stressful and traumatic experiences in which an individual must make a transition from one phase of their life to another. Over the years, many other theorists have created their own stage models to explain how people adjust after tragic or traumatic events. These have all been applied to the process of “recovery” from loss. Nolen-Hoeksema (2001), however, questions the validity of these models:

Although stage models have been extremely popular among health care professionals and the lay public, research over the last decade or so is strongly suggesting that many of the major assumptions of these models are incorrect. . . . There is tremendous variability between people in the order in which these symptoms are experienced and the duration of specific symptoms.(p. 273)

In spite of such rethinking, stage models have become so popular that they form the backbone of education in bereavement for doctors and other health care professionals. While some understanding of how people move through grief can be helpful, it is dangerous when people who do not follow these stages are labeled pathological. Nolen-Hoeksema (2001) believes that there should be no rules to how an individual should grieve and how long they need in order to create a new life for themselves. She quotes a widow who said:

There is no right or wrong way to feel. . . . (Grief) never really goes away. You don't get over a loss. No, you just learn to live with it, but you also have to accept the fact that you are changed as a result of it. (p. 274)

I, too, have been critical of stage models. One reason is that, even with the acknowledgment that the stages may not always be experienced in a specific sequence, there is a tendency to see the process as linear. The bereaved, or those with them, expects to complete the process within a reasonable time and feels a

failure when this is not achieved. I also believe that stage models are more inclined to deal with symptoms related to grieving rather than with the actual experience of the suffering soul.

Levine (1982), considers the grieving process as a pilgrimage toward insight and wisdom, a move from tragedy to grace:

In reality there are no stages but only the incessant changes of the mind. A moment of denial or anger opening into acceptance until a moment later the mind curls back on itself in depression and fear, trepidation and confusion. It is the rollercoaster mind constantly changing, opening, and closing, fluttering in the face of reality. . . . These are the stages of converting our predicament from tragedy to grace, from confusion to insight and wisdom, from agitation to clarity. They are our pilgrimage toward truth. (p. 234)

Surrendering to Grief

We are changed by the loss of a spouse. The death of any loved one is an opportunity for a spiritual awakening, a shift in consciousness leading to growth and transformation for the spouse left behind. This is very different from adjusting to a situation over which we have little control. While to a certain extent we have to adjust to a tragic event in our lives, we need not accept it placidly, not *succumb* to it, but consciously *surrender* to our grief in order to discover its meaning for us. These wise words fell into my hands one day. They are from an article called *Collapse: Friend or Foe* written by Barbara McNeill and published in a Wellness Community Newsletter of unknown origin that shows no date.

To surrender is very different than to succumb. Surrender opens me to a deeper knowing, an intuitive and vital process working from the inside out. Succumbing closes me to my inner wisdom and places a doormat squarely on my chest. To surrender is to trust my ongoing transformative process by opening and relaxing. To succumb is to fear change and slow down the transformative process by closing and tightening. Surrender or succumbing can appear to be similar when viewed externally by others. Internally, the difference is like night and day.

These words had a great impact on me and are now, more than ever, meaningful as I surrender to old age and widowhood. Grant (1997) also encourages such surrender to grief, even though he is aware that it may cause difficulties for the bereaved.

It is hard to surrender to our feelings of grief; however, if we do, eventually the homeostatic powers of our nature will restore health and well being to us. Only when everything is taken away from us do we realize that we are not in charge of our lives, but that we have to surrender to a higher power. . . . Suffering is not just about loss and destruction but about sanctifying pain. The stoic tries to master pain while the mystic embraces it realizing that it has the power to reveal his/her deepest nature. Suffering in this sense is a grace. Pain, distress and shame are often the only things powerful enough to demonstrate one's complete inability to master life. Suffering is a test of one's character and inner strength. It is not a punishment. (pp. 136-137)

Neither Grant, nor anybody else glorifies suffering, but we know the value of surrendering to our deeper feelings. When we do, we often find a seed of a cure in our dis-ease, or what Grant calls the "homeostatic powers of nature," and there is also a message in the experience of a depression. M. Esther Harding (1970), a follower of Jung, presented a paper to the Analytical Club of New York on *The Value and Meaning of a Depression*. In it she suggests that a depression is a calling from the depth of our unconscious to surrender the ego to the Self, or the higher power within us. The ego has to be stilled so that the Self can be heard. In the stillness of a depression we must listen to the messages the Self has for us. As Johnson (1998) said: "Listen to the will of God as it manifests within your own psyche, hearing what has been called the still, small voice within — this is the religious life" (p. 101).

I had walked the *via dolorosa* for too many years before realizing that my suffering was nothing but my frustration that life was not going according to my own wishes. I discovered that the strong emotions of frustration, anger, and fear overshadowed my deeper feelings of sadness. Now I had to open myself not only to my sadness of losing my husband, but also to my love for and my appreciation of him and my life.

Chapter 3: The Archetypal Perspective of C. G. Jung

Introduction

My conceptual understanding of widowhood is based on the psychology of C.G. Jung (1923/1953a, 1953b, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1960, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1973), who offered me a less clinical and more soulful approach to understanding our pains and problems. Jung had been critical of the Western scientific attitude toward psychology, which he thought, distanced itself from the very subject of its study, the psyche. Being an empiricist, Jung respected his perceptions, his feelings, and his emotions as much as his physical sensations, insisting that we can only know ourselves by experiencing ourselves. The psyche was for Jung as real as the body. He looked upon God as the *imago dei*, the image of God, not as a literal essence, but as a symbol for and his experience of the numinous, the holy. Years ago, when Jung was asked in an interview with British Broadcasting Company whether he believed there was a God, his now famous answer was that he did not *believe* there was a God; he *knew* there was a God.

Jung (1958) thought that “A psycho-neurosis must be understood, ultimately, as the suffering of a soul which has not discovered its meaning” (p. 330). He thought that the *imago dei*, needed a renewal. “Life wants to create new forms, and therefore, when a dogma loses its vitality, it must perforce activate the archetype that has always helped man to express the mystery of the soul” (1963, p. 347). Jung would have appreciated Bishop Spong (2001), an Episcopal Bishop from Newark, New Jersey, who could not understand how we can still believe every word as it was written in the Bible when today we are living in such a different world from the one in Biblical times.

Spong (2001) points out that “We once saw God as the prime mover on issues of sickness and health. Sickness was a reflection of God’s punishment, we used to think, while health was a reflection of God’s favor” (p. 22). Yet scientific discoveries disprove such preconceived ideas, and we know today that illness can be caused by germs and viruses and has little to do with God’s will. Still, many people believe that they are suffering because they have offended God.

Striving for Wholeness

Wholeness rather than healing of a neurosis, was Jung’s goal of analysis. He points out that a neurosis can actually become the stimulus to the struggle for wholeness of the personality, and that our one-sidedness often causes difficulties and suffering. Wholeness by transcending the opposites was Jung’s (1960) mission. “In the treatment of a neurosis, the task before us is to re-establish an approximate harmony between conscious and unconscious” (p. 289).

Frey-Rohn (1990) studied the differences between Freud and Jung and their disagreement regarding how our emotional wounds were healed and our symptoms relieved once we had become conscious of them. She elaborates on this issue:

In clear distinction from Freud, who looked upon neurotic conflict as something rather negative, Jung detected a positive meaning even in incompatible complexes; he arrived at this by realizing that dynamism is inherent in the tension of the opposites and that whatever made the person ill usually contained the seed of cure as well (p. 39).

Jung (1965) was not interested in finding a “cure” for our neurotic conflicts but in healing the split between the many opposites within our personality, as for instance, the conscious and unconscious. He insisted that it is not only important to gain insight into our unconscious, it is an ethical obligation.

Not to do so is to fall prey to the power principle, and this produces dangerous effects which are destructive not only to others but even to the knower. The images of the unconscious place a great responsibility upon a man. Failure to understand them, or a shirking of ethical responsibility, deprives him of his wholeness and imposes a painful fragmentation on his life. (Jung 1965, p. 193)

For Jung (1965), holding the tension between the opposites and striving towards wholeness gives meaning to our lives, thus making our suffering more bearable. “Meaninglessness inhibits the fullness of life and is therefore equivalent to illness. Meaning makes a great many things endurable — perhaps everything” (p. 340). The goal of analysis was to heal the split not only between conscious and unconscious, but also between the inner and outer world and the masculine and feminine principles. As Jacobi (1951) states,

Wholeness of the personality is attained when all the pairs of opposites are differentiated, when the two parts of the total psyche, the conscious and the unconscious, are joined together and stand in a living relation to one another. (p. 123)

Similar to the Chinese concept of *Yin* and *Yang*, masculine and feminine are one in our psyche. Our brain functions as one but has a left and right side. According to Bresler and Trubo (1979):

In most individuals, the left hemisphere is the seat of the conscious mind, for it is involved in the process of rational, logical, analytic and evaluative thinking. . . . The right hemisphere, on the other hand, processes the information it receives into an abstract, symbolic manner, and appears to be involved in creative, artistic, intuitive, impulsive, and instinctual processes. (p. 349)

In Jungian terms, the left side would be the masculine, associated with the thinking function and the right side, the feminine, the feeling function. We need both functions to operate as whole individuals, otherwise our one-sidedness will cripple us and make us dependent on others for completion.

After my husband died I yearned to be with him, but also knew that I had to find wholeness within myself. The yearning for my soul-mate reminded me of the story told by Plato (Jowett, Trans., 1937) of the round man who was so strong and omnipotent that he threatened the Gods. Zeus cut him in half; ever since then we have been looking for a soul-mate.

The sexes were not two as they are now, but originally three in number, there was man, woman and the union of the two . . . the primeval man was round, his back and sides forming a circle; and he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces, looking opposite ways . . . terrible was their might and strength, and the thoughts of their hearts was great, and they made an attack upon the gods. . . . Something had to be done to diminish the power of this round man, and finally Zeus found a way to do so. I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers. . . . After the division the two parts of man, each desiring the other half, came together and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces . . . So ancient is the desire of one another which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature, making one of two and healing the state of man. (pp. 316-318)

My yearning also reminded me of Psyche's search for Eros, the beautiful maiden who had lost her lover and set off on a journey to find him. As with all hero's — or heroine's — journeys, she had to deal with hardship and overcome obstacles along the way, but finally she was re-united with her lover.

Metaphorically, this story shows how Psyche matures on her journey to find love and how she gains her womanhood and her place next to Eros on Olympus.

I also turned to Moore (1994) for help in my search for my soul-mate. He has this to say: "Loss of love and intimacy can be a profound form of *initiation*. Paradoxically, initiation means beginning, and yet the most powerful initiations always involve some sort of death" (p. 196). Moore continues by quoting Mircea Eliade, a scholar of comparative religions :

Death signifies the surpassing of the profane, non-sanctified condition, the condition of the "natural man," ignorant of religion and blind to the spiritual. The mystery of initiation discloses to the neophyte, little by little, the true dimensions of existence; by introducing him to the sacred, the mystery obliges him to assume the responsibilities of a man. (as cited in Moore, p. 200)

However, in order to live fully we must become conscious and respect all aspects of our paradoxical nature.

The Individuation Process

Even though we may never achieve total wholeness, we grow and develop to our optimal fullness while we strive for it. Jung (1953) calls this journey to wholeness and selfhood the *individuation process*:

Individuation means becoming an "in-dividual," and in so far as "individuality" embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as "coming to selfhood" or self-realization. (p. 171)

For Jung the meaning of our lives was not to strengthen our egos or to adapt to our society, but to achieve wholeness by transcending the many opposites within our own nature so that we become unique individuals. Jung (1960) had a teleological attitude to life. We are predestined to become who we are meant to be by nature and/or by the grace of God. "Life is teleology *par excellence*; the intrinsic striving towards a goal, and the living organism is a system of directed aims which seek to fulfill themselves. The end of every process is its goals" (p. 406).

Jung (1923/1953a) considered wholeness the goal of our psychological work, and as Jacobi (1951) explains, "Wholeness is attained when all the pairs of opposites are differentiated, when the two parts of the total psyche, the conscious and the unconscious, are joined together and stand in a living relation to one

another” (p. 123). As long as we have unconsciously rejected aspects of our personality, fearing they would interfere with our relationship to significant others, we cannot be whole but will need others for wholeness. Jung was aware that we can never reach wholeness but can commit ourselves to achieving it. The path or the process is more important than the goal. Jung (1923/1953a) has this to say:

Individuation is the process of forming and specializing the individual nature; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a differentiated being from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore is a process of differentiation, having for its goals the development of the individual personality. (p. 561)

Our commitment to becoming who we really are has also a deeply spiritual dimension. When we trust our intuition and listen to the messages we receive from the unconscious, we see that we are not in the service of ego, but subjugate the ego to the Self, referring to God or to the higher power within ourselves. We no longer “will” our way through life but learn to say, “Thy will be done,” surrendering to the divine within us.

As long as women were unconsciously contained within their marriages they were subjugated to their husbands, taking care of their families, neglecting their own needs. The glue that used to hold many marriages and families together was perhaps less the love they felt for each other, but their neediness and dependency on each other for completion.

The Self and the Collective Unconscious

When I was married in 1950 I thought I loved my husband but soon realized that it was my neediness for him that contained me in my marriage. In my

Jungian analysis I was introduced to the concept of the Self as symbol for the innermost center of my wholeness, that helped me to become less dependent on my husband for completion.

I have called this center the Self. Intellectually the Self is no more than a psychological concept, a construct that serves to express an unknowable essence which we cannot grasp as such, since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension. It might equally well be called the “ God within us.” The beginnings of our whole psychic life seem to be inextricably rooted in this point, and all our highest and ultimate purposes seem to be striving towards it. This paradox is unavoidable, as always, when we try to define something that lies beyond the bourn of our understanding. (Jung, 1953b, p. 236)

As an archetype, the Self embraces both the personal and universal truth and includes the conscious and unconscious.

The Self, as a symbol of wholeness, is a *coincidentia oppositorum* containing light and darkness simultaneously. Christ, as a hero and god-man, signifies psychologically the Self; that is, he represents the projection of this most important and most central archetype. The archetype of the Self has, functionally, the significance of a ruler of the inner world, i.e. the collective unconscious. (Jung 1956, p. 368)

With the construct of the Self, Jung (1956) not only transcends all the opposites, he also shifts the authority of the divine from outside to within our psychic being. This Self, the *imago dei*, is an archetype and the center, not only of our personal unconscious, but also of the collective and objective unconscious. One of Jung’s major contributions was to bring the archetypal perspective to psychology. In contrast to Freud (as cited in Frey-Rohn,1990), who believed that we were born with an empty mind, a *tabula rasa*, and that the unconscious was nothing but a container for forgotten and repressed experiences, Jung ascertained that there was a deeper layer, aside from the personal unconscious. This idea was

based on the dreams of some of his patients who had images emerging from the unconscious that could not have come from personal experience.

This deeper level of the unconscious, Jung (1953b) concluded, contained primordial, universal images, or archetypes. He called this layer the “collective” or “objective” unconscious.

When fantasies are produced which no longer rest on personal memories, we have to do with the manifestations of a deeper layer of the unconscious where the primordial images common to humanity lie sleeping. I have called these images or motifs “archetypes.” . . . The collective unconscious stands for the objective psyche, the personal unconscious for the subjective psyche. (pp. 64-65)

The content of the *personal* unconscious refers to memories and images from our personal lives. The *collective* unconscious presents us with archetypal images that transcend our personal experience. When we dream of our own mother, we refer to the personal unconscious. When a dream presents us with an image of a mother figure, we are dealing with the archetypal mother, the woman who carries all characteristics of mothering.

