Under Saturn’s Shadow/Patriarchy: The Wounding and Healing of Men – James Hollis

Abstract/ of Chapter 5 – pp 100 to 135

**The Eight Secrets**

1. ***Men’s lives are as much governed by restrictive role expectations as are the lives of women.*** We have inherited a world under Patriarchy in which a man’s prime value is to defend his homeland and provide for his family. As Joseph Campbell expressed it, one can spend one’s whole life climbing the ladder, only to realize that it had been placed against the wrong wall. The first step toward healing is perhaps the hardest. Men must stop lying to themselves, and by extension each other, and they must permit their unhappiness to become conscious. They must admit that, perhaps for all the best intentions, their lives are wrong, and that from this point on it is their responsibility to change.
2. ***Men’s lives are governed by fear.*** Men are afraid of the power of the mother complex and so seek to please women or dominate them. Men are afraid of other men because they are cast into competitive roles; the other man is perceived as an enemy, not a brother. Men know the world is large and they are small. Men have the crazy notion that they ***ought not*** to be afraid, that their task is to conquer nature and themselves. Each man feels shamed by the fear that he is not a real man. His shame manifests in *overcompensation* when he shows off or bullies others, or in silent *avoidance* of the real task to which life has called him. Again, the healing of a man begins the day he can begin to be honest with himself, the day he can acknowledge how much his life is driven by fear, when he can beat back the shame that then threatens to engulf him. Only then can he recover that center which has been obscured by the fear that haunts his soul.
3. ***The power of the feminine is immense in the psychic economy of men***. The greatest psychological influence in a man’s life, under normal circumstances, is his mother. Because of the enormity of this psychic presence, of which *he is always more or less unconscious*, men develop a distorted relationship to the feminine in four major ways: **First**, They grant too much psychological power to women, that is, “My mother was a woman, you must be like her.” So, men, fearful of a woman’s power, will seek to please or control or avoid confrontation. Unable to recognize and own the issues generated by their mother complex, they fall into a projective relationship based on power (patriarchy). This is the most fundamental truth behind the so-called war between the sexes: *fear replaces attraction with power.*  **Secondly**, men are terrified of their feminine side. They associate their feeling life, their instincts, their capacity for tenderness and nurturance, with the culturally defined nature of woman and distance themselves accordingly. This also distances them from their own inner feminine/anima and occasions a profound self-alienation. Men seldom risk this part of themselves, but it is as much in their nature to relate to the world and to their own inner life as it is in women’s. **Thirdly,** because men are so insecure in their sexual identity and propped-up gender roles, they fear and deny those parts of themselves that do not fall within narrow collective limits. When they see those aspects being lived out by other, they reject them violently. Homophobia is a prime example. Gay men have the same heart, same soul, same courage to go into battle as their heterosexual brothers. It is time to come out of the macho closet and name the real problem – that men fear those who incarnate their unlived life. The enemy is not the other guy, but rather our fear that we are not what patriarchy demands. **Fourthly**, the purpose of a committed relationship, of which marriage is but one example, is not to take care of each other, to reinforce the parent-child complexes, but to grow thorough and with each other. Relationship is meant to be dialectical – soulful encounters that temper and enlarge. One of the bridges between the sexes, to be sure, is sex. But men, too often feeling deficient in discourse, place too much emphasis on intercourse. Sex as loving, sex as conversion, sex as dialectic, all presuppose an ***equal*** partner. Sex as redemption distorts the relationship and allows entry to Patriarchy shadow of power. When Patriarchy is present, nothing is fun, luminescent, or transforming.
4. ***Men collude in a conspiracy of silence whose aim is to suppress their emotional truth***. Virtually any man will recall occasions when he expressed himself and suffered ridicule or rejection. Men pay a heavy price for being seen to be fragile and vulnerable. Men breath silently together to protect their frightened souls, prolonging the wounding of all.
5. ***Because men must leave Mother, and transcend the mother complex, wounding is necessary***. Having delineated the power of the mother complex, the part of a man that longs for nurturance and safety above all, we must also acknowledge the necessary wounding of the male. The wounding is a way of helping him to face the coming pain of life and sacrifice his infantile longing for a warm hearth. He was to assume the burden of his journey, its pain and solitude. No one else, parent or tribe, could spare him that journey lest they also steal his capacity to fight for and achieve his full potential. But for each of us the hero task summons: each of us, each day, must struggle anew with the grinning demons of fear and lethargy that confront us from the foot of the bed, eager to eat another piece of our soul. The price we pay for greater consciousness, and worlds worth winning, is the wounding of the protagonist so that he might become the hero in his life.
6. ***Men’s lives are violent because their souls have been violated***. Most of all, men are asked, as women too have often been asked, to sacrifice their soul to serve some economic, political, or cultural norm. They are shamed if they resist the deformation of their nature, shunned if they protest, and sometimes even martyred if their vision too strongly challenges the status quo. Men need to acknowledge their anger, anger that has accumulated to the level of rage. Where does the rage go? For some it manifests as depression, a general heaviness they may carry their whole life long. For others it somatizes in sundry provinces of the body or is projected in the paranoid game of us and them, winners and losers. For many the rage is acted out against women and children or other men, the deep knowledge of their soul’s suffering projected onto any convenient object.
7. ***Each man carries a deep longing for his father and for his tribal fathers***. To leave the comforts of home, the mother world, one must have some place to go. Admittedly, the rites of passage of traditional cultures were to initiate the youth into a simpler society. As well, their interest lay not in the individuation of the person but in the integration of that unformed person into the collective definition of tribal masculinity. Still, take away such psychically charged images of identity, take away the wisdom of elders, take away the community of men, and one has the modern world. Childlike and uninitiated men must acknowledge the reality of what lies within. Among those confusing emotions is a deep grief for the loss of the personal father as companion, model and support, and a deep hunger for the fathers as a source of wisdom, solace, and inspiration. They long for modeling and for great teachings. They suffer their exile in silence or act out their grief disguised as rage.
8. ***If men are to heal, they must activate within what they did not receive from without***. In his *Demian*, Herman Hesse observed, “In a world of wanderers, when paths intersect, the world feels like home for a while.” But the experience of community, of primal connection is only for “awhile”; then one is back on the journey alone.

