

When I started my journey, if there was one man in the seminar I was attending, it would be a bonus. Normally there were none! Over the years I saw more and more of these brave souls venturing into seminar rooms to learn various healing and learning modalities. A few years ago we started running a seminar for men..... mainly because women asked us too. They wanted their partners and lovers and husbands to have the information they had and for several years, when asked why they were there, the answer was invariably: "because my partner strongly suggested it" or "my wife gave it to me as a birthday present." I could count on one hand the number of men who came because they wanted to be there... for themselves!

And so several years after our first foray into the realm of men's work we have discovered several things that we would like to share with you. I'll start by saying basically Men are the same as women.... they were born, they had childhoods.... often not conducive to them being sensitive, open-hearted people... but childhoods anyway; they were taught to get a good education (even if they didn't want to be a doctor like dad); to get married and have kids and keep the whole system going around and around. Along this route of course came relationships. Unfortunately, many of these were coloured through being hurt by the opposite sex. Betrayal, sadness, abuse and pain are not relegated to one gender or the other! Some people licked their wounds in a corner somewhere for however long they needed to and then, tentatively ventured out to attempt another relationship, often with the same results.

Because children rarely get the love they need or the approval and respect they long for, they learn certain behaviours. Sadness was for most, not okay because it was a sign of weakness. Anger was considered inappropriate and many learned the hard way that their own anger equalled pain (when the authoritative parent smacked or hit in response). When we can't express how we feel outward, those feelings have only one place to go.... They get buried inside... you can see them... etched in the lines on a face, laying heavy on a back, stuck rigid in shoulders, tight in a stomach or knotted in a bowel. What people don't realise is the scale of emotions, be it anger or sadness, are nothing more than energy and energy creates energy. Energy that is held in and held onto ultimately depresses us. Anger can be a useful energy that helps us leave

unhealthy situations, correct injustices, enhances communication and increases the possibility of intimacy.

Holding onto it creates bitterness, being resentful and finally illness. Much of the work being done in the field of psycho-neuroimmunology is now proving categorically, to the satisfaction of scientists and doctors alike, that how we feel in our heads shows up in our bodies as dis-ease. It is no longer a Louise Hay Heal Your Life type of new age lingo.... it is scientific fact! Interestingly, compared with women men die younger, suffer a great incidence of fatal disease (cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, pneumonia and heart disease) as well as more migraines, ulcers, alcoholism, commit suicide more often and cope less effectively with stress.

Boys were trapped at an early age into a set role. They were taught what was acceptable and what was not. Thou shalt not cry; Thou shalt not display weakness; Play hard at sports and fight to win at all costs. Traits such as toughness, rationality, aggression, competitiveness, self-reliance and control over the emotions were considered to be positive for the male gender whereas tenderness, emotional sensitivity, dependence, openness to experience and vulnerability were negative. In the majority of households the male was dominant. He never cracked, despite the stress. He was always a superb lover and we knew he was because we watched him in endless variations of the same theme, John Wayne, James Bond, Clint Eastwood, Michael Douglas, Antonio Banderes. Always perfect... always sure of himself.... Always in control of the woman, the money and the situation.

Are they really though? Many of the men we have worked with admit they learned early to put on the masks.... Indifference – "*I don't need anyone*" Self-sufficiency.... "*I can manage on my own*"... Darkness - "*Don't come near me*"... Intellectual – "*I am too educated to feel*" ... even... Spiritually enlightened – "*I am past needing relationships on my karmic journey now!*"

All these masks hide people who are very alone and deal continually with the concurrent loneliness and who can't let people near with a few more commandments under their belt and in their psyche as men (From Peyton Bailey's: Men: A book for women; Avon Books 1978.) Thou shall not need affection, gentleness or warmth, Thou shall comfort but not desire comforting, Thou

shall touch but not be touched, Thou shall be steel, not flesh
Thou shall be inviolate in your manhood, Thou shall stand alone.

My experience with the fronts that people present coincides with the 'Course In Miracles' approach. There are only two ways of being – loving or crying for help. Unfortunately what happens to the child, especially boys, is that they learn to go into their heads in order to turn off the pain in their hearts. It is only through the brain that they can escape the reality of not getting what they needed and learn to survive the painful emptiness of childhood. As teenagers this energy is lowered into the genitals and sex then gets used as a way of attempting to connect and for many people, this pattern continues into adulthood. Often with no filling of the void however.

Our friend, Ken Druck, the grandfather of the men's movement in the US says that there are several areas in which men keep secrets. Let's look at them.

1. Men secretly yearn for their father's love and approval.

This is true, no matter whether the parent is alive, dead or estranged. Listen to the song by Mike and the Mechanics 'The Living Years' and see if that doesn't ring some bells. If you are a father, tell your son that you love him and you are proud of him today. If you are a son, tell your father the same thing. Men of yesterday weren't taught to share their feelings, but underneath those crusty exteriors, there is someone who can learn. Don't wait for them to do it... you may wait forever. I always say that the one who is the most enlightened must end the quarrel or make the first move and right now... that's you because you're reading this! How willing are you to heal the relationship with your father/son?

2. Men hide their desire for friendship and support from other men.

Some men will have close relationships with women but often men's male friends are the husbands of their wife's friends. Even though they really want it, not many men have close intimate friends they can share with on a heart level. Australia is a very homophobic country and the idea of hugging another man is not in most people's paradigms. My father was in his 70s before he had his first male hug... how sad. In Bali and other Eastern countries the boys and

men walk down the street with their arms around each other. They have no inhibitions. Also on this note: check how you hug when you do. Do you squeeze the life out of the person you are hugging? Do you pat? If so stop doing both and just hold the other person gently and breathe together. It feels so different. Also consider joining a men's group on a regular basis where you can share and support with other men. This time is about being real and you can only be real when you claim all of your feelings and heal the little boy within. Can you acknowledge that little boy and catch yourself when you move into being him instead of the grown up?