Archetypal images go beyond time and space and are not to be taken literally but psychologically; however, they are as real as physical objects. Since they are being contained within a collective that transcends the personal unconscious, they can open doors to a magical world for us. “These are mythological associations — those motives and images which can spring anew in every age and clime, without historical tradition or migration” (Jung 1923/1953a, p. 616).

It is difficult to define the essence of an archetype, even Jung admits to this. When he was asked where the archetypes come from, he answered: “It seems

to me that their origin can only be explained by assuming them to be deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity.” Bolen (2001) describes archetypes in the following way:

[They are] inherent patterns or predispositions in the human psyche. . . . An archetype is like the invisible pattern that determines what shape and structure a crystal will take when it does form. . . . Archetypes might also be compared to the “blueprints” in seeds. . . . Under optimal conditions, the full potential in the seed is realized. (p. xix)

Perhaps we can call archetypes our psychological DNA; like our genetic DNA, the building blocks are the same for everyone; however, the way they combine within each person determines our uniqueness. The study of mythology, legends, and fairytales is of utmost importance in understanding archetypes. Presenting themselves in dreams and in mythological images, archetypes affect our behavior and bring meaning to our lives. Such a perspective enables us to transcend the personal, offering a collective view of human experience and behavior patterns.

In our deepest hour of grief the archetypal perspective can shift the painful experience of our grief to one of understanding it. Such objectivity can shed new light on one’s individual passage, as it links our personal experience with that of greater humanity.

Thus Jung (1968) opened the door to a repository of inherited collective archetypal images belonging to all humanity. At this level we are not fragmented but healthy whole human beings. “Once the process has reached the sphere of the collective unconscious we are dealing with healthy material, i.e. with the universal basis of the psyche, variable though this may be with individuals” (p. 33). It is within this deeper layer of the unconscious that we can find the healing

powers that cannot only restore us to our authentic selves, but also connect us to humanity at large.

Identity vs. Individuation

Until we realize that there is a deeper center within ourselves, the only reality we know is the outer world. Sherven and Sniechowski (2001) describe the process of finding the center of ourselves in a less conceptual and more poetic way than Jung:

If you take time to look inside, you sense something at the center of who you are. That something withstands all the noise of your daily activities, the emotional ups and downs, the demands others make on you, even your own hopes and expectations. It's like the foundation of a building that remains secure even though the floors above may be swaying in the force of a strong wind. When you get in touch with it, you know it's more real than anything going on around you and it's always aiming you toward wholeness. (p. 41)

As long as we have not found this center, we are very likely to lose our selfhood and take on the collective identity our culture assigns. According to Jung (1923/1953a), "Psychological identity presupposes its unconsciousness. . . . It is therefore a characteristic of the early infantile mental conditions. . . . Identity is primarily an unconscious equality with the object" (p. 553). This means that the child in its original state of one-ness with others cannot differentiate between itself and others. And when it happens to an adult, Jung says it is "merely a relic of the original psychological non-differentiation of subject and object — hence of the primordial unconscious state" (p. 553). The individual cannot differentiate between being him or herself and being the person others want him or her to be.

The feminist movement has freed women from their collective role in which women used to be limited to being wives and mothers or love goddesses. The new woman no longer wants to be identified with collective roles; she wants to be herself. This is often very difficult because we think we are individuals only to discover that we have been in the grip of some collective image or archetype. This happened to me when I became a widow.

In my research I learned that loss of identity was one of the most common complaints of widows. Van den Hoonaard (1995), who studied resilient older widows, referred to this loss as an “identity foreclosure”:

Identity foreclosure refers to the fact that, although (widows) try to hang onto their identities as wives, they no longer have the social resources to do so. They find themselves symbolically stranded on the sidewalk with their belongings (i.e. the elements of their identity) strewn about them. This results in a loss of self. (p. 1)

Caine (1974) blames society for the loss of a widow’s identity:

Our society is set up so that most women lose their identities when their husbands die. . . . I felt like one of those spiraled shells washed up on the beach. Poke a straw through the twisting tunnel, around and around and there is nothing there. No flesh, No life. Whatever lived there is dried up and gone. (p. 1)

Indeed, I could relate to these women because I too felt abandoned after my husband died and like a “nothing.” In reality, I was not abandoned; I was close to my two daughters and enjoyed my doctoral studies. I had made friends with some of my fellow students and was leading an interesting and rich life. Why then was I feeling sorry for myself? I could accept my grief and despair, and gladly surrendered to my feelings, but I could not understand why I felt sorry for myself. After all, I was not a poor old woman without a family or financial means.

Nevertheless, it seemed that since I was no longer contained within my marriage, my social and cultural identity had changed from that of a wife to that of a widow.

I experienced not only strangers but even friends and family not knowing how to relate to me. They seemed to feel uncomfortable with my grief. In their eyes I was no longer the woman I was as the wife of Dr. Stein; they now saw me as his widow and seemed to pity me. Overnight I had become the poor old widow, the abandoned woman, and started to feel sorry for myself.

Yet basically I was still the same as I had been when Bob was alive, only now I was sad and grieving. This made me question what I had actually lost when my husband died. Struggling with my pain and grief I had almost forgotten that I had gained my own individuality in analysis and had no longer felt defined by my marital status. What was so painful now, since my husband was no longer in my life, was not being able to share my feelings with him. I was missing the personal, intimate connection we had had to each other. I was grieving for the loss of the role I played in our marriage. I had lost the intimacy and the specialness this relationship had given me; I still miss it terribly. We had two children and had grown old together, we had shared years of our lives, we had benefited from learning from each other. We adjusted to each other without losing our uniqueness. I did not want to lose these treasures, but as a widow I could no longer find an expression of my feelings for Bob. I always wanted to talk about our lives together in order to keep these stories alive, to keep my connection to Bob alive. Still, when I started to feel sorry for myself I knew that I had lost my authentic self and had unconsciously become identified with an archetypal image of the poor old widow.

This experience has shown me how easily we lose ourselves by identifying with collective images. As such, the process of identifying with collective roles is normal. As children we sense what is expected of us and unconsciously take on the identity our parents and our peers bestow on us.

Before my analysis I had unconsciously adopted the role of the traditional wife and mother, a societal persona that made me feel “normal” and belonging to the community. “A persona,” Jung (1953b) claims, is “fundamentally . . . nothing real; it is a compromise between the individual and society as to what a man should appear to be” (p. 156).

Years later, when I was in analysis, I learned to distinguish between identifying with a role and “individuation, [that] is the development of the psychological individual as a differentiated being from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality” (1923/1953a, p. 561).

My move toward individuation meant shedding all the personas I had adopted during my life. Growing up in Vienna, Austria, I was taught that proper behavior and good appearance were more important than exposing one’s thoughts and feelings. I had learned to bury my feelings and cultivate the proper persona — first that of a young lady, which I then transferred to the role of being wife and mother. Coming from an upper-middle-class home, my sister and I were taught the importance of learning the proper behavior and duties of a good housewife in order to make our husbands proud of our upbringing. These roles were deeply ingrained in our psyche, blocking out any idea of being our authentic selves.

When I finally broke down under the stress of being somebody other than I actually was, my husband referred me to an analyst. One day, when our daughters were already young ladies, I realized with horror that I had been nothing but a puppy, performing roles instead of being a flesh-and-blood woman. While watching a home movie, taken at the time the children were still little, my attention went to the woman on the screen. She was playing with her two children — the perfect picture of a mother enjoying her daughters. The mother busied herself, placing one child on the swing, tossing a ball to the other. She was smiling, but her expression looked frozen. Who was this woman, I wondered? Did she actually enjoy playing with her daughters or was she only going through the motions of being a good mother?

I had not really been a happy mother, I had been a nervous one, concerned with raising my children “correctly.” Watching the film, I was overwhelmed with sadness. Where had I been while my children were growing up? I realized I had not been emotionally available to them, I had unconsciously identified with the role of the mother and had looked for everybody’s approval of my performance. After viewing the movie I wrote the following in my journal:

When a woman, emotionally still a child, enters a marriage and becomes a mother, she will give up being a child and take on the role of mother. She will mistrust her childish emotions which are connected with all the fantasy life, the irrationality, the naiveté, and the openness that is part of being a child. Not only will she mistrust it, she will look down upon all these qualities. Have they not become her negative shadow figures at the very moment when she took on the role of mother?

This insight changed my life and my relationship to my husband. I was now ready for what Jung (1954) calls a “conscious” psychological relationship, not playing roles, but being the woman I was meant of be by the grace of God. Without consciousness, Jung says, two people are related to each other but have no psychological relationship. The process of individuation is often painful, as Jung (1954) knows only too well. “Seldom or never does a marriage develop into an individual relationship smoothly and without crises. There is no birth of consciousness without pain” (p. 193).

Hera

When I was at this low place in my grieving process and had realized that I identified with the negative aspect of the widow archetype, I turned to Bolen who considers archetypes as powerful inner patterns, responsible for major differences among women. In *The Goddesses in Every Woman*, (1984) Bolen presented the psychology of women based on her Jungian understanding. In 2001, she made a special contribution to the older generation with *The Goddesses in Older Women*. In that text, her premise is that just as women are unconsciously affected by powerful cultural stereotypes, they are also unconsciously influenced by powerful patterns within themselves, the archetypes. She identifies these forces with personalities of ancient Greek goddesses and shows how they account for the diversity and complexity in women.

Bolen divides the Olympian goddesses into three categories: the virgin goddesses, the vulnerable goddesses, and the alchemical (or transformative) goddesses. The virgin goddesses represent the independent, self-sufficient quality in women, qualities found in the goddesses Artemis, Athena, and Hestia. The

vulnerable goddesses carry the traditional roles of wife, mother, and daughter: Hera, Demeter, and Persephone. The transformative goddess is Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, who motivates women to seek intensity rather than permanence in relationships, to value the creative process, and to open to the possibility of change.

These goddesses also influence women's relationships with men. Bolen (1984) believes that it is very helpful for a woman to know which one of these goddesses plays a predominant role in her life so that she can develop her "goddess-given" potential to the fullest:

When she knows which goddesses are dominant forces within her, a woman acquires self-knowledge about the strength of certain instincts, about priorities and abilities, about the possibilities of finding personal meaning through choices others might not encourage. . . . Every woman has "goddess-given" gifts to learn about and accept gratefully. Every woman also has "goddess-given" liabilities, which she must recognize and surmount in order to change. (p. 5)

As a wife, I considered myself a Hera type. I related to her in her role of wife and mother, and to her happiness with — and jealousy of — her husband Zeus. Today we are more familiar with Hera's rage and vengeance against Zeus for deceiving her when he seduced other goddesses as well as mortal women. However, what is less known is how blissfully fulfilled Hera was as Zeus's wife for the three hundred years before he became unfaithful to her.

I was delighted when I discovered that Hera, also represented the widow archetype. Bolen (2001) describes Hera as the triple goddess:

She was worshipped in the spring as Hera, the Virgin; in the summer as Hera the Fulfilled One; and in the winter as Hera the Widow. These aspects represented the three stages of a woman's life, and were reenacted symbolically. (p. 154)

In a footnote Bolen clarifies:

As Zeus's wife she is literally not a widow, but based on those times when she withdrew from Zeus in grief over his behavior, wrapped herself in deepest darkness, and wandered to the ends of the earth and the sea. Hera's rituals honored the phases of women's lives as maiden - wife - widow. (p. 154)

Reading this passage brought Hera back to me and I felt myself coming home to myself. When I became a widow I had forgotten the maiden and the wife aspects of my feminine nature and only identified with the widow. Now I realized that, like Hera, I hadn't lost these other parts of myself. Not only had I not lost these parts but I have come to know them much better, since I reconnected with the child in me and have gotten to appreciate the maiden, the free independent woman. Similar to Hera, all women have the ability to transform and renew themselves as they move from one phase to another.

Hestia

Another important archetype in widowhood is Hestia, the goddess of the hearth and temple. Widowhood creates a space for Hestia to enter. Her qualities are the most suited to the archetype of the widow. Hestia is the crone, introverted and wise. Hestia is the aspect of Hera who, Bolen (2001) says, "goes into hiding as the widow" (p. 154).

As a virgin goddess archetype, Hestia is "one in herself," meaning that she did not need anyone else to be complete, not a spouse, not a child, not a lover. . . . Sometimes Hestia comes into the psyche only after loss and grief lead a woman to discover the richness of an inner spiritual life or the sweetness of peace and quiet. (p. 65)

Hestia comes into our lives as the "archetype of meaning" when we no longer need to please others or consider the needs of others as the center of our lives. Bolen (2001) admits that in our extroverted society the Hestia archetype does not get the credit it deserves:

When Hestia is the predominant archetype throughout a woman's life, she may feel out of step and inadequate, unless she develops other aspects of herself as well, or until she sees and honors who she inwardly truly is and finds a place where she can be herself in the world, or finally comes into her own in her older years. (p. 62)

We all have an extroverted and introverted side; however, our society does not value introversion, but encourages us to be busy and to lose ourselves in the collective, even in old age. Yet old age is a time to simplify our life, a time to find comfort in our inner house, a time to center ourselves.

In our extroverted society, there is a tendency to think that there is something wrong when one does not feel "up to par" and prefers to be alone rather than to socialize. Hestia ensures me that it is perfectly appropriate for me to stay home, if I so desire.

Later, when I became more authentic and less dependent on others for wholeness, I learned to appreciate Artemis. She is one of the virgin goddesses of the Greek pantheon, who, as Bolen (1984) points out, symbolizes the woman who is one-in-herself. "If a woman is one-in-herself, she will be motivated by a need to follow her own inner values, to do what has meaning or fulfills herself, apart from what other people think" (p. 36). Instead of suffering from feeling incomplete without a husband, the woman in touch with Artemis in herself can feel whole within herself even though she is alone.