**The Mother Complex / Father Task**

A review of the morphology of the mother complex is warranted here. A man’s relationship to himself, to other and to the life force that courses through him is profoundly channeled by his primary experience of mother. To the extent that she is unable to meet his needs, and imposes her personal complexes on them, so he will suffer the wounds of abandonment and overwhelment. From the former he learns to distrust his own worth and the reliability of the world. Because of the latter he feels powerless to defend his fragile frontier and so evolves a generally compliant, co-dependent personality or a fearful, overcompensated, power-dominated one. In either case, he is not himself, but lives in reaction to an experience so powerful that it subordinates his natural truth. This compromise formation, repeated throughout childhood, produces a false personality and furthers the projection of that first relationship onto later, adult relationships. Thus he lives a false self.

Since the child is completely dependent, any threat to his neediness occasions great fear. All men carry within them the replicated memory of this vulnerability. They suffer enormous fear that their needs may not be met, fear that their neediness will prolong their dependency. Out of this troubled condition, which remains with men however old, are bred anger and sorrow.

Beneath all of these dynamics are, on the one hand, men’s fear that they will not be taken care of, and, on the other, an overwhelming terror of dependency. Thus, men fight the feminine, both within and without, as a result of their largely unconscious fear of their own longing for peace.

Since all men carry the mother imago deep within, charged variously from one to the other, so the result of their restricted consciousness is to produce a highly defended and narrow definition of the masculine. Men evolved the patriarchy, with its rules, hierarchical thinking and social structures, and its subjugation of the feminine, as a defense against the mother complex. Fathers and sons can barely talk to each other. The compensation, then is just as killing as the problem it seeks to defend against. Both the fearful suppression of the complex and the patriarchal reaction alienate men from themselves.

Men everywhere are fated to face their partners, institutions, or some emotional analogue, carrying the dynamics of childhood as a contemporaneous experience. The past is not truly past. Mother and father live within, every moment – not only the personal parents, but the collective experience of them as well. Thus, feeling all the old need, the old fear, the old longing, the old anger, albeit unconsciously, men project these dynamics onto the current Other. That Other, then, has the power the primal parent once had, which men will variously try to control or placate, or even avoid altogether.