3. Men use the workplace as a major burial ground for their secrets.

Work can be a source of enormous fulfilment. The danger is that men define themselves almost solely on the basis of what they do for a living. We all know the story of the man who is upset and goes off into his cave and hammers some nails, well, hammering nails is one thing but a job is just a job. It is not who you are as a man. If you lost the job tomorrow, what would you feel? Excited, scared, embarrassed? It is said that 70% of people hate their jobs and wait for the weekend to do what they love to do. That is crazy. Don't take your work home and if it is imperative, set limits. If you are in a relationship it is a sure fire way of losing it. Chances are once you really wanted your partner to love you so you put all your energy into making that happen, the phone calls, the flowers, the romance. The challenge is that once achieved, the next step is work to give them what you think they want. Forget about the flowers, the romance etc. Most people in relationships we know would rather have a partner who cares and is there than a workaholic. Breadwinner's love isn't enough! Who would you be, minus your job?

4. Men are more dependent on women than they admit.

Men strive to present themselves as strong and independent. Women outlive men. When the wife does die first, men wish to remarry more so than women do. Look at this dependency and ensure it is not co-dependency, which is a dangerous thing. Also know that patterns in relationships begin with mothers and men need to heal that first primary relationship in order to have relationships in the future that are fulfilling and totally satisfying. Men rarely discuss their unresolved feelings about their mothers with other women, these emotions are

often hidden away out of our awareness. Yet a large part of what men expect from women and of themselves as men, dates back to childhood experiences with the mother. What do you expect from your partner and how similar is it to what your dad expected?

5. *Men deny themselves the right to feel uncertain, fearful and hurt.*

Men need to learn that showing emotion is becoming more and more necessary, for their own health and the health of their relationships. When things go wrong it is safe to feel the feelings. To believe that you are a strong impenetrable male and you don't need to feel your feelings is the surest way to ill health and depression. A lot of men's fear comes from judgement at the hands of other men. Men are more sensitive to what other men think, especially if they leave behind the carefully crafted exterior and actually show the uncertainty and fear and hurt. There is a wall of ignorance prevents us from having the opportunity to get to know other men in ways that permit a mutual exchange of feelings. What prevents you from sharing on an intimate level with other men?

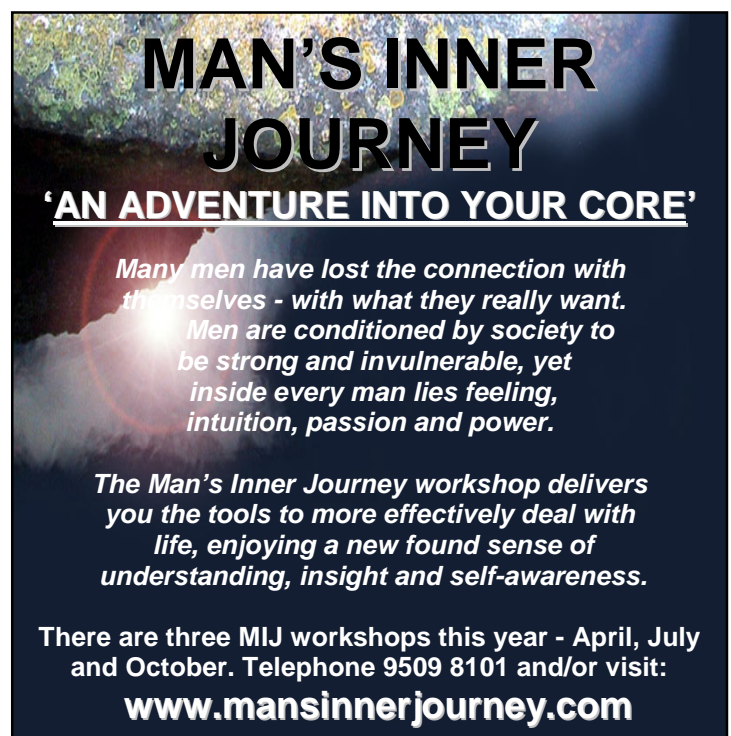
"To be strong a man must be able to stand utterly alone, able to meet and deal with life, relying solely upon his own inner resources." Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy insisted. "Once I held my hand in the flame of a candle – just to see how tough I was."

These were old beliefs.... Today we are in a different time. A time when the world is moving toward finding new ways for human beings to live together in peace and harmony. What we see in our work is women who want to find equality with their men, be them fathers, brothers, lovers, husbands, co-workers. They want men who are willing to feel their feelings, cry their tears if need be... to let the walls down and to let women in. An easy task? I think not... but I do believe it is possible and it is happening.

The best thing you can do as a man is to peel the layers off your onion, so that you discover there is much more to you than you ever dreamed possible. Solutions start with honouring and loving yourself for who you are, focusing on your merits not your shortcomings. Begin to feel good about yourself. The beliefs you hold about yourself are learned from your past, they are not inherited, you have an incredible capacity for change and flexibility.

Know that your self worth is not dependent on your assets in the bank but rather the assets of your heart.... A greater sense of self-approval cannot be gained with hard work, education, money, power or love from others... it can only come from loving yourself. The past may have held dysfunction and struggle however the future horizon can be intimacy, friendship, success and inner contentment, providing you listen to your own heart and live your life in integrity with yourself. The moment you discover how amazing you really are, and women discover how amazing they are... the world will shift because then we will no longer come from need or want or patterns from the past... we will be able to come from love.

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