The Spiritual Path

Moving from grief, loss and abandonment to reintegration and wholeness is a journey of the soul, the discovery and creation of a spiritual path. Lama Surya Das (2003) comments on different ways people react to loss:

Some men and women respond to suffering and personal pain by becoming hardened, constricted and embittered; they become more self-centered and less aware of the pain experienced by the rest of the world. But those who are wiser and more spiritually evolved respond differently. They are able to view their losses more realistically. They get past numbness and despair; they get past bitterness; they get past their initial “Why me?” reaction. Even though bad things continue to happen to them and those they love, they choose to walk the spiritual path in search of meaning and inner wisdom amid the madness. (pp. 14-15)

My own spiritual path started when I was a child. I sensed that there was more to life than the limitations society imposed on me. There was a whole world beyond the confines of my father and our apartment in Vienna. I often sat on the windowsill of my room watching the traffic and the many people on the streets below, wondering who they were and where they may be going. I felt separate from the outer world, but had an active imagination and valued my inner world which, since age fourteen, I have documented in my journals. Metzger (1992), a feminist writer, encourages journal writing as a spiritual practice, making a path through our emotions:

Being on a path is often likened to fording a difficult river or climbing a mountain. . . . Following the creative is a path, but it is not a known path. It has to be carved out by each individual practitioner. There is a practice, but its particular rituals are mysterious and unique, and again each practitioner must discover them for herself. (p. 186)

I had always thought that being on a spiritual path meant searching for God, but I have learned that a spiritual path means subjugating the ego to the authority of the Self, trusting the divine within. It is not searching for a divine path but making a path with the help of the divine. In the case of widowhood, once again there is no path to follow, we have to make our own way through our grief. As Epstein (1999) says:

People speak of being “on the path” as if it were clear where it starts and stops. . . . The spiritual path means *making* a path rather than following one. It is a very personal process, unique to each individual. . . . In building a path through the self to the far shore of awareness, we have to carefully pick our way through our own wilderness. (pp. 118-119)

Epstein compares such a journey to that of Buddha, who “had to leave all of his relationships and go deeply inside himself to confront his own separateness” (1999, p. 118). We don’t plan such journeys, we do not prepare for them, but suddenly we find ourselves lost, facing the unknown, and all we know is that we cannot will our way out of the wilderness but must ask for guidance from the Self, the soul, the psyche, the center within ourselves. Romanyshyn (1999) describes such a journey beautifully:

It is a description of the winter landscapes of the soul, that far country where I found myself after an unexpected, sudden, and shattering loss. In this landscape there really are no maps, no markers to plot the course of grief. Here I was forced to find my own way. (p. 6)

Baker (1999) transmits the way a widow spoke of the journey she had to take:

There is no timetable for grief, and the journey is filled with peaks and valleys. Just when you feel you are getting better a fresh wave of pain pulls you back. Finding ongoing ways to honor your loved one, experience the grief, and still carry on with life can be difficult. (p. 25)

When Bolen (1994) was facing a passage from one stage in her life to another, she wrote the following:

This is a time of liminality for me, of a passage from one part of my life to another, when I am venturing psychologically out beyond “my known world,” heeding a call to live my life more authentically even as it puts me in conflict with uncertainty. (p. 4)

The death of a loved one usually forces us to seek something larger than our little egos. Keen (1994) believes that today it is not only the loss of a loved one that engenders such a search but that in general many people feel an

emptiness, a longing for something to surrender to. “The spiritual craving of our time is triggered by the perennial human need to connect with something that transcends the fragile self, to surrender to something larger and more lasting than our brief moment in history” (p. xviii). Before we can start on such a spiritual journey, Keen says, we must be willing to “[peel] away the myths and illusions that have misinformed us” (p. xxii). We must let go of preconceived ideas and judgments of ourselves and the world around us. We must face our past history and consciously face the unknown ahead.

What we do on such a journey is soul-making, deepening our experiences, playing with ideas, asking questions, gaining new insights, always knowing that the path is more important than the goal of our journey. Hillman (1975) reminds us that ideas — archetypal ideas — belong to the realm of psyche:

True psychological ideas circulate within a psychic field, arising from the psyche and returning to it. They self-reflect. That is their internality and is what gives them their ability to interiorize events. An event that is psychologized is immediately internalized, it returns to the soul. . . . Archetypal ideas are rather like mythical fantasies, so psychologizing by means of them is a fantasizing activity, seeing into things and speculating about them by means of fantasies. (pp. 117-118)

Psychologizing is a process of *interiorizing*. “Moving from the surface of visibility to the less visible, it is a process of deepening; moving from data of impersonal events to their personification, it is a process of subjectivizing” (Hillman, 1975, p. 140). Psychologizing is seeing through our fantasies; they draw us into the world of mythology and thus into the world of antiquity. Hillman (1979) further explains: “Mythology is a psychology of antiquity. Psychology is a mythology of modernity. . . . We seek to reflect back and forth between the two,

myth and psyche, using them to provide insights for each other, preventing either from being taken on its own terms only” (pp. 23-24).

By deepening my experience and my understanding of widowhood, I found a world of fantasy or mythologems helping me to find the strength within myself to face life without my husband. I also realized that I had been under the socially dictates that a woman was not supposed to live alone. She was supposed to be married and depend on her husband, or if not married, depend on her father for guidance and support.

I had suffered under the control and the restraint of my domineering father, but I had kept quiet and considered suffering a virtue. Christ had suffered, I reminded myself; Mary had suffered; suffering deepens the soul. Later I realized that my father, too, must have suffered, himself a victim of the masculine value system of the patriarchal culture.

The archetypal aspect of Jung’s depth psychology helped me to go beyond my personal experience to a more transpersonal or collective one. The grief I was feeling for the loss of my husband was not “my” grief, but that of all other widows and of humanity as such. My spiritual, or soul-making, journey was not to deny my grief and suffering, but to develop a new attitude toward it. Rather than passively accepting suffering as inevitable, I have learned that it can lead into the very core of the soul, where the opposites are complimentary rather than in opposition to each other.

On the path I created through my widowhood, I discovered that I was not abandoned by my husband, but that I had abandoned myself, not owning my own potential and instead depending during his lifetime on his strength and love in

order to feel whole and complete. I now knew that, just as archetypal forces and images caused me to fear and shun the role of the widow, other archetypal imago, particularly those of the goddesses Hera and Hestia would restore my sense of place in the world.

The Stages of Life

Jung (1960) saw life as a whole, an energy process, leading from one phase or stage in our lives to another. He related these stages to the pattern of the sun, rising in the morning and setting at night. He also compares these stages to the developmental process of consciousness:

The first stage of consciousness, consisting in merely recognizing or “knowing,” is an anarchic or chaotic state. The second, that of the developed ego-complex, is monarchic or monistic. The third brings another step forward in consciousness, and consists in an awareness of the divided, or dualistic state. (p. 391)

The first stage of consciousness, the early morning, is in childhood, when what we see and what we perceive are still undifferentiated. By noon, the sun has reached its highest place in its orbit; the ego is well developed and the young adult finds himself or herself entrenched in personal attitudes and social positions. Soon the sun begins to sink to the horizon and our preconceived ideas of what life is supposed to be become less clear. It is a time to question whether what we have achieved is all there is to life. For some of us, money, social position, and material goods seem insufficient, and a mid-life crisis offers a re-evaluation of our values and goals. It is a time to question the deeper meaning of our lives. We have established ourselves in the community as productive and successful citizens; we

have learned to please others, but we begin to wonder if we are actually fulfilling our own destiny, paying attention to our own higher needs.

As the sun is setting, we withdraw to our homes, to the warmth of our inner fire, discovering value systems that are incongruent with the striving and accumulation of material goods. This is the time when the psyche is asking for attention; we turn inward, to the spiritual and psychological realm of our nature. This does not mean that we deny our attraction for material goods. Just the contrary. We learn to appreciate more what we have, but become less attached to the outer world. "Aging people should know," says Jung (1960) "that their lives are not mounting and expanding, but that an inexorable inner process enforces the contraction of life" (p. 399).

Life is an energy-process. Like every energy-process, it is in principle irreversible and is therefore directed towards a goal. That goal is a state of rest . . . the goal no longer lies on the summit, but in the valley where the ascent began. The curve of life is like the parabola of a projectile which, disturbed from its initial state of rest, rises and then returns to a state of repose. (pp. 405-406)

The significance of the morning undoubtedly lies in the development of the individual, our entrenchment in the outer world, the propagation and care of our children. The evening of life must also have a significance of its own, and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning and noontime. And so old age, too, has its place in our earthly existence. In *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* Jung (1965) writes:

In old age one begins to let memories unroll before the mind's eye and, musing, to recognize oneself in the inner and outer images of the past. . . . The inner images keep me from getting lost in personal retrospection. Many old people become too involved in their reconstruction of past events. They remain imprisoned in these memories. But if it is reflective and is translated into images, retrospection can be a *reculer pour mieux*

sauter [stepping back in order to jump further ahead]. I try to see the line which leads through my life into the world, and out of the world again.
(p. 320)

Old age is a time to step back and reflect upon our lives. The older we are the more expansive is the view of the past, the clearer the vision of the meaning of our lives. We have to step back in order to see the whole, to understand the thread that guides us on our spiritual path.

Chapter 4: Marriage

The Traditional Role of the Wife

For thousands of years the traditional role of the woman was limited to that of wife and mother. However, since women have liberated themselves from the yoke of the patriarchy, they have many more choices and are able to make rich and interesting lives for themselves. Older women, too, have been affected by these changing roles. Widows no longer need to withdraw to their homes or simply devote themselves to their children and grandchildren. They now explore many other options for interesting and exciting lives.

Yet old notions die hard, and for many older women the idea that a woman needs a man to take care of her is so deeply ingrained in their psyche that they have difficulty overcoming this long standing social/cultural myth. Unlike the younger generation, older women often find it more difficult to trust themselves to make a new life as a single woman. To appreciate the persistence of the myth that women cannot survive without a man we must understand the messages women have been given about their place in marriage and the world. The roles assigned to women go back a long way.

During the agricultural era, brides and grooms did not enter marriage with the expectation of loving each other as we understand the term today. Instead, marriages were arranged by others and were mainly for the purpose of procreation. James (1952) explains about that era:

Marriage was primarily a “public” institution rooted and grounded in society because the propagation of life is essentially a communal rather than just an individual concern. . . . The tasks allotted to women are usually connected with the home, the rearing of children and the

cultivation of the soil, and in her prescribed sphere of activity in the domestic group the wife generally has an assured position which gives her a measure of independence and authority. (pp. 54-55)

Marriage meant security for women, even though by today's standards we would consider many of these women as abused, being treated more like slaves than wives. Yalom (2001) describes the traditional role of the wife:

Once married, a bride was obliged by law and custom to obey her husband — a requirement so fundamental to the biblical idea of a wife that it remained in most Jewish and Christian wedding vows until the late twentieth century. . . . After all, wives were considered a husband's "property," alongside his cattle and his slaves. And above all, a wife would have been consumed by the need to produce a son, for only as the mother of a son would she have been fully honored in her new family. (p. 4)

Yalom (2001) explains that even though the woman was considered man's "property," he was obligated by law to take care of her, together with his animals and slaves. This was also true for other cultures as well, where the head of the house, the patriarch, was responsible for the whole household. In Latin the word *familia* stands for the whole household, including slaves and animals.

Among the ancient Hebrews, married couples were held in high esteem. The most important task for the couples was procreation. Men were encouraged to have sexual relations with women other than their wives — slaves, concubines or mistresses — because children often did not survive beyond childhood. Moreover, the woman's role as childbearer was so important that, as Yalom (2001) cites, "When a woman who had no children lost her husband, her dead husband's brother was expected to marry her to give her seed" (p. 6).

What was of utmost importance for both Jews and Christians was motherhood. The *Dictionary of the Bible* (Hastings, 1963) claims that

childbearing was the most important achievement of a woman and brought happiness to her.

Throughout the Bible a noteworthy characteristic is the importance and happiness assigned to the possession of children, and correspondingly, the intense sorrow and disappointment of childless parents. Children were regarded as Divine gifts, pledges of God's favor, the heritage of the Lord. It follows naturally that barrenness was looked upon as a reproach, i.e. a punishment inflicted by God, and involving for the woman, disgrace in the eyes of the world. (p. 134)

Men's Fear of Women

Religious tradition provided one avenue for defining women's role. But where did this tradition come from? Since men created the traditions, we must examine men's relationship to women. Men seem to be driven by a difficulty in accepting women's nature that was so alien to their own. They did not understand that the feminine principle operates differently from the masculine consciousness. The masculine principle, what the Chinese call the *yang*, strives toward the light of the sun, whereas the feminine principle, or *yin*, is affected by the light of the moon. Woodman (1990) describes it as follows:

Women's nature is earthbound, comfortable in the darkness of the night, because of their moon consciousness. Silver is the metal of the moon and because women's biology is connected to the moon, silver is associated with the feminine. The luminous glow of moonlight lacks the sharp clarity of sunlight, but its gentleness unfolds, synthesizes, brings together as one. Feelings and intuitions that remain hidden from the sun surface in moonlight. They flower into love, poetry, music. (p. 115)

As early as the ancient Greeks, men feared women because of their dark, earthy nature. They did not understand it. In *Plato's dialogues* (Jowett, Trans., 1937) we learn that men did not trust women and thought them to be strange

creatures: “Women should be drawn into the light of day, and not be left to themselves. . . . For women are accustomed to creep into dark places” (p. 540).

Lederer (1968) confirms that man’s fear of women is related to “the otherness of woman, the particular mystery by which she manages to bleed and to transform blood into babies, and food into milk, and to be apparently so self-sufficient and unapproachable in all of it” (p. 34). For centuries, men were told not to have contact with women who were menstruating. “A menstruating woman is regarded as a being with whom all contact, however innocent, would entail dreadful consequences” (Briffault, 1963, p. 238). During the Middle Ages men thought that women of all ages could be bewitched, and that motherhood could prevent their witchiness: “Something about the child-rearing function [that] seemed to dim both the dangerous and the beneficent magical powers” (Lederer, p. 200).

During the matriarchy, menstruation was considered sacred; it was the initiation to womanhood for the young female. According to Neumann (1955):

The transformation from girl to woman is far more accentuated than the corresponding development from boy to man. Menstruation, the first blood transformation mystery in woman, is in every respect a more important incident than the first emission of sperm in the male. The latter is seldom remembered, while the beginning of menstruation is everywhere rightly regarded as a fateful moment in the life of a woman. (p. 31)

During the patriarchy, we referred to the woman’s monthly blood as a *curse*. Such negativity can affect the self-esteem of young girls and may lead to pathological consequences later in their life.

Thompson (1949/1967) tells us that Freud considered women inferior to men because their biological functions were so different from those of men.

Therefore, he felt woman’s position in society should also differ. According to

Thompson, Freud had a distaste for women's biology and he explains Freud's thoughts this way:

Menstruation, pregnancy and the menopause can bring to a woman certain hazards of which there is no comparable difficulty in the male biology. . . . [Freud] believed that all inferiority feelings of women had their root in her biological inadequacies. . . . According to this theory woman has a lasting feeling of inferiority because she has no penis. . . . She must go through life with the feeling either that she was "born short". . . or that something terrible had happened to her: possibly as a punishment. (p. 131)

It is hard to believe that the very same man who opened the doors to our innermost feelings and thoughts would, as late as the 20th century, consider women inferior beings and assign the blame to their biology.

At the same time that men were intimidated by the power of the woman, they were also fascinated by her otherness and in awe of it. Lederer (1968) admits that men need women:

We have forgotten, or tried to forget, how much we are in awe of women's biological functions. . . . Whereas in truth — and this we try to forget — we need her, and depend on her altogether: for she is the shipyard in which we are built, and the harbor that is our base and strength, and the territory we live to defend, and she is the hearth and the salvation from the dumb misery of the beast and from the icy loneliness of the mind. (p. 282)

In a recent op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, "Men Just Want Mommy," Maureen Dowd (2005) contemplates why men prefer old-fashioned wives rather than strong and independent women. Dowd refers to a variety of movies showing how men prefer less glamorous and clever women rather than the bright and beautiful ones. She cites a study done at four British universities that claims that "a high IQ hampers a woman's chance to get married, while it is a plus for men. The prospect for marriage increased by 35 percent for guys for each 16-point increase in IQ; for women, there is a 40 percent drop for each 16-point rise" (p.

A35). It seems as if men marry women of a lower IQ because these women are more likely to play the role of mommy for them. We hope the time will come when strong women will no longer be a threat to men but a catalyst for their own strength.