This explains why so many men seem angry and controlling at home and in the workplace. It also explains why there seems to be an increase in those who may be described as passive-aggressive. They feel powerless, but they are angry and will find a way to sabotage or subvert Other. Their powerlessness is all the more actue as there are so few positive models of masculine empowerment that show how to tackle such large needs and fears oneself, thereby lifting their projections off others.

*Men can never be in reality, that is, deal with the Other as genuinely different, if they cannot discern the effect of their mother complex rippling within. Yes, it takes a great deal of courage, insight, and patience, as well as steady work, to make such material conscious. It is especially difficult for men to work with the mother complex, since uncovering its power and influence in their lives tends to jeopardize the frail hold they already have on their masculine identity. But, until men can take the risk, they will remain stuck in a compensated identity that only furthers their inner division and their estrangement from others.*

**What Is Healing, and Who the Healer?**

Our society has long treated men as machines, as bodies expendable in the name of progress or profit. Men have overruled their pain and soul’s delight, taught to think of themselves as “mechanisms.” Such an estrangement wounds very deeply; it has gone on so long and is so taken for granted that healing individuals, let alone a whole gender, is a dubious undertaking. But the beat goes on, Patriarchy lives, the only game in town, and shame on the defector. The wounding is institutionalized and sanctified, and men unwittingly collude in their own crucifixion.

All men suffer from neurosis. The word itself suggests a mechanical failure and, indeed, derives from the Enlightenment’s effort to create models of the cosmos and models of men. But in fact neurosis simply signifies the deep split between socialization and soul, between collective culture and individual psyche. When outer roles do not fit the shape of one’s soul, a terrible one-sidedness occurs. It is the suffering of this imbalance that impels men to war on themselves and on each other.

**Seven Steps to Healing**

1. Re-member the loss of the fathers.
2. Tell the secrets.
3. Seek mentors and mentor others.
4. Risk loving men.
5. Heal thyself.
6. Recover your soul’s journey
7. Join the revolution

**Re-member the loss of the fathers**

It is imperative that men render what is inside of them more conscious. They certainly cannot change the past, nor, the outer father-son relationship. But what they do not know operates silently within them, nonetheless. Given Jung’s profound observation that *the greatest burden the child must bear is the unlived life of the parent*, so each father’s son must examine, without the motive to judge, where his father’s wounds were passed on to him. *Either he finds himself repeating his father’s patterns or living in reaction to them – in both cases he is prisoner to the patterns.*

Each father’s son must ask himself, “What were my father’s wounds? What were his sacrifices, if any, for me and others? What were his hopes, his dreams? Did he live out his dreams? Did he have emotional permission to live his life? Did he live his life or the Patriarch tapes? What did he receive from his father and culture that hindered his journey? What would I have liked to know from him about being a man? Was he able to answer such questions, however tentatively, for himself? Did he ever ask them? What was my father’s unlived life, and am I living it out, somehow, for him?”

**Tell the secrets**

Those in the healing professions know that wherever there is denial the wound festers. Men’s lives are based on denial and resistance to the truth. Rarely does one hear the unvarnished truth, as in the confession of Pablo Neruda: “It so happens I am sick of being a man.” Note that he does not say he is sick of being himself; it is his role as a man that sickens him. This is the deepest truth men carry, that their souls are deformed through being defined by outside forces.

Since the psyche knows more than consciousness, this deformation of soul is recorded and occasions a concatenation of responses. The most notable of reactions is the tinge of sorrow that haunts men’s lives even though they may cover themselves well.

The other tell-tell sign is their rage which, misdirected and undifferentiated, turns on themselves and others. And underneath all this “fury and mire of human veins is the terrible fear. No man feels he is a real man. His macho behavior belies his terror.

When men sense that they are frauds, that is, caught between their soul’s intention and external demands, they are forced to dissimulation. Estranged progressively from their inner life, their inner feminine, they expect women to carry the burden. Sex, in particular, is given too much importance, for through sex men seek to overcome their isolation from their feeling state and from their own body. They ask the Other to reconnect them and to reassure them before the dawn brings new battering. This makes them as vulnerable and dependent as before. As humans must hate those upon whom they depend, so tension and animosity grow, and love is replaced by the shadow of power.