Marriage Benefits Men More Than Women

It seems that, in this culture, men benefit more from marriage than women do. Could it be possible that men kept women innocent, helpless, and dependent on them in order to secure their own need to have the woman all for themselves at home? Women have questioned the institution of marriage and the uneven power balance within it. Yalom (2001) recounts the example of Mona Caird, who, inspired by feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and by the reformer John Stuart Mill, published an article entitled “Marriage” in the British quarterly, *Westminster Review*, in 1888. According to Yalom, Caird’s article suggests “that women had been kept in subjection for centuries because it suited men’s purposes, and that marriage was the primary institution by which women continued to be held in bondage” (p. 268).

Traditionally, husbands are older than their wives; this, coupled with their greater risk of dying from work accidents, fights, soldiering, and other causes, makes them more likely to die before their wives do. When they survive a wife, Ginsburg (1995) shows, “five times as many men over fifty are likely to remarry than women over fifty” (p. 117). Two conclusions can be drawn from this fact alone: men prefer not to be alone, and men need women in their lives. Because men tend to marry women younger than they are, older women who are single

through divorce or widowhood have less chance of remarrying — and may have less desire to do so.

Why Did Mothers Not Warn Their Daughters?

I wonder why mothers did not discourage their daughters from marrying when marriage was as oppressive as it seems to a twenty-first-century woman? Since women had few choices outside of marriage, they often found an escape from the dreariness of their confinement to their homes in mindless and self-defeating competitions with other women as to who was the best dressed, the best hostess, the best cook, best housekeeper, etc. Women were encouraged in this pursuit by the popular culture of the day, through magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Home and Gardens*. To this day, there are men and women who are more concerned with their public image than with wanting meaningful and intimate relationships with each other.

Perhaps mothers did not want to admit that married life was not what it was supposed to be because they could not admit to being unhappy wives. Yalom (2001) explains, “Wives were seen as key to the success or failure not only of their children, but also of their marriages. If a marriage went bad, it was primarily her fault, not his” (p. 362). Women often accepted such judgments and blamed themselves for the unhappiness in their marriage. Besides, for women to admit that they were abused or that there could be anything wrong with their marriages could be construed as the failure of the woman to please her husband.

There may be another reason that women accepted their fate quietly, patiently suffering their submissive place in the patriarchy. I suggest that the Pieta, the virgin Mary, mourning over the dead Christ, is one of the most

beautiful, most painful images of a loving mother. Women were supposed to suffer. I grew up in a Catholic country, where suffering was considered a virtue. I was taught self-denial, sacrificing my own pleasure for that of others. I was assured that one day God would reward me for my suffering. It was a kind of flagellation or masochism. Lynn Cowan, (1982) in her study on that subject, quotes Krafft-Ebbing, who claims that “masochism is a pathological growth of specific *feminine* psychological characteristics, the ‘determining marks’ of which are suffering, subjection to the will of others, and to force” (p. 13).

How could mothers warn their daughters not to get married when the life of a single woman was even worse than being married ? I already mentioned in my introduction that women had no choice but to marry, since single women were less respected than married ones and still depended on others for their survival.

Chapter 5: The Changing Role of the Woman

The Liberation of the Feminine

It was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that women organized themselves and seriously questioned marriage and motherhood. Yalom (2001) recounts some of that history. In 1792, the British writer Mary Wollstonecraft protested women being deprived of their educational rights in *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Several novelists in England expressed resentment at the idea of being given into marriage by their fathers. In 1848, women — primarily married women — met at Seneca Falls, New York to challenge their role in marriage. Yalom writes:

The group led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony saw the existing institution of marriage as a form of bondage for women similar to the institution of slavery. . . . By the 1850s the marriage-equals-slavery rhetoric was commonplace among reformers speaking out against the unfair distribution of power in marriage. (p. 194)

Yalom (2001) notes that it was not much later when Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* was first performed in 1879, and society was shocked when its heroine, Nora, sets out to leave her home and her family. When her husband reminds her that she has a sacred duty to him and her children, Nora responds: "I have another duty just as sacred, my duty to myself. . . . I believe that before everything, I am a thinking human being just as you are — or at any rate, that I must try to become one" (as cited in Yalom, 2001, p. 113). Nora became an inspiration of the feminine liberation movement. There was no doubt that it was only a matter of time before women were going to reject the role of the helpless, dependent woman.

An important event in Western history made it possible for women to liberate themselves from the yoke of the patriarchy. During World War II, women were introduced to the workplace outside of their homes and they — and the rest of the culture — discovered how well they did jobs previously held only by men. After the war, some refused to stay home; they had discovered an alternative to the dissatisfaction of their traditional role.

While the traditional wife who submerged her identity into that of her husband may no longer represent a viable model for most women, Americans are not giving up on wifehood. Instead, they are straining to create more perfect unions on the basis of their new status as co-earners and their husbands' fledgling status as co-homemakers. I suspect that the death of the "little women" will not be grieved by the multitude, even if society must endure severe birth pangs in producing the new wife. (Yalom 2001, p. 400)

Women did not grieve for the death of the "little woman." However, men did not let their women work without a last attempt to keep them home. According to Fisher (1992), the 1950s were the most unusual years in our society. Even though women had thrived working outside of the home during World War II, once the men came home, the "little woman" was expected to throw herself back into the role of mother and housewife. Hollywood and the media reinforced these efforts by printing a glorious picture of the perfect family life.

Did women really love going back to motherhood as their main occupation or did they pose an economic threat to men coming back from the war? Fisher (1992) points out that women must have been a threat to men because "Women's magazines warned brides of the dangers of mixing work with motherhood. Psychiatrists described women with careers as struggling with 'penis envy.' And social critics proclaimed that mothering and keeping house were women's natural roles" (p. 295).

Yet behind the perfect Rockwellian image of family life manufactured for mass consumption lurked women's desire to break out of the box the patriarchy had built for them. "Between 1960 and 1983 the number of working women doubled. . . . Between 1966 and 1976 the divorce rate doubled too" (Fisher, 1992, p. 296).

It was soon after the war that Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking book, *The Second Sex*, published in France in 1949 and translated into English in 1953, found its way to America. One of the prominent leaders of the feminist movement, de Beauvoir (1949/1989), suggested that marriage was a tragedy:

The tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure women promised happiness — there is no such thing as assurance in regard to her happiness — but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine. . . . Real activities, real work, are the prerogative of her man; she has mere things to occupy her which are sometimes tiring but never satisfying. (p. 478)

De Beauvoir (1949/1989) questioned not only marriage but also motherhood. Was it really the crowning glory of every woman? She claimed otherwise, especially for women who were unhappy in their traditional roles:

[It is] criminal to recommend having a child as a remedy for melancholia or neurosis; that means the unhappiness of both, mother and child. Only the woman who is well balanced, healthy, and aware of her responsibilities is capable of being a "good" mother. . . . not every child is happiest in the arms of his or her mother. (pp. 522-523)

Finally, the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* heralded the end of an era and the beginning of the new woman in the United States — a sexual, sensuous individual. Friedan, like Caird over one hundred years earlier in Britain, described a pernicious system that continued to subjugate women. But unlike the times one hundred years earlier, there were more choices for women, and Friedan urged women to take them.

This was the beginning of a shift in our perception of womanhood. In the meantime, the development of the birth control pill in the early 1960s meant that women were no longer confined to child bearing. Since it was possible for women to avoid pregnancy, they were free to explore their sexuality, free from the Victorian belief that they had no sex drive themselves but were to serve as a means to reduce men's stress level. — Women were supposed to find pleasure and fulfillment through motherhood. Yalom (2001) describes Victorian thinking: “Woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband's embrace, but principally to gratify him” (p. 183). Since then, women have debunked this myth and are redefining themselves. But it has left scars on women's self-esteem.

Adolescence — A Special Time to Grow Up

Though women have rebelled against the role they had been burdened with during past centuries, they have not rejected marriage altogether. However, they want a different role in it. It seems that the new generation of women and men are delaying marriage in order to discover their own selfhood before taking on the responsibility of adulthood. Ganahl, in an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of December 19, 2004, writes:

According to a just-released census study, the number of never-married people in their early 30s has quadrupled since 1970. That year, only 6 percent of women 30 - 34 had never been married, compared to 23 percent last year. The number of unmarried men has also increased from 9 percent in 1970 to 33 percent in 2003. (2004, M7)

The reason for this decline is given in an interesting article by Grossman (2005) that shows that the new generation of young people delay their transition from adolescence to adulthood. They are called “twixters,” because they are

betwixt and between these two stages in their development, stalling for a few extra years before having to become responsible adults. I had been critical of the American adolescent mentality because I considered the young irresponsible, refusing to grow up. But I am coming to the conclusion that it is an important stage that had not been respected in former times. Whereas young people used to rush into marriage without having experienced any free time after leaving their parents' home, now, according to the article, the reason for stalling is not "that they don't take adulthood seriously; they take it so seriously they're spending years carefully choosing the right path into it" (p. 44).

In his article, Grossman refers to a study by Arnett, a developmental psychologist at the University of Maryland, who favors what he calls "emerging adulthood."

This is the one time in their lives when they're not responsible for anyone else or to anyone else. So they have this wonderful freedom to really focus on their own lives and work on becoming the kind of person they want to be. (as cited in Grossman, 2005, p. 44)

According to Arnett: "They're not just looking for a job. They want something that's more like a calling, that's going to be an expression of their identity" (as cited in Grossman, 2005, p. 46). This attitude seems to be not pure idealism, but a pragmatism based on new economic realities, since the "annual earnings among men 25 to 34 with full-time jobs has dropped 17 percent from 1971 to 2002, according to the National Center for Education Statistic" (p. 48). Arnett believes that twixters simply can't afford to marry and become adults. However, instead of marrying, young people today have the gift of making friends and creating a support system that is a family of friends.

One can also think of widowhood as being a “late adolescent” period for the woman who never had the luxury to experience such freedom before in her life. It is important to recognize the value of such freedom; it is not wasting time, but it is a special time when the individual can get to know herself better.

Mothers’ Daughters

Spretnak (1982), a feminist, a professor, and writer who explores women’s spirituality, points out how women learned to depreciate themselves because of the patriarchal mindset:

We were raised with the patriarchal message that women are limited and incomplete beings — that we cannot comprehend the deeply spiritual or intellectual aspects of life, that we cannot exist without dependence, that we cannot defend ourselves physically, that we are partially incapacitated by our monthly “curse” — in short that we fully deserve being considered “the other.” We have discovered that these premises are false. (p. 247)

Erica Jong (1994), in *Fear of Fifty*, notes that she learned to be self-deprecating because she was raised by a mother who put herself down most of her life. Jong feared that she was between emulating/following and rejecting her mother:

Womanhood was a trap. If I was too much like her I’d be trapped as she was. But if I rejected her example, I’d be a traitor to her love. I felt a fraud no matter which way I turned. I had to find a way to be like and unlike her at the same time. I had to find a way to be both, a girl and a boy. (p. 28)

Girls were not supposed to be successful, only boys were allowed to study and have careers. Jong wished her mother could have enjoyed her life. In the end of the book, Jong (1994) prays for her mother to find happiness so that she can be happy. “If she will only embrace her life with joy, then so can I. I feel that all my

life I have tortured myself because I feel she has been tortured. All my life, I have suffered because somehow I sense she wants it that way” (p. 321).

Fear of Fifty is a wonderful example of how women have had to fight against the prejudices and preconceived ideas of the masculine value system imposed on them for thousands of years. How could these mothers initiate their daughters to a life other than the one they had experienced? In that restricted system, it was the men who held independence, authority, and power; therefore, it would be up to fathers to teach these traits to their daughters.

Fathers’ Daughters

Though mothers may not be able to help their daughters go beyond the limited role of wife and mother, fathers can. When a woman has a positive experience in her relationship to her father, he can initiate her into womanhood. How is this possible? Samuels (1985), a Jungian analyst, explains that when the erotic element between father and daughter is experienced within a safe environment, the relationship has the potential to initiate the girl into adulthood.

This gives [the father] his potential to stimulate an expansion and a deepening of her personality. . . . But what if this eroticized relation fails to take place? Then the father cannot, as it were, initiate his daughter into the next stage of her development, for she will be too distant from him for their relationship to have a profound effect on her. (p. 31)

By differentiating herself from the father, she becomes aware of her own sexuality. The father-daughter relationship is rather complex because of the strict incest taboo connected to it. Young females often develop in their early years a close and intimate relationship with their father; however, this relationship changes once the daughter enters puberty and physically changes into a woman.

Fathers have difficulty dealing with their sexual arousal and often withdraw from their daughters at that time. Some women can be wounded by their father's rejection at the time they develop breasts and their bodies change. Suddenly the father become critical of his daughter's clothes and her overtly affectionate behavior to him.

The young woman senses her father's attraction, however cannot understand why the father is withdrawing from her. She is too young to deal with her sexuality and is inclined to feel ashamed and dirty. Yet when a father can trust the incest taboo and remains open to his loving feeling toward his daughter, he is helping her to open up to her sexuality. Searles (1965), a psychiatrist, struggled with his feelings toward his seductive young daughter and came to the conclusion that, as her father, he had to embrace her charming self in order to help her accept her femininity:

Toward my daughter, now eight years of age, I have experienced innumerable fantasies and feelings of a romantic-love kind, thoroughly complementary to the romantically adoring, seductive behavior which she has shown toward her father often times ever since she was about two or three years of age. . . . I came to the conviction, some time ago, that such moments of relatedness could only be nourishing for her developing personality as well as delightful to me. If a little girl cannot feel herself able to win the heart of her father, how can the young woman who comes later have deep confidence in the power of her womanliness. (p. 296)

Not only does it help the daughter to experience her sexuality embraced by the father, but it is also important for the father not to repress his erotic feelings toward her. Otherwise he can become rigid and controlling, blindly following traditional rules without questioning them. He will unconsciously take on the role of the patriarchal father, forcing his wife and daughters into their traditional submissive roles.

The Anima-Type Woman

On the other hand, if, as Jung proposes, a woman identifies too strongly with the love goddess she is in danger of taking on the projection of man's soul, *the anima*, sacrificing her own individuality. This woman does not develop her own uniqueness; wanting to please her man, she becomes what he wants her to be. Jung (1964), refers to these women as "anima-type" women: "The most striking feature of the anima-type is that the maternal element is entirely lacking. She is the companion and friend in her favorable aspect, in her unfavorable aspect she is the courtesan" (p. 39). I understand her to be also the muse, the *femme inspiratrice* in her positive function and the prostitute in her negative one.

The claim that the anima-type woman lacks the mothering instinct limits all women. If a woman feels forced to take on one role or the other, she is not able to experience both sides of her nature. Since I was the motherly type, I considered the anima-type my shadow figure and I resented Jung from making a distinction between these two aspects of the feminine. It meant that mothers cannot be sexual beings.

In my opinion this is not only destructive to women, but also burdens the man with the dilemma of having to choose one type of woman or the other. They often live within the tension of two loves, the love for their wives and their yearning for the *anima*, the love goddess or the image of the feminine within man.

When I grew up, it was understood that men needed sex more than women and therefore it was taken for granted that married men would have mistresses or seek out prostitutes. It was called the Mary-Magdalene or Mary-prostitute complex. Even Jung had two women, Emma, his wife and mother of his five

children, and Toni Wolff, his *femme inspiritrice*, companion, or whatever else she was for him. Emma and Toni often attended lectures together. It was so common at that time for husbands of middle class or upper middle class families to have mistresses, that nobody commented on it.

As long as the woman is identified with either role, the wife and mother or the anima type women, she can never be truly free and independent. In both cases she has to sacrifice one aspect of her feminine nature. Only when the woman embraces both sides, her mothering instinct and her sexuality, can she achieve wholeness. Only then can she be free to choose the life she wants to lead, whether to live independently or with others.

The New-Age or *Hetaira*-Type Woman

In ancient Greek the word for a free, unattached woman was the courtesan or *hetaira*. Bolen (1984) describes this type of woman as follows: “She was educated, cultured, and unusually free for a woman of those days . . . a type of woman whose relationship with men had both erotic and companionship qualities” (p. 230). Stein (1990) describes her as “an aspect of the feminine related to the free, wild, independent, youthful, unspoiled nature spirit that has no interest in merging with the man. For the Greeks this aspect was reflected in the virgin goddess Artemis” (p. 46). In Japan, the Geisha is such a woman.

The *hetaira* is not an empty woman like the anima-type, who is open to carry the projection of a man, but is rooted in her own reality. I would call the new-age women *hetaira* types. They are strong, independent women, reluctant to commit themselves to marriage. They enjoy their freedom; they are not ashamed of their bodies. If they had good relationships with their fathers, they are not

afraid of their femininity, nor of their intellect, having inherited the masculine *logos* from their fathers. However, if the father represses his sexual attraction for his daughter, he may be driven to literally commit incest with his daughter.

Samuels (1985) relates:

The father's failure to participate in a mutual attraction and mutual, painful renunciation of erotic fulfillment with his daughter deprives her of psychological enhancement. This can take many forms: mockery of her sexuality, over-strictness, indifference — and, if the symbolic dimension is savagely repressed, actual incest. (p. 31)

I have shown how over the last decades attitudes toward women have changed and how women have moved from a state of dependency on their husbands to a more individuated, independent place in our society. Many widowed mothers have learned from their daughters that they too can make choices and are no longer forced into one role or the other. They too can relate to the Artemis or *hetaira* type of a woman, independent and *belonging to no man*. She does not merge with the man but is free to have a loving and intimate relationship with him. She no longer needs to be completed by her husband but has found wholeness within herself.

Unfortunately it is more difficult for men to become whole within themselves because our society, based predominately on a masculine value system, does not encourage them to develop a relationship to their inner woman, to their emotional side. Men may find it difficult to enter into a loving and caring relationship with the *hetaira-type* woman, because they are less likely to be willing to satisfy their emotional needs for a connection to their own soul. Instead of going deeper into their feelings, most men reach for the heavens, strive for the

light, instead of looking into the darkness of their souls and the depth of their unconscious.

Regardless of what type of woman the widow is and what her relationship to her husband was, when she loses him she loses the role she played in her marriage. Perhaps she was a father's daughter but was unable to live out her *hetaira* side because it was unacceptable during the patriarchy. If she was a mother's daughter she had to struggle to go beyond the consciousness of her mother, separating herself from an important source of love and care.

Yet the patriarchy was not only negative. Even though women were in a submissive role as wife and mother, they may have enjoyed a rich life within an extended family. Today, however, there is often no place for her in what we call "nuclear" families consisting only of parents and children. Within such a setting the couple is burdened with more duties and a greater dependency on each other. Many widows feel that in their circumstances they would be an additional burden to their children and decide to live by themselves, feeling rejected but at the same time freer to have an independent life.

This makes widowhood such a special time for a woman, when she can finally express herself and heal the wounds caused by the masculine rule of the patriarchy. She may enjoy a second adolescence and become a crone, whom Bolen (2001) calls "juicy women" (p. 19). In former times this word used to have a negative connotation. According to the *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Skeat, 1961) crone is related to the word *carrion*, meaning putrefying flesh, a carcass. *Carrion* is similar to the French word *carone*, meaning an old worn-out horse. It surely is a contemptuous term for old women, that we have to

revise and re-imagine. Today we are proud to be called crones, meaning wise old women with the free spirit of an adolescent.

A few years after my husband died, I experienced a powerful feeling of wholeness that I had never felt before in my life. I was very excited and wrote: *Widowhood is a time for the culmination of my life-long search for wholeness.* In the process of exploring the Biblical role of women I have changed from being a traditional wife and mother to a free-spirited woman. I have become conscious of the dependency I experienced in my marriage and have come to appreciate my newly found independence. I have learned that the woman can only be whole and complete when she is conscious of the many opposites within her nature and when she no longer identifies with societal and cultural roles but lovingly embraces all phases of womanhood: the maiden, the wife, and the widow.

Initiation Rituals

In their wholeness women are maidens, wives and widows, and it is important to mark the transition from one state of being to the next. In primitive societies initiation rituals facilitated such passages. The most common initiation rites in most cultures are at puberty as a way of helping the adolescent move from childhood into adulthood. Jung (1953b) commented on the psychological significance for the young man to undertake such initiation rites:

When he has reached puberty the young man is conducted to the “men’s house,” or some other place of consecration, where he is systematically alienated from his family. At the same time he is initiated into the religious mysteries, and in this way is ushered not only into the wholly new set of relationships, but as a renewed and changed personality, into a new world, like one reborn. The initiation is often attended by all kinds of tortures, sometimes including such things such as circumcision and the like. (pp. 103-104)

The initiation ritual for boys was usually a collective affair, occurring at the time of puberty. On the other hand, the segregation of girls from their homes had a more individual character. The girl was removed from her family for a period of time at the onset of her first menstruation. Eliade (1958) elaborates:

The length of the segregation varies from culture to culture, from three days (as in Australia and India) to twenty months (New Zealand) or even several years (Cambodia). . . . In the end the girls do form a group, and then their initiation is performed collectively under the direction of their older female relatives. . . . These tutoresses instruct them in the secrets of sexuality and fertility, and teach them customs of the tribe and at least some of its religious traditions accessible to women. The education thus given is general, but its essence is religious; it consists in a revelation of the sacrality of women. (p. 42)

The girls were taken from their homes and led into a dark place — the forest, a special hut, or some other dark place. Eliade (1958) explains that the symbolism of the forest or the hut represents the darkness of gestation in the mother's womb. He states:

The symbolism of darkness is also emphasized in the ceremonial segregation of girls, for they are isolated in a dark corner of the house and forbidden to see the sun — a taboo whose explanation lies in the mystical connection between the moon and women. (p. 42)

I already mentioned Woodman (1992), who claims that women's consciousness is rooted in the moon, in the darkness of the night where "Feelings and intuitions remain hidden from the sun surface in moonlight. They flower into love, poetry, music" (p. 116). Thus the initiation rituals helped the adolescents to get in touch with their basic nature as they moved into adulthood, making them full women and full men.

Unfortunately some of the religious initiations today are not as effective as they used to be in former times, when the rituals effected a change of the total personality of the initiate. Eliade (1995) explains:

The term initiation, in the most general sense, denotes a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated. In philosophical terms, initiation is equivalent to a basic change in existential condition. The novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a totally different being from that which he possessed before his initiation; he has become *another*. (p. x)

Today, some teenagers participate in what is called a “vision quest” that has the same purpose of separating the young from their families, tribes or groups in order for them to discover their potential to survive in the wilderness alone. It does not have the sexual and religious overtones that it used to have in primitive times; nonetheless, most youngsters return from their quest claiming to feel changed and having had deep spiritual experiences. Unfortunately, there is no larger community to celebrate their return, whereas in former times the young men were initiated into the circle of the elders upon their return. The sacrament of marriage is another form of initiation, the young adults making the transition into being husbands and wives, starting families of their own after leaving their birth family.

My late husband, Dr. Robert Stein, claimed that few individuals — male or female — can successfully make the transition into adulthood because such passages involve complex rituals that introduce the adolescent to the mysteries of their sexuality and sexual identity and this is not done today. Stein (1985) believes:

While the unformed maleness and femaleness of a child begins to emerge as soon as it is born . . . the child does not attain its own sexuality until it becomes sexually conscious. And this cannot occur before its bodily centers of sexuality are fully awakened, not before its consciousness develops sufficiently to receive the dark mysteries of sexual passion. In most cultures, the transition rites into manhood and womanhood center mainly around the mysteries of sexuality and sexual identity. Mankind has always found it necessary to help the child through this dangerous passage with the aid of complex rituals. (p. 121)

Because of our repressed cultural attitude toward sexuality, most of us enter marriage without having developed our “pure male or femaleness,” the very quality that attracts us to each other in the first place. Stein (1985) believed that under those circumstances the neglected inner child within both partners tends to rule the relationship. It demands to have its needs met and if this is denied, the inner child will either leave the marriage or throw a tantrum. In his opinion, “There is no possibility for any vital male/female connection, then, and no real sex” (p. 121). He continues:

So my answer to the man or woman who sees no reason to endure the “rightful” demands of his or her own neglected child is this: there is no hope for any real change in your marriage, no hope for reconnecting to the great natural rhythms of your own being and of the cosmos, unless you do, until this is fully realized and lived, your marriage can only be a sterile prison or a battle field. (p. 121)

Unfortunately, in our culture sexuality is taboo and children have to grope in the dark to discover the mysteries of their own nature. Developing into a whole woman demands of her to respect and accept all her positive and negative attributes, including her raw impersonal sexuality, her wild intuition and strong emotions. These qualities are not part of the biblical role of the woman. Many women rather remained dependent and contained within the security of their marriages than fight against the societal pressure to stay in her role. Husbands

often reinforced this role, thus making it almost impossible for her to develop beyond her child-like nature and not even trying to be initiated into womanhood.

Yet the only way the woman is initiated into widowhood and becomes whole is to undertake a vision quest herself. Instead of unconsciously moving from the role of the wife to that of the widow, she can expose herself to the wilderness of her own nature and find her own independent self.

The Contained and the Container

When I was married, I was not basically changed, but merely took on the traditional role of the wife. Instead of being contained within my family of birth, I was now contained within my marriage, defined by my relationship to my husband rather than by my relationship to my father.

Jung (1954) suggests that as long as we are unconscious of our own authentic selves marriage becomes a confining container. He claims that it is usual for the woman to be “wholly contained spiritually in her husband, and for a husband to be wholly contained emotionally in his wife. One could describe this as the problem of the contained and the container” (p. 195). As long as husband and wife depend on each other for completion neither can evolve into an individual. For years I depended on my husband for financial, spiritual and emotional support. I enjoyed the security of my marriage and, during my analysis, struggled to separate from him on a psychological level. Twice we were physically separated during our forty-six -year long marriage, which improved our relationship. However, it was not until his death that I realized the difference between being contained in another person and being my own self.

Hancock (1990) describes the difficulties women have in finding selfhood because for years they tend the gardens of others instead of taking care of themselves. “While providing the contact for others’ development, they have historically neglected their own” (p. 63). According to Hancock:

The new woman thus lives in a man’s world where she is turned against womanly strengths that lie at the heart of her identity. . . . Duped by the promise that she can have it all, she is compelled instead to do it all by a culture that offers its members only a single way to count. Captivated by the patriarch’s masquerade, she becomes less conscious of the split between who she “really” is, and what she appears to be. This disconnection from her primary identity sends her veering around a dangerous curve when it comes to the development of the authentic female self. (p. 56)

Hancock questions how a woman can be her true self when there is no blueprint for her female identity. Hancock pleads with women not to look toward men for their new identity, not to lose their primary feminine identity that reaches back to the early years of her development, when the girl embodied her own identity. “The fullness of human development depends on circling back to the girl within and carrying her into womanhood” (p. 63).

The Mother Complex

I had never had a mother who could have initiated me into womanhood, teaching me the art of love making. Instead I was surrounded by servants who taught me the art of home making and caring for others. As a child I never allowed myself to be held by anybody, however during adolescence I succumbed to any young man’s embrace. I did not become sexually involved with anybody until much later. I was a needy child yearning for love that I never had from my mother.

I always thought of having had a father complex because I fought the control of my rigid and domineering father. I knew that some complex was touched when my husband died but after the many years of analysis I did not think that this old complex still effected me. Jung (1960) describes a complex as a constellation of psychic elements grouped around certain feelings in relation to specific issues, as for instance a mother or father complex.

A complex would not be a complex at all if it did not possess a certain, even a considerable, affective intensity. One would expect that this energetic value would automatically force the complex into consciousness, that the power of attraction inherent within it would compel conscious attention. (p. 11)

What complex then could have been touched, I wondered. By going deeper into my feelings of abandonment I realized that I had not been abandoned by my husband but that I had unconsciously abandoned myself by rejecting my need for a loving mother and instead developed a pseudo strength, protecting myself from ever re-experiencing the pain of loss and abandonment. I became a defensive opinionated and independent young woman. Therefore when my husband died, the idea of leading a life as a single older woman brought up fears and feelings of abandonment — an old complex of mine.

After studying the complexity of widowhood, I wonder whether neither a mother or father-complex but my fear of abandonment that kept me contained in my marriage and attached to my husband. He never tried to control me, was not a traditional man and always encouraged me to study and to go beyond my limited role. But I fought him like I fought my father, insisting that he needed me and so did my children. I did not want to admit that I was afraid to step beyond the

boundaries of my home. I was a frightened child. I was a needy child not a loving one, but very needy of the love of others.

Fromm (1956) points out, “Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of *being loved*, rather than that of *loving*, of one’s capacity to love” (p. 1). Indeed, I needed love, not really knowing or daring to truly love another.

When I was married I was not really in touch with my feelings and only became a mother to complete the perfect image of a family. I realized later that I had merely performed the role of mother, but never had been in touch with my intuitive mothering feelings.

Giving up the traditional role of the wife was most difficult for me. My husband never reinforced this role, but it was my own neediness of him that kept me in a dependent relationship to him.

The Difference Between Feelings and Emotions

My neediness overshadowed any loving feelings I may have had for my husband in the beginning of my marriage. It was only after years in Jungian analysis, Gestalt, and some Reichian therapy that I recognized the difference between the subtle feelings of love and sadness in comparison to the strong emotions of anger and frustration when my needs were not met.

Jung (1923/1953a) understood emotions to be synonymous with *affect* and distinguished them from *feeling* by the degree of intensity:

Every feeling, after attaining a certain strength, releases physical innervations, thus becoming an affect. . . . Similarly, affect is clearly distinguished from feeling by quite perceptible physical innervations, while feelings for the most part lack them, or their intensity is so slight that they can only be demonstrated by the finest instruments, as for example the psycho-galvanic phenomenon. (pp. 522-523)

Hillman (1960) describes the difference between emotions and feelings as the difference between conscious and unconscious reactions. He explains that the individual can control feelings; however, emotions are more likely beyond ego control. Whenever we are overcome by strong visceral emotions we know that some complex is touched and we react defensively. As long as I was not in touch with my true instinctual self I fiercely defended myself whenever my mothering skills were questioned or criticized. Reflecting on the difference between feelings and emotions, I realize that my own terror of abandonment led me to a state of neediness beyond my control — and that this affect or strong emotional state made it impossible for me to be in touch with any deeper feelings of love. Shielding myself from my pain and grief, I took on any social or cultural role abandoning my feelings and my needy child with it.