These are the central secrets of men – that they feel themselves failures as men, that is as persons who happen to be men, that they are torn between fear and rage, and that they are emotionally dependent but resentful of the object of that dependence. Again, the only way out is consciously to acknowledge these insufferable truths. They must begin with themselves and then share that truth with others – not with a woman but with another man. That man, caught also in fearful defendedness, may scorn the truth-teller, his scorn in proportion to his fear, but he may also step from behind the ramparts to acknowledge his brother. Our fear is the task – failing the task we bluster into macho compensation or shamed complicity. Telling the truth of our soul to ourselves is the first task. Living that truth is the second task. And telling it to others is the third. Such truth-telling will be the supreme test of our lives. Afterward, perhaps, we can stop being “sick of being a man.”

**Seek mentors and mentor others.**

Unfortunately, few mentors are to be found. How many men have had an initiatory experience and integrated that experience into a working World View? Boys still need that older man to teach and model the knowledge of the outer world. But who, as Nietzsche asked, will teach the teachers: Who will initiate the mentors? The truth, once again, is that in our time there is no collective rite of passage, no mythically grounded body of experience to assist men in their journey. So, they must do it as individuals. And such individuals, like the bodhisattvas of Buddhism, can reach back and, out of simple compassion, bring their fellows along.

**Risk loving men**

Like the paradox of Jesus, that one can only love the neighbor to the degree one can love oneself, so men can only learn to love other men if they can learn to love themselves. Our self-blame and rage are projected onto other men, whom we then avoid. When we acknowledge that we are estranged from our brother because we fear him, and that we fear him because we are riddled with fear of ourselves, then we have taken the first step toward love. The opposite of love is not hatred; it is fear. The most difficult part of loving other men, as individuals or as a group, is that we have to take the terrible risk of loving ourselves. Such self-acceptance is the face of failure and fear is profoundly difficult. But replacing homophobia with love and compassion begins a home.

**Heal thyself**

Men understandably fear being dependent, but they should not fear their need for nurturance. All creatures need care and feeding. The male overcompensation for dependency – the lonely drifter on the plains, is pathological, as anyone who has to live around such a person will testify. Men must accept their need for nurturance. And whether they seek it from women or other men, they need to recognize that the care and feeding of themselves is primarily their own responsibility. Then fear of and need for other is put into proper perspective.

If *nurturance* is the archetypal need behind the boy’s relationship to his mother, so we might say that *empowerment* is the archetypal need that seeks fulfillment from the father world. He needs to see father develop a relationship to his own inner truth, deal with fear and shame, hold the feminine in respectful balance, and go about the business of building a new world out there. Personal empowerment is not to be confused with the power complex. The power game castrates all men. Empowerment means that one feels good energy available for the tasks of life. One feels the permission to dive into life and struggle for depth and meaning. One feels that there are resources within to draw upon when the forces of darkness are nigh. Again, it would be helpful to have the model of the personal father at close hand to activate such empowerment, but most men will have to do it on their own.

**Recover the Souls journey.**

*It does not matter whether a man feels at home in some religious or political or domestic form. He* ***is*** *his journey, and that is what is of decisive significance. The terror he may feel on the high seas of life is understandable, but in relinquishing the imperative to sail on, in giving over to an ideology or to dependency or someone else, he loses his manhood. It is time to come clean, acknowledge the fear, but live the journey.*

The summons to journey is not a justification for narcissism. A man still is obliged to fulfill his commitments to others, to meet his responsibilities. Yet he has an inescapable calling to individuation. If he forgets that calling, squanders his brief moment on earth, he is a problem to those others anyhow. To life the journey of the soul is to serve nature, to serve other and to serve the mystery of which we are the experiment. Then we will have incarnated the invisible, made luminous this short episode between two great mysteries.

**Join the revolution**

The man who walks out from under the Patriarch shadow in his personal life is also doing a great thing for others, whether they know it or not. He has learned that no one has power over him if he does not give it to them. He has recovered the worth of his own soul’s journey. His life takes on a new meaning and his prayer, in the words of Kazantzakis, “is the report of a soldier to his general: This is what I did today, this is how I fought to save the entire battle in my sector, these are the obstacles I found, this is how I plan to fight tomorrow.” When this man, and that man, and the other one over there, begin to take personal responsibility for their lives, the old tyrants will lose their grip.

***Until all are equal, none are equal.***