Dissociation

Soon after my husband died, I unconsciously identified with the archetypal widow. This became evident when I felt like a poor old lady who had been abandoned by the whole world. I felt sorry for myself and questioned my new role in society. I wanted to run away from my grief into role-playing, dissociating myself from my feelings just as I had done when my mother died.

According to Jung (1964) we dissociate from a painful experience when we are not ready to consciously integrate such trauma into our personality.

As a result of some psychic upheaval whole tracts of our being can plunge back into the unconscious and vanish from the surface for years and decades. . . . These things happen not only to people with a bad heredity or neurosis, but to normal people as well. Disturbances caused by affects are known technically as *phenomena of dissociation*, and are indicative of a psychic split. In every psychic conflict we can discern a split of this kind,

which may go so far as to threaten the shattered structure of consciousness with complete disintegration.” (pp. 138-139)

When my mother died I had split off my needy inner child, dissociating myself from the pain caused by the loss of my mother’s love for me. I wanted to do the very same when my husband’s died. I did not want to suffer the grief a wife experiences for her dead husband, but I simply wanted to take on the role of the old abandoned widow. Yet something within me told me that I could not do so, that I had to go into the depth of my grief, into the depth of my unconscious. I had to take control of my own life.

Chapter 6: The Power of the Image

Introduction

One way of taking control of my own life was to find support systems within my inner self, rather than depending on others to guide and comfort me. Images always played an important role in my analysis because the unconscious manifest itself in mysterious ways to us; as for instance, through metaphors, synchronistic events or dreams. Images and myth shed light on my journey through my grief and I discovered that the same childish qualities that I had previously rejected offered me an entrance into the magical world of childhood. By having rejected the child I had cut off not only from my loving feelings but also from the primitive, unspoiled, playful, intuitive, adventurous qualities in the child. My analysis brought this world back to me.

When my husband died it felt *as if* I had a gaping wound along one side of me where he was torn from me. Or when I felt lost and abandoned, I saw myself in the middle of the ocean, bobbing up and down on top of the waves in a small boat, no land in sight. In Jungian terms the ocean symbolizes the collective unconscious: “The primordial waters; chaos, formlessness; endless motions, it is the source” (Cooper, 1978, p. 121). The message this image gave me was that I had to embark on a night-sea journey to retrieve the rejected parts of my personality in order to heal and become whole.

During a time when I felt desperately depressed and could hardly move, I had an image of carrying the dead body of my husband on my shoulders. Unconsciously I had been burdened with a heavy load; I had to let go of the dead

body so that I could become the woman I am today. Each time I felt grief, pain, despair, etc., I knew I had to stay with my feelings until I was able to go through them to a new place of understanding them. Each time an image led the way.

The dream is another way the unconscious manifests itself. Interpreting our dreams is a very personal issue. Dreams have a magic quality and everybody can project aspects of their own personality on dream images. Jung (1964) writes:

The dream is a little door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the soul, opening into that cosmic night which was psyche long before there was any ego consciousness, and which will remain psyche no matter how far our ego consciousness may extend. (p. 144)

I use dreams in the service of the Self — the divine within — and not the ego, which means that dreams do not tell me what I *want* to hear, but what I *ought* to hear. Dreams can make us conscious of psychological complexes that are working unconsciously within us blocking us from finding wholeness. Dreams have a wisdom that goes beyond problem solving, they guide and help us find new directions and new meanings to our lives. Dreams, myth, and fairytales connect us to a reality that transcends that of the ego consciousness.

We all live our own myth, and even though some of us think that our lives are not very interesting, we all have stories to tell. Keen and Valley-Fox (1989) in their excellent book, *Your Mythic Journey: Finding Meaning In Your Life Through Writing and Storytelling*, offer us a variety of ways in which we can open ourselves to our imagination and live fully in both worlds, the inner and outer.

Hillman (1979) wants us to reflect on our myth and our stories and bring them into our present reality. “We seek to reflect back and forth between the two, myth and psyche, using them to provide insights for each other, preventing either

from being taken on its own terms only” (pp. 23-24). We reflect back and forth between the personal and the archetypal, between the heart and the head.

The Inner Adviser

One avenue for the widow into her inner world can be an inner adviser taking the place of her husband on whom she had previously depended for support and advice. When I worked at the Pain Control Unit at UCLA, we used visualization and guided imagery to help patients get in touch with their feelings and gain an understanding of their afflictions. One exercise was to get in touch with their inner adviser. Bresler and Trubo (1979) explain:

These advisers have taken the form of everything from dogs and frogs to religious figures — but, of course, they are just a reflection of the person who is creating the image. . . . Our unconscious is a valuable storehouse of insights, suggestions, and desires, and through regular communication with our adviser, critically important information about our inner world often emerges. (p. 191)

This inner adviser or guide can help in a variety of ways, suggest Bresler and Trubo:

(1) The adviser can provide advice on how to reduce stress and pain. (2) The adviser can provide support and protection. (3) The adviser has the power to give total and complete pain relief. (4) The adviser can help you discover the message behind your pain. . . . Often the message has been repressed and is not available to the conscious mind, but your adviser can help you to uncover it in a gentle, loving, non-threatening way. Your adviser cannot only tell you why your body hurts, but also why your life hurts. (pp. 411-412)

The widow usually knows why she is hurting, but the inner adviser can be a source of comfort in her isolation and lead her to a place where her loss takes on a new meaning.

I was amazed at the many different images patients received from the unconscious as to who this inner adviser was. Usually they were small,

insignificant animals, like birds and squirrels. Patients were encouraged to befriend these animals, ask them questions and listen to their answers. Often these inner guides did not use words but made gestures to let patients know where to find healing for their pain.

The Worm and the Sleeping Beauty Myth

One of my patients had difficulty in finding her inner guide. I suggested she look on the ground or perhaps up to the sky. Eventually she saw a small worm wiggling its way toward her but she did not consider it her inner adviser. I asked her whether she had any association to worms. Being an avid gardener, the woman answered: "Worms loosen the soil and make things grow." I suggested she follow the little worm under the earth and see what was going on underground. Suddenly a smile came over her face. To her surprise a scene from the fairytale *Sleeping Beauty* appeared on her inner movie screen. There was a King, a Queen, and the young princess. The scene presented in miniature the image of the whole court asleep. As the scene came to life, we explored the deeper meaning of the fairytale.

The fairytale is about a young princess who at birth is condemned by a wicked witch to fall asleep, to become unconscious, lest she should ever prick herself. In spite of all the precautions, the princess pricks her finger at the age of fifteen, at the onset of womanhood. The whole court falls into a hundred year long sleep, waiting to be awoken by the hero who dares to break through the thicket of roses that had grown around the princess. Symbolically, this can be seen as the maiden falling into unconsciousness at the unveiling of her sexuality. She is overcome by it and cannot as yet deal with it.

Von Franz (1951), who studied archetypal patterns in fairytales, describes the symbolism of the story as the feminine under the spell and trapped. It is the riddle of the anima or the feminine principle in relation to the masculine principle. “It is the riddle of a right relationship” (p. 33). The woman had not found her place as a woman. In order to do so she needs consciousness, the masculine principle. As long as she remains unconscious of herself she will depend on the man for her womanhood. This patient had never had a close relationship to her father; sex was never discussed in her home, nor were feelings expressed. She could relate to the Sleeping Beauty, trapped within a relationship to her father that did not allow her to grow up. Her mother too had been trapped and never developed into a mature woman.

This patient had come to the clinic because of chronic back pain. She was aware that her back pain was caused by excessive stress, caused by having to “bend back ” too much in relation to her husband. In exploring the story, she became aware of how much she had needed her husband to make her feel loved, how she had always looked up to him as the hero who had freed her from the loveless and unemotional atmosphere of her father’s house and brought love into her life, giving it meaning. Von Franz (1951) writes: “The hero in a fairy-tale is rarely an individual human ego. He is mostly apt to have wonderful powers and gifts which distinguish him from the ordinary mortal or is at least royal” (p. 9). The patient became aware that she had projected the savior or hero onto her husband, when in reality he was only an ordinary human being, needing her love as much as she needed his. This new insight humanized the relationship between

them and she could accept him as another struggling human being. She learned to relax, having been freed to find her own lovingness, and her back pain eased.

Such a tiny little worm had taken the woman to one of the deepest and most archetypal places in humanity in order to find her own lovingness. The archetypal pattern of the *Sleeping Beauty* myth is rather common in a male-female relationship and some widows may be able to relate to it. Widows no longer can wait for their heroes to make them come to life. Instead, they can make their own heroic journey into the depth of their inner selves, where Eros, the god of love, slumbers.

A similar motif is shown in the *Psyche and Eros* myth. As Tripp (1974) relates, this is a story of the beautiful maiden Psyche who can only remain blissfully happy within the embrace of her lover Eros as long as she does not shed light on him. In psychological language, the light becomes conscious awareness of her womanhood. When she can no longer bear her state of unconsciousness, she holds a candle to his face, burning his skin, whereupon he disappears. In order to find Eros, Psyche sets off on her heroic journey into the underworld, where she finds him. Tripp describes Eros as one of the great and original gods. "According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, Eros existed almost from the beginning of time, being born, together with Ge (Earth) and Tartarus, out of, or at the same time as Chaos" (p. 232).

Again and again we see the theme of an initiation: the woman having to leave home or move from blindly having lived within the embrace of her lover so that she can find her own lovingness and move into selfhood as a whole woman.

The Old Woman in the Forest

I met my own inner adviser during a guided visualization session with Marielle Fuller, a specialist in this field at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute during the 1970s, when I was an intern at the Pain Control Unit. Fuller had asked me to go into the forest to find the witch; this is the image that came to me: As I was walking along the path I noticed an old peasant woman dart out from behind a tree; she beckoned me to come along. As soon as I got nearer to her she disappeared and reappeared further down the path, hiding behind another tree. She stayed ahead of me, laughing, cheerfully encouraging me to come along.

This image had been stimulated by a conversation I had the previous day. A friend had told me how she had found singing and dancing her primary means to express devotion. Was my old woman beckoning me into the forest to dance and feel free in its sanctuary? Researching the symbolism of the forest, I found that Cooper (1978) describes it as “ the realm of the psyche and the feminine principle.” Cooper goes on to say:

A place of testing and initiation, of unknown perils and darkness. . . .
Entering the Dark Forest or the Enchanted Forest is a threshold symbol;
the soul entering the perils of the unknown; the realm of death, the secrets
of nature or the spiritual world which man must penetrate to find the
meaning [of life]. (p. 71)

Ever since then I have felt safe within nature, and today my daily walks into the forest near my home are part of my spiritual practice. This image has given me immeasurable comfort and support over the years. It has become even more meaningful since I discovered that the forest was the domain of Artemis.

The forest was the realm of the Greek goddess Artemis, who was the goddess of the Hunt and the Moon. Artemis is an archetype present in women who are spiritually nurtured by mother nature and instinctually attend to their own wilderness nature. (Bolen, 1984, p. 156)

My inner guide or adviser, the woman in the forest, beckoned me to go deeper into the forest to find my own freedom and my own wilderness.

Chapter 7: The East

Eastern Traditions

I was also greatly helped in my grieving and healing process by turning to the East for compassion and a loving acceptance of my suffering. Today, when the world is changing and we are moving from a self-centered to a world-centered psychology, some psychotherapists are integrating Eastern thought and rituals into their own therapeutic practices. Epstein (1999), a psychiatrist, considers the Buddhist attitude toward suffering more helpful than the Western view:

Afflicted as we are with a kind of psychological materialism, we are concerned primarily with beefing ourselves up. Self-development, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-expression, self-awareness, and self-control are our most sought after attributes. But Buddhism teaches us that happiness does not come from any kind of acquisitiveness, be it material or psychological. Happiness comes from *letting go*. In Buddhism, the impenetrable, separate and individuated self is more of the problem than the solution. (p. xvi)

Jung (1964) was attracted to Eastern thought, considering it to have a more “civilized” approach to dealing with the dualism of our nature — the masculine, rational thinking function and the feminine, irrational feelings side. He appreciated the Chinese way of embracing our wholeness, the one-ness of the Chi, containing *yin* and *yang*. He also was attracted to the Indian way of thinking being very different from ours:

I have, so it seems to me, observed the peculiar fact that an Indian, inasmuch as he is really Indian, does not think, at least not what we call “think.” *He rather perceives the thought*. He resembles the primitive in this respect. I do not say that he is primitive but that the process of thinking reminds me of the primitive way of thought-production. The primitive’s reasoning is mainly an unconscious function, and he perceives its results. We should expect such a peculiarity in any civilization which has enjoyed an almost unbroken continuity from primitive times. (Jung, 1964, p. 527)

Jung (1964) regretted that Westerners, in their attempt to become civilized, sacrificed their primitive animal nature, condemning it to the realm of the unconscious. He stated:

Man became split into a conscious and an unconscious personality. The conscious personality could be domesticated, because it was separated from the natural and primitive man. Thus we became highly disciplined, organized, and rational on one side, but the other side remained a suppressed primitive, cut off from education and civilization. (p. 527)

The women's liberation movement brought the irrational, primitive feeling side back into our lives and with it the more mystical side of the child. It opened doors for physicians and psychologists to integrate healing methods used in the East in order to *heal* the suffering of the soul, rather than focusing only on *curing* physical symptoms caused by suffering.

Eastern ways of thought presented new concepts for me, making me realize how unsophisticated and undeveloped my thinking of God and spirituality had been. My own God image had been tied up with the old man with the white beard directing the traffic of the world from heaven. That image, though immature, fits perfectly the Western dualistic thinking: heaven vs. earth, spirit vs. psyche, sin vs. goodness. pain vs. happiness.

When I was introduced to the Eastern idea of wholeness as our condition from the very beginning, I was opened to a new consciousness that I am still trying to integrate. Buddhists, for example, understand suffering as a natural component of human existence, part of the wholeness of being human, not as a punishment for having sinned. Even Western theologians are moving away from the idea of God as director of our personal lives. Spong (2001), an Episcopal

Bishop is critical of using God and religion as a “security blanket.” He suggests that we may have to rely on our own coping skills:

The belief that God is at the helm is only the modern-day remnant of the theistic system that our forebears developed at the dawn of self-consciousness in order to still human angst, to enable them to survive the trauma of self-consciousness. . . . But theism is also a security blanket with which we are loath to part. Like all security blankets, theism may make us better able to pretend that we are competent to cope with life. But when the crises comes, theism and security blankets prove inadequate to deliver what they so loudly promise. (p. 192)

Regarding prayer, Spong (2001) sees more benefit in using words such as “meditation” and “contemplation.” “Words,” he notes, “that have over the centuries been identified with the mystical discipline of spiritual development” (p. 193).

Today I too have moved away from seeing things as distinctly binary — as when Jung (1964) described the self as a symbol of wholeness, a *coincidentia oppositorum*, containing light and darkness simultaneously. I prefer his description of the divine power as a “something.”

This "something" is strange to us and yet so near, wholly ourselves and yet unknowable, a virtual center of so mysterious a constitution that it can claim anything - kinship with beasts and gods, with crystals and with stars. . . . This “something” claims all that and more, and having nothing in our hands that could fairly be opposed to these claims, it is surely wiser to listen to this voice. . . . I have called this center the *self*. . . . It might equally well be called the “God” within us. (pp. 235, 236)

These revelations from Eastern philosophy caused me to review my idea of wholeness not only on a personal level, but on a cosmic level as well. Fung (1948) explains the Chinese idea of universal wholeness:

What the philosophers call the universe is the totality of all that is. It is equivalent to what the ancient Chinese philosopher, Hui Shih, calls ‘The Great One’ which is defined as “that which has nothing beyond.” So everyone and everything must be considered part of the universe. (p. 2)

As a result, I have changed my idea of a more intimate, personal God to that of “One Supreme All,” “The Absolute,” or the “The Great One,” a more collective image of the godhead and at the same time meaningful to me on a personal level.

Eastern Concepts Used in Western Healing

Even though suffering is a natural human condition and pain and grief are real emotions, Epstein (1999) recommends that grief must be embraced as wholeheartedly as joy and beauty. “As the Tibetan master’s reaction made clear, love and grieving, like separation and connection, are co-constitutive. Opening oneself to one emotion deepens the experience of the other. The heart can open in sadness as much as it can in joy” (p 64).

When my husband died I thought I would never experience joy again. Then I attended a workshop at a Zen community and learned that joy and sadness can co-exist. Once again I realized that I had created an artificial duality between opposites. Now I learned that opposites coexist and we must open ourselves to our feelings, regardless of what they are.

Many widows fear that they will not be able to bear the pain caused by the loss of their husbands and repress their feelings. However, this attitude only causes more stress and unhappiness. We have to give ourselves permission to release our pain. Studies have shown that stress caused by our emotions can make us physically sick. Meditation and Yoga exercises are often prescribed by physicians in order to lower a patient’s stress level. Lama Surya Das (2003), a spiritual teacher, shows how meditation can be healing:

When we are recovering from loss of any kind, we need to find ways to reconnect with our basic sanity and essential, authentic selves; we need to find kind ways to heal and put ourselves back together again. We need to ground and center ourselves and return home to our innermost being. . . . meditation practice can be very healing and nurturing. (p. 18)

Welwood (1996), a psychologist, was not only a student of psychology but had also delved into Zen. He compared the experience of *satori*, spiritual enlightenment, being achieved through meditation, with a sudden *felt-shift*, when an old fixation suddenly gives way in psychotherapy. As a psychologist and a Buddhist, Welwood had to deal with what seemed like two paradoxical practices. On the side of the contemplative practice, the emphasis was on opening to our feelings, regardless of whether they were painful or joyful. On the side of psychotherapy the emphasis is on reflection and understanding.

Welwood (1996) came to the conclusion that psychotherapy can offer both, the dialogical process and a contemplative attitude. He writes: "Psychotherapy and spiritual practice may both incorporate reflection and presence; the home base of therapy is reflection and the home base of spirituality is presence" (p. 127). He encourages his clients to be totally present with their feelings instead of separating from them. "Unconditional presence is the most powerful transmuting force there is, precisely because it is a willingness to be there with ourselves in our experience, without dividing ourselves in two by trying to 'manage' what we are feeling" (p. 120). Tolle (2003), also emphasizing the importance of being and remaining present to each moment, discusses what he considers one of the major obstacles to living in the present: accepting the unacceptable:

Even within the seemingly unacceptable and painful situation is concealed a deeper good, and within every disaster is contained the seed of grace. . . .

Acceptance of the unacceptable is the greatest source of grace in this world. (p. 71)

All oriental practices aim toward balancing the opposites within us, heaven and earth, and body and soul. The martial art of Tai Chi, has been practiced in China since the 5th century BC and combines physical discipline with meditation. It is helpful to older people because it is less strenuous than other physical exercises, calming to the mind and achieves a balance between body and mind, between spirit and soul, between heaven and earth.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead and the Bardo

One central text of Buddhism that is well-known in the west is *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. This text, compiled and edited by Evans-Wentz (1960), deals with Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, the so-called *Tantrik* type, and shows how the individual can prepare him or herself for the soul to move from birth-consciousness to death-consciousness. “Death disincarnates the ‘soul-complex’ as Birth incarnates it. In other words, Death is itself only an initiation into another form of life than that of which it is the ending” (p. lxxviii). The dying individual has to prepare him or herself for being initiated into death-consciousness.

According to the Tibetan thought, the passage from life to death, the *bardo*, is a period of forty-nine days during which the soul prepares for a re-entry into the earthly plane. Tulku Thondup (2005) explains:

The traditional Tibetan teaching is that there are four passages in the cycle of existence: *life*, which most of us are engaged in now. *Dying*, which begins with the onset of a fatal illness and ends when the breathing ceases; *the arising of the “luminosity of the basis,”* which is the appearance of the true nature of mind as it is; and the *bardo*, the transitional passage prior to entering a new rebirth.

The third passage, the rising of the *luminosity*, is where we might unite with our true nature, but that is apparently possible only for the most

advanced practitioner. Most of us will perceive it with fear and pass out after a moment. The *bardo* state is the one we are most concerned with, the period between one life and another.

A *bardo* is actually a transitional passage between any two states. In that way, all four passages are *bardos*. . . . Nevertheless, this fourth passage is a time when we may have some choice about our next rebirth, and the whole point of these teachings is to achieve a favorable rebirth. (p. 75)

My Husband's Death

My husband studied the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, preparing himself for his own death and apparently also for his rebirth. For almost two years we had known that his disease was terminal, so that his impending death was no surprise to us. I consider it an honor to have been allowed to witness his dying process. He died consciously, deeply committed to his psyche and listening to messages from the unconscious to the very last. As a Jungian, dreams were always important in his search for selfhood.

In *Newsweek* magazine, July 25, 2005, Underwood describes how helpful dreams can be for a dying person yet little systematic study has been done on this subject. "There are certain overarching themes that emerge — going on journeys, reuniting with deceased loved one, seeing stopped clocks" (p. 50). Dying people have dreams of being visited by deceased loved ones, others experience being engulfing by darkness, a symbol of death, others see strong lights outside their windows.

As a rule, my husband was an introverted and rather reserved man. Yet one morning his behavior suddenly changed; he became outgoing, wanting to see people, telling me that everybody needed a village in order to die. Perhaps he had a dream, perhaps his soul told him that he needed to say good bye to the "world of

the living” before entering the “world of the dead.” Whatever the message he had received, he began to say good bye to all his friends all over the world and remained in good spirits until he became comatose, two weeks later. I will never forget the day — a few weeks before he died — when the house was filled with family, friends and neighbors, and we celebrated his departure from this world to the next with champagne. I called it a “living wake” and watched the scene in sadness and with great admiration and love for the dying man.

On another occasion, a friend of ours arranged a meeting between my husband, our two daughters and myself in order to share our feelings. Nothing was to be left unsaid before he died. My husband expressed his regrets at not having been a better father. Both our daughters agreed, but assured him that they had accepted it and felt a great love for him. When it was my turn I had nothing to say. Bob thought that there was nothing he wanted to say to me either because we had been so close to each other and had said everything there was to be said. I recall that during my husband’s last days I wanted to say good bye to him, but he refused, saying that he would never leave me. I did not know what he meant because we all knew that he was dying. Perhaps he meant that he was always going to be with me in spirit, and he is.

I still feel very pained remembering those last days before he died. He fell into a coma soon after the wake. On March 10, 1996, a Sunday, my daughters and I had retired to the living room after the night nurse took over her shift. We were tired, drained, but in a good mood. Only minutes later the nurse came to tell us that Bob had passed away. She had been startled by my husband suddenly raising his right arm and then letting go. He was gone. What did he see? What was he

reaching for? Did he see the light we are supposed to see when we step over the threshold to another existence? Bob made the process of dying almost beautiful for me and my daughters. I am eternally grateful to him.

I had never seen a dead person before. When mother died father only allowed us to look from afar. This time I wanted to look *into* Bob's eyes but he was gone. I could only look *at* his eyes. His soul had already departed. I sat with his body for a very long time while waiting for the undertaker. I remember sitting across from his bed, not moving for ages, listening to the silence of the room. I had never before experienced such stillness, such total peace. What I had dreaded all my married life had finally happened. I had lost Bob.

Chapter 8: From Grieving to Healing

The Outsider Syndrome

It seems that I had to lose Bob in order to find myself. I had always felt an outsider even in my own home and did not know who I was. Ever since I was a child, I remember hiding my neediness behind the persona of a tough, independent little girl. Jung (1953b) calls the persona the mask we present to the outer world: “The word *persona* is an excellent expression, for originally it meant the *mask* once worn by actors to indicate the role in which each appeared on the scene” (p. 276).

Unconsciously I had taken on a variety of social and archetypal roles, never really knowing the real me. Reflecting on my past brought back the memories of myself as a child, sitting on the windowsill of my room in Vienna. I was looking down onto the busy street life of Vienna. I yearned to be one of those people who seemed to know where they were going. I did not know where I was going, only aimlessly following others. I felt like an outsider.

Myss (1997) suggests that outsiders are deeply invested in their pain, what she calls their *woundology*, and won't allow healing to take place. “We don't want to give up [our wounds] because [they] become our first language of intimacy, and we've created everything else — our romantic life, our social life — around bonding with wounds” (p. 21). Myss touched a deep core of my soul. I felt sad; I felt my woundedness and was reluctant to go deeper into my feelings. Am I ready to give up my wounds, I asked myself. Is it even possible to give them

up? They are so much a part of me. They are me. I am one of the many wounded healers and am proud of it.

I realize that these pains are our neglected, wounded children and our scars are protecting them from any further abuse. These pains are our past, our heritage, our dreams, hopes and loves. These wounds were caused by rejecting our full potential, fragmenting and crippling ourselves in order to please others. In our attempt to become civilized we sacrifice the emotional, wild, and natural child in us. We become outsiders in our own inner homes.

Our Woundedness

We all are wounded children and need to admit our pain and our suffering. However, according to Grant (1997), our society does not appreciate this wisdom:

People today are taught that there is no inherent value to pain, suffering or sacrifice. Most Westerners have been conditioned to believe that pain and suffering should be avoided at all costs. Yet it is through and not around suffering that spiritual healing occurs.

The healing process is based on the idea that one is capable of wholeness. Becoming whole demands dialoguing with one's wound(s) while handing over the ego to a greater dimension of Self. Wounds force victims to drop pretenses, idealizations and preoccupation with self and others. Wounds demand honest solutions and authentic encounters. Embracing one's wounds is never finished. It is a process of continual re-evaluation and recommitment. (pp. 88-89).

It is this very woundedness that makes us the individuals we are; we carry our wounds with us into old age. When we lose a loved one our wounds are re-opened and need healing in a new way. When I embarked on an inner journey after my husband died, I did not know then that I would find the child that I had abandoned long ago in the depth of my own soul. This insight brought tears to my eyes and deep feeling of sadness for the little girl sitting on the windowsill of her room, yearning to be a part of life and part of the world, she thought, did not

know she existed. I knew now that she existed and that I wanted to hold and embrace her and make her come alive. It was time for me to heal my woundedness, to grow up and be initiated into womanhood.

For thousands of years, girls were never allowed to grow up but treated as children, performing their duties as wives and mother “ happily ever after.” Boys however, took on the role of the protector and carried the vision for a better future for the family. Women stayed home with their children and were spared the dark side of life. Men worked outside of their homes. Under this system neither girls nor boys were ever initiated into adulthood but only forced to assumed social and cultural roles. They have babies, construct their homes and vicariously play house with their neglected inner children. As my husband said, the birth children are neglected in this game.

The Spiritual Healing Model

All through this paper I have been critical of the medical model in America underlying the grieving process. So too is Smith (1999) who writes: “*The medical model* has the primary goal of *curing*, or eliminating the physical (objective) problem, whereas *the spiritual model* focuses on healing, the psycho-spiritual (subjective) change in a person that improves the person’s quality of life” (pp. 10-11). Smith reminds us that according to Buddhist thought,

We cannot even begin to proceed down the path that Buddha offers us until we first go through the process of fully accepting suffering, being mindful of it, realizing what causes it, and realizing how to use it to become a more complete individual. (p. 11)

Smith assures us that this kind of healing “does not come from ignoring pain, suffering, and death. Healing comes in the very midst of pain, suffering, and

death” (p. 10). We must learn to lovingly accept ourselves in our woundedness and wholeness with all our positive and negative traits. Quoting Pema Chodron, Smith (1999) writes:

Our brilliance, our juiciness, our spiciness, is all mixed up with our craziness and our confusion, and therefore it doesn't do any good to try to get rid of our so-called negative aspects, because in that process we also get rid of our basic wonderfulness. . . . Our pain and suffering is part of our wonderfulness; our wounds are part of our wonderfulness, we can probably even say that without our pain and suffering, without our wounds, we would have no wonderfulness.” (p. 22)

We must go deeper within our grief because healing comes from within our woundedness. This view is shared by many new age thinkers who have published a variety of self-help books, all of them appropriate for widows to heal their wounded souls. As long as the grieving process is based on the medical model — that is on curing rather than on — it cannot serve as a transformative process.

Healing happens when we allow all aspects of our nature, the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual to work together harmoniously.

The Strict Father Family Model

The power for self-healing is within us, however, the patriarchy made us distrustful of our instinctual wisdom that is more in tune with nature and the feminine than the masculine element in us. Not being able to trust our own feelings and knowledge, we all, especially women, depend on others to guide and heal us.

The medical model seems to be rooted in our patriarchal value system, that believes “father knows best” what is right for the individual and the whole family, the doctor being the all-knowing father. Lakoff (2004), a professor of

cognitive science and linguistics at the University of California, describes the difference between two distinctly different family models in America: the “nurturant parent model” and the “strict father family model.”

The strict father is a moral authority who knows right from wrong. His role is to protect the family in a dangerous world. The nurturant parent world-view is gender neutral. Nurturance is basically two things; empathy and responsibility connecting with someone else, feeling what they feel, and then assuming responsibility by acting on that feeling. It seems to me that it has a very nurturing morality. Its job is to create nurturing human beings who empathize with others and act responsibly.

Lakoff (2004) explains that because the role of the father since Biblical times was to protect the family from the evils of the world, he had to teach his children how to become responsible, moral adults:

What is needed in this kind of a world is a strong, strict father who can protect the family in the dangerous world, support the family in a difficult world, and teach his children right from wrong. . . .

What is required of the child is obedience, because the strict father is a moral authority who knows right from wrong. It is further assumed that the only way to teach kids obedience—that is, right from wrong—is through punishment, painful punishment, when they do wrong. . . .

The rationale behind physical punishment is this. . . .When children do something wrong, if they are physically disciplined they learn not to do it again. . . . Without such punishment, the world will go to hell. There will be no morality. . . .

If people are disciplined and pursue their self-interest in this land of opportunity, they will become prosperous and self-reliant. Thus the strict father model links morality with prosperity. . . . The link is the pursuit of self-interest. . . .

In this model there is also a definition of what it means to become a good person. A good person — a moral person — is someone who is disciplined enough to be obedient, to learn what is right, do what is right and not do what is wrong, and to pursue her self-interest to prosper and become self-reliant. (pp. 7-8)

Growing up in Vienna, I was raised by a father who adhered to the very same parenting model. As a child I was punished for questioning my father's rigid rules and strong opinions. I was given to understand that children have no brains, no feelings, and girls have no sexual drives. Zweig (1943/1964), a famous Viennese writer during the last century, discussed his society's attitudes toward girls:

[It] wished young girls to be silly and untaught, well educated and innocent, curious and shy, uncertain and impractical, and predisposed to this education without knowledge of the world from the very beginning, to be led and formed by a man in marriage without any will of their own. . . . The unmarried maiden became an article left on the shelf, and the left-over became an old maid. (p. 79)

If we prevent young girls from experiencing their pain they cannot develop into healthy adults instead they remain in their woundedness until they are ready to face their wounds and heal them. Marriage is a wonderful place to hide our old wounds. Only when I lost my husband did I become aware of them.

The Neglected Inner Child

Children were not thought to be affected by traumatic events. Today we know that this is a fallacy and that children react very much to losses, even though they may not be able to verbalize their feelings. Children know that something is wrong and through their behavior let us know that they are hurting or "dis-eased." They may behave irritable and pesky; instead of listening to their problems we send them out to play or we insist that they must be tired and needing to rest.

Since parents, themselves, feel uncomfortable with their own feelings, children receive messages early in life to dissociate themselves from their feelings

and not to bother their parents. They learn to present physical symptoms (stomach, headache, or accidentally getting hurt) in order to get the love and care they need for their emotional distress.

Bowlby (1980) confirms the fallacy that children don't feel grief and points out how little attention was paid to a child's experience of loss. He believes that the reason for this was that most children seem to regain their cheerfulness in a relatively short time. He elaborates:

Although Freud was on the one hand deeply interested in the pathogenic role of mourning and on the other, especially in his later years, was also aware of the pathogenic role of childhood loss, he seems, none the less, never to have put his finger on childhood mourning. (p. 35)

Bowlby credits Melanie Klein for having made an important contribution to our understanding of phases of depression in infants and young children and the effect this has on their later lives. Today we are much kinder to our children and encourage them to express their feelings.

Wickes (1968), one of the first generation Jungians, studied the inner world of childhood and concluded that children grow and develop through experiencing their pains and their losses:

Growth comes through individual experience and the understanding of experience. This must be gained by each one for himself. We do not try to save our children from the labor of education and expect to pass on to them our intellectual attainments, so saving them the process of study; yet we are impatient if they cannot accept the result of our experiences instead of gaining them for themselves. We are reluctant to see that any deeper understanding of the meaning of life can be obtained only by the individual acceptance of joy and pain and that each must gain this through his own efforts p. 103

The death of my husband opened my woundedness and once again I felt like a child, helpless and lost. I suspected that these feelings were triggered by the loss of my mother and not the loss of my husband. As I was grieving for the loss

of my husband, I found my neglected inner child. Never consciously having grieved for my mother, I had suffered all my life for one reason or another. I suffered through my school years because I was not a good student and did not make my father proud of me. I suffered through my adolescence because I did not have a boy friend and was not the “belle of the ball.” I suffered for many years in my marriage because it did not live up to the expectations I had of married life.

Suffering was meaningful for me; I considered it a virtue and my entrance into heaven. Only now do I understand that my suffering was nothing but the frustration of my sad inner child not receiving the empathy and support she needed. Instead, she was raised according to the “strict father family model” where the father was more interested in teaching his children morals and proper behavior than exposing his feelings and giving loving support to the child. Mothers are supposed to do this, but I did not have a mother.

Miller (1981), too, was raised according to this family model. She writes about the neglected gifted child who is kept in a prison from which it cannot escape. The assumption that the world is a dangerous place and needs the protection of the father makes the woman insecure about her survival and her mothering skills. Miller concluded that the patriarchy made it difficult for mothers to feel grounded in their own maternal instincts and made them often feel inadequate to raise their children. It seems that even when children had mothers, they still lacked the loving tender care they needed to grow up.

There was a mother who at the core was emotionally insecure and who depended for her narcissistic equilibrium on the child behaving or acting in a particular way. This mother was able to hide her insecurity from the child and from everybody else behind a hard, authoritarian and even totalitarian facade.

The child had an amazing ability to perceive and respond intuitively, that is, unconsciously, to this need of the mother, or of both parents, for him to take on the role that had unconsciously been assigned to him.

This role secured “love” for the child — that is, his parents’ narcissistic cathexis. He could sense that he was needed and this, he felt, guaranteed him a measure of existential security. (p. 8)

These mothers need their children for their own satisfaction; through the years children of such mothers develop a special sensitivity to unconscious signals manifesting the needs of others. They will “develop the art of not experiencing feelings, for a child can only experience his feelings when there is somebody there who accepts him fully, understands and supports him” (Miller, 1981, p,10).

Miller (1981) writes that when a mother does not receive loving care from others, especially from her own mother, she will turn to her child for gratification of this need.

The child feels this clearly and very soon forgoes the expression of his own distress. Later when these feelings of being deserted begin to emerge in the analysis of the adult, they are accompanied by such intensity of pain and despair that it is quite clear that these people could not have survived so much pain. (p. 11)

Mothers get deeply attached to their children, depending on them for their emotional satisfaction, and as Miller (1981) says, making it difficult for the child to rely on his or her own emotions.

The difficulties inherent in experience and developing one’s own emotions lead to bond permanence which prevents individuation. . . [The child] cannot rely on his own emotions. . . . has no sense of his own real needs, and is alienated from himself to the highest degree. Under these circumstances he cannot separate from his parents, and even as an adult he is still dependent on affirmation from his partner, from groups, or especially from his own children. (p. 14)

This neglected child lives within the shadow of the unconscious from one generation to another, pretending to be strong and independent, yet yearning for somebody to understand, to hold, love and cherish it.

Miller suggests that it takes some time in analysis before patients can trust their own feelings and accept themselves as who they really are and not who they had to become in order to get the love they so desperately needed.

I believe the widow does not need to be in analysis to learn to trust her own feelings and to learn to understand herself but can reflect upon her own past and become aware of how she abandoned her own individuality by serving the needs of others. There is no doubt that the loss of a husband opens old complexes and wounds that were never challenged while expecting the love of our spouses to heal us. Once she loses her marriage, it is up to the woman to heal her own woundedness, to mother her inner child, to love and cherish it.

How We Can Learn to Love Ourselves

Sherven and Sniechowski (2001), in their book, *Be Loved for Who You Really Are*, offer ways for us to become loving human beings without having to depend on others to bring love into our lives. They suggest that as we develop an ongoing curiosity about ourselves and our partners the relationship deepens and becomes more intimate. The couple discovers that the differences between them are not threatening to the marriage but give it a more magical quality. They believe that we don't choose our partners arbitrarily:

With your soul's urging, you are attracted precisely to someone who pushes all your hottest buttons and also makes you feel wonderfully, marvelously special . . . You enjoy supporting one another in this magical process and you reap the rewards of transformation that were unattainable without the other's presence in your life. (p. 195)

The authors insist that in order for a marriage to stay alive we need a spiritual attitude toward developing a solid and lasting love relationship with our partners. “When you have what we call a spiritual purpose for your relationship, that purpose directs you toward the open and honest connection that emerges when you face into and grow from the inevitable challenges of daily loving” (p. 27). Sherven and Sniechowski (2001) claim that their approach is very practical:

If you take the time to look inside, you can sense something at the center of who you are. That something withstands all the noise of your daily activities, the emotional ups and downs, the demands other make on you, even your own hopes and expectations. . . . When you get in touch with it, you know it’s more real than anything going on around you and it’s always aiming you toward wholeness. (p. 41)

Love is not being given to you by anybody outside of yourself, but you must find love within yourself. “When you allow love to enter your heart, it has special designs on you. It wraps itself around you and urges you to surrender to what it wants from you. That’s right, what it wants *from* you” (p. 17).

The answer to who you really are lies within you, and you will find yourself once you have dealt with your inner critic, who demands perfection from you. The process of becoming a loving human being as a widow demands an honest and non-judgmental acceptance of herself as who she truly is and not who she ought to or who she wants to be. It is a time for the woman to let go of her romantic dreams and expectations and be realistic about her past and future life. It is a time when her inner child can be most helpful in the process of self-discovery.

A Study on Love

In his book *On Love*, Ortega Y Gasset (1960), describes romantic love as a combination of enchantment and surrender:

A feeling of being “enchanted” by another being who produces complete “illusion” in us, and a feeling of being absorbed by him to the core of our being, as if he had torn us from our own vital depths. . . . There is no will to surrender: there is an unwilling surrender. (p. 174)

Romantic love is an unwilling surrender or a succumbing to the love for an individual whom we do not really know. Like Narcissus we are in love with an image of ourselves, reflected in the water, yet unconscious of it. Only when we are separate from the object of our love can we be conscious of ourselves and have affection for the other. Jung (1954) explains that “In order to be conscious of myself, I must be able to distinguish myself from others” (p. 190). This is a difficult task when we are contained in an intimate and romantic relationship, identifying with the role we play in it and unconscious of our individuality.

I am often asked whether I ever got over my grief. The answer is that I will never get over my grief, but I have learned to live with it. Do I like to live alone? Yes, I love being free to do whatever I want to do. Am I lonely? Yes, there are times I feel very lonely, but I have noticed that it is my mind telling me that I “should” be coupled. It is an old tape in my mind and as soon as I stop it, I enjoy my aloneness. Am I happy with my life? I am not happy but I am content, very content with my life and very appreciative of every moment of it. I believe happiness is another romantic illusion, chasing the image of a perfect life that can become addictive.

Widowhood has been a time when my life-long search for wholeness was finally culminated. Yes, I feel whole, however this does not mean I am perfect

and complete, but that I am whole in my incompleteness, my imperfection, my fragmentation and my woundedness. I am all I am, and content with that.

Chapter 9: Discussion

New Attitudes Toward Death and Grieving

Since I started my research on widowhood, there has been a general softening in attitudes toward death and grieving. Widowhood seems to be no longer considered all negative. Several studies show that the death of a loved one also has a positive effect on the bereaved. Whereas it used to be recommended that one cuts the bond to the deceased as soon as possible, it is now questioned whether this is indeed the best way to deal with the bereaved. A variety of papers suggest that there may be a meaningfulness in the experience of loss.

For instance, Conant (1996) interviewed younger widows between the ages of 39 and 51 years and discovered that these women were still related to the memories and images of their late husbands. At the same time they also wrestled with basic existential questions: What is the meaning of life? Is there life after death? What is my identity without the person I love most? Where is the deceased person I love now that he is dead? Her study showed that the relationship to their late husbands was still alive but had changed.

The relationship grows and shifts and gets reorganized into a new form with a familiar face. The attachment can enhance attachment to the future when it functions in a positive manner. . . . Memories of the deceased spouse served as a safe haven to help mend the trauma of loss, as an inner voice to lessen current social isolation, as an internal reworking of self to meet new realities and as reassurance of the possibility of immortality. The memory and images of the deceased were a source of current strength when affirming permission to move on in life while maintaining meaning in the past. The intense pain of grief was an acknowledgment of the present reality, not an end to the caring. (p. 195)

More and more emphasis is now placed on reconstructing the meaning of grieving. In an anthology edited by Niemeyer (2001) several studies confirm my finding that grief can be a learning and healing experience. For instance, Richards (2001) writes: “Providing care to a dying person, witnessing death, losing a loved one — all can open us to existential issues and spiritual experiences that re-focus our lives” (p. 173).

In another study Frantz, Farrell, and Trolley (2001) come to the realization that the loss of a loved one is not necessarily a devastating experience. The authors have, perhaps reluctantly, arrived at a new awareness “that the quality of some people’s lives is in some ways better following their loved one’s death than it was before” (p. 206).

Calhoun and Tedeschi (2001) refer to a group of widows that were interviewed several months after the death of their husbands, and reported an increased sense of independence and self-confidence in the women having been forced to accomplish certain chores by themselves. Loss forces the bereaved to change, challenging them to find their own coping mechanism. They must learn to trust their ability to fend for themselves and also have faith in some inner strength that will help them in reconstructing their lives. Calhoun and Tedeschi suggest,

Religious, philosophical, and folk traditions have for thousands of years recognized that the struggle with major losses in life can be the source of enhanced meaning in life and the impetus for positive change. . . . They refer to gains that can result from such struggle as *post-traumatic growth*. (pp. 157-158)

We cannot spare our children from experiencing the pain and suffering of their losses because it belongs to the fullness of being a human being. Neither can

the widow be spared of her grief when her husband dies. It is a very painful experience, but at the same time offers the woman an opportunity to become herself. I like the idea of *post-traumatic growth*, especially when it applies to an older woman. The process of change and growth never ends and even after death, there is rebirth.

Final Thoughts

It has been nearly ten years since my husband died, and the memories of those terrible days are still vividly in my mind. My life has changed drastically since then and so have I. Widowhood offered me a freedom I had never known before. However, it was not the loss of my husband that made me feel like a free woman, but the discovery of my own powers that I had previously denied, fearing they would threaten my marriage. By going deep into my grief I realized that I had not really wanted to grow up and that I had designated my husband to be guardian of my needy neglected child. No longer being contained in my marriage nor defined by my marital status, I had to integrate the qualities of this child into my whole personality. Only then did I feel free of my dependency on my husband for the love I needed so badly to validate myself. Today, I still feel deeply bonded to my husband, only now it is not because of my need for him but because of my love for him.

I have learned a great deal about widowhood over the last years and I know that the grieving process never ends. This was confirmed on a recent trip to the Canadian Rockies with my daughters. We stopped to have a meal in a lovely hotel overlooking the snowcapped mountains of Banff when I was suddenly overcome by an intense feeling of sadness. I missed my husband; we had loved

traveling together and I wondered how I could possibly enjoy my trip without him. Yet, as days went by, I stopped thinking about my husband and thoroughly enjoyed the trip.

This experience showed me that I will always be bonded to the memories of my husband and other loved ones. Only by opening my heart to these memories will I be able to experience the fullness of life, the suffering along with the beauty and joy of it. I have also learned that the drive for wholeness, the yearning to be free, unattached and independent, is as strong as the yearning to be contained within a loving relationship. Only when I consciously face the tension of these opposites can I have compassion and love for others without losing myself. By embracing both drives I am free to enjoy my independence and being alone, and other times I can allow myself to be taken care of by family and friends. As long as I was unconsciously contained within my marriage I was too needy for the love and care of my husband and could not feel whole within myself.

I also freed myself from public expectations. Even though the public attaches a stigma to widowhood, I am now able to value myself as an older single woman, rooted in the deepest core of my individuality. I no longer resent being excluded from the couples' world; I can understand how easily a woman can unconsciously identify with traditional cultural roles and dissociate from her own painful feelings.

Having worked with patients in chronic physical pain, I know that we cannot repress our emotions; eventually, our bodies will feel the stress and disease. We must be aware of the interconnection between our physical, emotional,

mental, and spiritual being. The most common reaction to loss is similar to the reaction to any other traumatic experience: our senses shut down, we are numb and paralyzed; we feel faint, wounded and helpless. We want to run away from our grief or deny having any.

We call upon God to take away our pain, praying for relief from our suffering. We want to understand our misery and ask, Why me? Have I sinned or displeased God and am I now condemned to a lonely life? However, we no longer bring the suffering of our soul to the priest or to the rabbi but to the physician, most of whom are only interested in easing our dis-ease and curing our symptoms. They would rather give medication for depression or anxiety attacks, bypassing our woundedness. I believe that only by surrendering to our deepest emotions and feelings can we lovingly accept our true selves.

I hope that this exploration into the time of widowhood, as well as sharing my own story, will help other widows find their own way through their grief. By charting our spiritual paths, we bring ourselves through grief to healing; from loss to gaining our fullest selves; from the spiritual wilderness to a covenant with the divine.

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